

Tourism promoting sustainable regional development: focusing on rural and creative tourism in low-density and remote regions

El turismo y desarrollo regional sostenible: Análisis del turismo rural y creativo en regiones de baja densidad poblacional y remotas

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ABSTRACT

This study, based on the analysis of the existing bibliography, as well as the result of the appreciation of a low-density and remote case studies located in the Azores Archipelago, seeks to identify a theoretical nexus regarding rural and creative tourism and regional sustainable development in the post-COVID-19 scenario. In this regard, the authors applied analytical descriptive and inductive deductive methods. Contextually, the study aims not only to understand the subject in more prominent detail but also to clarify new tendencies, approaches, and potential guidelines that allow the actors implicated to design and drive sustainable regional development in the long term. The remote and low-density territories are the most appealing destination for this new tourism dynamics. Also, the paper shows that it is possible to establish that in this ultra-peripheral territory, the tourism sector was already presuming relevance in 2019, benefiting from a large sample of entrepreneurs and actors in the tourism sector in the Portuguese Autonomous Region of the Azores. Some potential implications may include the following: (i) Increased economic benefits: Creative tourism can bring in additional revenue for local businesses and organizations and individual artists and craftspeople; (ii) Preservation of cultural heritage: Creative tourism can help to support and preserve traditional cultural practices and crafts, which can be an essential aspect of island communities' identity; (iii) Job creation: Creative tourism can create new job opportunities for locals, such as tour guides, workshop instructors, and artists.

RESUMEN

Este estudio se sustenta sobre el análisis de la bibliografía existente, así como la valoración de un estudio de caso vinculado a un espacio con baja densidad de población y localización remota, ubicado en el Archipiélago de las Azores; para así tratar de identificar un nexo teórico, que relacione el turismo rural y creativo con el desarrollo regional sostenible, en el escenario post-COVID-19. Para ello, los autores han utilizado métodos de análisis descriptivos e inductivos/deductivos. A través de esta investigación se pretende no sólo profundizar en el estudio de esta temática, sino también identificar nuevas tendencias, enfoques y directrices rectoras que permitan



a los actores implicados diseñar e impulsar un modelo de desarrollo regional sostenible a largo plazo. Los territorios remotos y de baja densidad poblacional son el destino más atractivo para este nuevo modelo de desarrollo turístico, fundamentado sobre estas tipologías turísticas (rural y creativa) de forma complementaria. Es por esto que mediante este estudio se muestra, cómo es posible impulsar un nuevo modelo de desarrollo turístico en un territorio ultraperiférico, como es el caso de la Región Autónoma Portuguesa de las Azores, en la cual el sector turístico ya tenía una relevancia significativa en 2019, contando con numerosos empresarios y actores turísticos. Como resultado, algunas implicaciones potenciales para esta región pueden ser: (i) Mayores beneficios económicos: el turismo creativo puede aportar ingresos adicionales a las empresas y organizaciones locales y a los artistas y artesanos individuales; (ii) Preservación del patrimonio cultural: el turismo creativo puede contribuir a apoyar y preservar las prácticas culturales tradicionales y la artesanía, que pueden ser un aspecto esencial de la identidad de las comunidades insulares; (iii) Creación de empleo: el turismo creativo puede crear nuevas oportunidades de empleo para la población local, como guías turísticos, instructores de talleres y artistas.

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourists no longer want a destination with a unique tourist product and increasingly look to heritage (especially cultural heritage) and creativity (creative tourism) – the culturally based creative tourism. Such, is considered a decision factor when choosing a vacation spot, and there is no tourist destination that occurs in places that do not have a culture to offer.

Several studies and research have demonstrated the importance of strategic and smart planning in sustainable regional development and activities related to regional growth (Santos, 2013; Vulevic, 2013; Couto et al., 2018; Castanho, 2017, 2019; Codosero et al., 2020; Van der Schyff, 2021). According to Amado (2000): *"(...) this development typology is fundamental to achieving territorial success in the medium-long term"*.

In low-density and remote territories, as in the insular regions, their socioeconomic bases are indivisible from tourism (Tiago et al., 2020; Couto et al., 2021; Sousa et al., 2022). Accordingly, multidisciplinary reflections that associate topics such as strategic planning, sustainable development, and new tourism trends (rural or creative tourism in this particular case) are necessary to increase the thematic literature and provide guidelines and unique solutions for technicians and decision-makers.

Regional development in insular regions can be challenging due to the unique characteristics and limitations of these areas, such as their isolation, small populations, and limited resources. However, creative tourism can be a viable strategy for regional development in insular regions as it can: diversify the local economy; attract visitors – i.e., insular regions may not have the same natural or built attractions as mainland destinations, but they can still attract visitors by promoting their unique cultural and artistic offerings; promote cultural heritage – i.e., creative tourism can help to promote and preserve the cultural heritage of insular regions, which can be an essential aspect of their identity and attract visitors; create jobs: i.e., creative tourism can create new job opportunities for locals, such as tour guides, workshop instructors, and artists; or even encourage sustainable development (Santos et al., 2022; Santos et al., 2023).

However, it is important for destinations to ensure the sustainability and resilience of the local communities and to use their resources and capacities wisely. This can be achieved by involving the local community in the planning and management of tourism development and by balancing the economic benefits of tourism with the needs of the local community (Santos et al., 2023).

Contextually, The Sustainable Tourism Charter of Lanzarote advocates sustainable tourism development, *"(...) ecologically sustainable in the long term, economically viable and equitable from an ethical and social perspective for local communities"*.

The menace of mass tourism, which is about transportation and accommodation becoming flexible and affordable, forces fundamental tourism actors in developing countries to debate their sustainable tourism practices (Celik et al., 2021). This is how sustainability has become a widespread subject (Abellera & Castanho, 2022).



This review study, based on the analysis of the existing bibliography, as well as the result of the appreciation of a low-density and remote insular case study located in the Azores Archipelago, seeks to identify an empirical relation regarding rural and creative tourism and regional sustainable development in the post-COVID-19 scenario. In this way, the study aims not only to understand the subject in more prominent detail but also to clarify new tendencies, approaches, and potential guidelines that allow the actors implicated to design and drive sustainable regional development in the long term.

Moreover, this article is part of the ongoing research that we are following at the University of Azores in partnership with the Tourism Observatory of the Azores (OTA) since we intend to argue later the relevance of fostering such tourism typologies for the Azores regional development as well as for the legitimate social interests of sustainable cultural management.

The paper starts with the current introductory section, followed by literature review sections regarding rural tourism, creative tourism, and regional sustainable development. Subsequently the used materials and methods are revealed. After, the results and discussion, and an ending section emphasizing the study conclusions.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Regional Sustainable Development

Spatial planning is a vital instrument for the development of urban and rural areas to stimulate economies (regional and local), foster cohesion and development, and also imbuing an environmental perspective and consideration to create more sustainable regions, inclusive and safe (Loures, 2015; Marino, 2022). In this regard, it is clear the relationship between sustained financial growth, equity, and social inclusion, as well as ecological preservation and protection, areas where a firm responsibility is needed from the political actors, the technicians implicated, and also from society as a whole, via engaged public participation. Consequently, sustainable development is based on social, environmental, and economic spheres (Stephen, 2015).

Sustainable Development (SD) is described not only by its multidisciplinary and variety of criteria (Loures, 2015). Among the various fields of action of SD, strategic planning is one of the most pertinent (Vulevic et al., 2021). If we consider the spatial planning strategies, we notice that they strive to encourage life standards' (whether rural or urban) through the responsible use of the land and, simultaneously, to preserve the balance between the constructed and the natural.

In the sustainability concept, the financial-economic component is comprehended as the search for an economic system that seeks to react to the needs of its habitants, offering adequate employment and rejuvenating its population to guarantee the continuity of services in the long term (Yigitcanlar et al., 2015; Rodríguez-Serrano et al., 2017). This definition should be widened to include regional and local growth and development ideals and territorial public policies such as land use or real estate speculation - these are just a few examples.

Considering the basic pillars of the concept of Sustainability, it is possible to understand the vast scope of SD and its interactions with activities and scientific fields, such as Rural or Creative Tourism and Development.

Therefore, legislators, policymakers, and other actors involved and committed to promoting SD must also consider the economic, environmental and sociocultural consequences (Amado, 2000; Loures, 2015), emphasizing the importance of strategic planning and integration. Regardless, planning strategies and methodologies for sustainable tourism, encompassed by the SD, demand additional tools and approaches for monitoring and permanent administration of the process (Balaguer & Jordá, 2010; Fadahunsi, 2011; Ulucak et al., 2020).

In fact, tourism is an activity in constant dynamics. Consequently, the concepts and definitions related to tourism (directly or indirectly) are not static and constant over time. In fact, we should consider that the tourist of the 21st century is more informed, experienced, sophisticated, demanding, and always with a smartphone in hand, looking for increasingly authentic and transformative experiences perceived as unique



and exclusive (Wang et al., 2016). In many cases, the visitor contributes to the construction of “tailor-made” products, customizing them and feeling more involved, allowing him to improve his experience and satisfaction (Vargas-Sánchez, 2017). Providing high-value tourist experiences implies a commitment to innovation, creativity, and content development, preferably based on the authenticity and resources of the territories visited (Silva & Lopes, 2020).

2.2. Typologies of Slow-Tourism

Rural tourism can be classified within the so-called “alternative tourism” or “new tourism products,” and it is a form of tourism clearly influenced by environmental factors (Mediano-Serrano, 2004). It is a type of tourism with great potential to stimulate the growth of the local economy and social change due to its complementarity with other economic activities, its contribution to GDP, job creation, and its ability to promote the dispersion of the demand over time (fight against seasonality) and throughout the territory (OMT, 2021).

According to the definition of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), rural tourism is “ (...) a type of tourist activity in which the visitor’s experience is related to a wide spectrum of products generally linked to nature activities, agriculture, lifestyles, and rural cultures, angling and visiting places of interest”.

Despite the fact that there are official definitions, there are many works that offer different definitions of rural tourism; the absence of a standard definition is due to the lack of homogeneity of the offer because, unlike other tourist modalities, rural tourism is developed in different spaces, with different social structures, diverse geographical characteristics, and various economic systems. It is also closely related to the fact that the term “rural” or “rural space” itself does not have a specific definition, being understood very differently depending on the territory in which we find ourselves (Solsona-Monzones, 2006; Polo-Peña, 2010; Varisco, 2016; Moral, 2019).

If we look at Hui and Bao’s research (2013), it is possible to evidence that rural tourism adds to the expansion of urbanization. In fact, it can direct us to new resource disputes and, if not promptly fixed, probably will cause social and cultural obstacles. Nevertheless, the conflict between tradition and modernity (which can be seen as a socio-cultural clash) was memorialized as one of the most general and essential types of debate in the current urbanized regions (Rytkönen et al., 2014; Yu et al., 2015).

In previous studies, it is likely to comprehend that employment in tourism had a substantial involvement in enhancing national economic growth and as a trigger for transitions in regional economies (Williams, 1984; Mora Aliseda, Garrido & Bedón, 2017; Garrido et al., 2018; Castanho et al., 2020; Rytkönen & Tunón, 2020; Couto et al., 2021). Furthermore, bearing in mind the theoretical investigations in low-density and remote rural regions (Fleischer & Felsenstein, 2000; Santos, 2013), the thematic literature reveals that tourist spending induces more jobs and revenue than any other economic sector; besides, such tourism not only creates but also sustains employment in several different sectors that guarantee or support visitors and tourist enterprises.

For example, by contextualizing the light of the actual events (as is the case of the COVID-19 outbreak), we can extrapolate some considerations for the thematic literature on how we can overcome a crises momentum. Looking in retrospect, the rural “world” has lived through many crises - i.e., rising unemployment, population aging, population fluxes (emigration and immigration), or revved restructuring of production and farmsteads (Santos, 2013; Zhu & Deng, 2020; Jiao et al., 2021). So, focusing on the low-density and remote regions, economic growth is crucial in initiating sustainable development (Meller & Marfán, 1981; Vargues & Loures, 2008; McKercher, 2018; Castanho, Couto & Santos, 2021). This is why so many academicians defend the prospect of rural tourism, related to entrepreneurship and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), form the magnitude of regional trade and consequent business activities.

In fact, due to the closure of hotels, spa complexes, and shopping centers, this crisis has greatly affected the tourism sector. Restrictions on travel between countries, regions, and even cities due to the increase in the number of infected people due to health safety and the reduction of the possibility of the spread of the virus also had a negative impact on the tourism sector (Posthumus, 2016; Marques et al., 2020; Rebola et al., 2021; Crăciun et al., 2022).



The blockade in the spring of 2020 and the forced closure of shops and hotels greatly affected the tourism sector. Hotels started to reopen in June, but many health and sanitation measures have to match, as the disease is still out there. There were different scenarios related to the reduction of tourist arrivals, based on changes in consumer preferences and a drop in demand, also considering European and national measures that helped many tourist companies to survive.

With the gradual decrease in the number of infected people, mobility also increases, leading to the loosening of measures and restrictions on the movement of citizens and tourists alike. There are, of course, significant regional differences in terms of the extent to which countries are affected by Covid-19 and the ways in which they plan to overcome the epidemic. Countries where tourism is the dominant activity are definitely the most affected by this crisis.

In this sense, several researchers have been warning over the last few decades about the possibility of a large-scale health crisis and consequently shaking society and tourism in previously unknown proportions, examples of which are the studies by Gosling (2002), Hall (2006), Page and Yeoman (2007), Fauci and Morens (2012). In this sense, the following studies may be considered as a basis for the above; Likewise, the authors recommend its reading in order to deepen the theme (Scott & Gosling, 2015; Brown et al., 2016; Qureshi, 2016; Abukhalifeh et al., 2017; Rosselló et al., 2017; Qiu et al., 2018; Bloom & Cadarette, 2019). In addition, according to the conclusions of Burkle (2006): "(...), *the relationships between pandemics and travel are fundamental to understanding health security and global transformation*".

In view of the above, if we consider ultraperipheral territories, as is the example of island regions, where, as a rule, tourism plays a fundamental role in its socioeconomic sphere (it is recommended the complementary reading of the following studies on peripheral territories: Bieldt, 2012; Stipanovic & Rudan, 2014; Naidoo & Sharpley, 2015; United Nations, 2015; British Council, 2016; Giaccone et al., 2017; Indah et al., 2017; Blapp & Mitas, 2019; Trivic et al., 2020). Therefore, the authors believe that the consequences of the COVID-19 crisis may be even more evident in this typology of territories.

Suppose we focus on Southeast Asian countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines. In that case, there is still a need to provide a dynamic, up-to-date, and detailed analysis of the progress towards sustainable tourism of countries in Southeast Asia that are known for its ecotourism, beach tourism, cultural tourism, creative tourism, nature-based tourism, among several others typologies of tourism (Abellera & Castanho, 2022). So, it is easy to understand that this is a global trend.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, several studies pointing in the direction that nature-based tourism and rural tourism will become a tendency are easy to find. In Morais et al. (2018) research in African territories, it is possible to comprehend that a growing number of nature-based tourism operators, mainly those committed to normative ecotourism and operating in regions where people gain their livelihood through multiple occupations. In fact, those mentioned above are not a new finding, and according to previous authors, they seek to engage natives in their activities and to assure socio-economic benefits to the local community (Spenceley, 2001; Tao & Wall, 2009; Tichaawa & Mhlanga, 2015). Besides their expected commitment to fundamental ecotourism principles (Fennell, 2008), such nature-based tourism operators tend to act this way because their success will largely depend on community support (Spenceley et al., 2016). Although there is a general awareness that ecotourism is not the ultimate solution (Coria & Calfucura, 2012; Honey, 2008; Wunder, 2000), commercially viable nature-based tourism ventures can be an essential tool for generating employment and economic benefits (Bluwstein, 2017; Chiutsi et al., 2011; Kiss, 2004; Powell et al., 2017). A central goal of Namibe province's Tourism Master Plan (NTMP), in which ecotourism is considered an anchor product (EDETA, 2013), is increasing the living standards of impoverished rural communities while observing ecological principles and promoting economically viable tourism ventures. Using as reference the Sustained Development model proposed by the World Commission on Environment and Development, tourism ventures operating according to NTMP should seek a balance amongst the three pillars of sustainability.

Contextually, creative tourism is known that this variant of tourism that facilitates regional development by esteeming endogenous resources, promoting an innovative financial-economic environment, and not decreasing the culture to the products consumption (Leíra, 2004; Lima & Silva, 2017; Santos et al., 2022).



Moreover, this creates room for emancipation, independence, new adventures and experiences, solidarity, and contact with rituals, and develops revenue through alternative tourist itineraries.

Corrêa et al. (2019) conclude that there is a need to operate on development techniques, notions, and structures that incorporate regional financial-economic, social, and environmental problems. Nonetheless, other methods are possible for creative tourism. In this regard, Richards (2018) points us to think about the current situation of creative tourism and its various underlying experiences available around the globe.

According to Pimenta et al. (2021) review article, it is likely evidence of an emphatic relationship between creative tourism and regional development. In such a study, the authors tell us that creative tourism functions *"(...) through some type of reality transformation process and demonstrates direct correlations with cultural, material and immaterial factors, by committing and involving local development agents – public and private – in the elaboration and implementation of cultural policies that attract creative tourists."*

In short, tourism should be classified as an isolated element of a more comprehensive rural development program. Thus, it is vital to strengthen cooperation between the public sector, the private sector, societies, and civil society to guarantee adequate public policies.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Taking into consideration the scope of this paper, we have applied the analytical descriptive and inductive deductive methods. In fact, we applied to give coherence to these ideas that were essentially based on observation, our professional experience, site analysis of the pilot projects of creative tourism, and above all, on the personal contact with the actors of the aforementioned projects in the Azores territory.

For the approach to the thematic trajectory of Creative and Rural Tourism and Regional Development, firstly, a literature review approach was used, followed by a Case Study Research (CSR) method. The steps followed for this paper conception were the following:

- (i) Literature review (119 thematic scientific articles were analyzed);
- (ii) Data collection and information processing;
- (iii) Case Study Analysis.

(i) Literature Review

In this preliminary stage, the research team analyzed nearly 120 scientific thematic publications and reports (mostly related to rural tourism, creative tourism, regional development, and sustainable development) to create a coherent state-of-the-art section and define the importance of developing this study typology.

(ii) Data collection and information processing

The data for the study was collected through the existing assessment of the existing literature (indirect methods) combined with a CSR (direct method). In fact, through talks and informal interviews with technicians, experts, and leaders in the fields of regional development, territorial policy as well as tourism entrepreneurs, we have been able to determine the interest of this research as well as the most relevant issues that should be answered throughout the present paper. Therefore, connecting with phase one, the developed literature review intended to cover a wide range of issues, such as the state-of-the-art regarding rural tourism, creative tourism, regional development, and the main considerations for sustainable development strategies designed through tourism. Also, it should be added that more than 50 interviews and surveys were conducted to the pilot-projects leaders, the consultants, and the customers.



(iii) Case Study Analysis

As mentioned before, in the scope of the research, seven pilot-projects of creative tourism in the Azores Islands have been identified and analyzed.

The analysis includes seven pilot-projects of creative tourism working in the Portuguese Autonomous Region of the Azores. The assessed projects were: (1) CDIJA; (2) Refunction Project – GOODBYAZORES; (3) Art in Nature (*Arte na Natureza*); (4) Discover the Azores through Photography (*Descubra os Açores através da fotografia*); (5) Mahilawake; (6) The Farm; and (7) Local Network of Artisans. Regarding their location, the case studies are located on 4 of the 9 Azorean islands. So, four are located on S. Miguel Island – namely CDIJA, Art in Nature projects, The Farm, and Local Network of Artisans; one on Terceira Island (Refunction Project – GOODBYAZORES); and another one on Faial Island (Mahilawake) (figure 1).

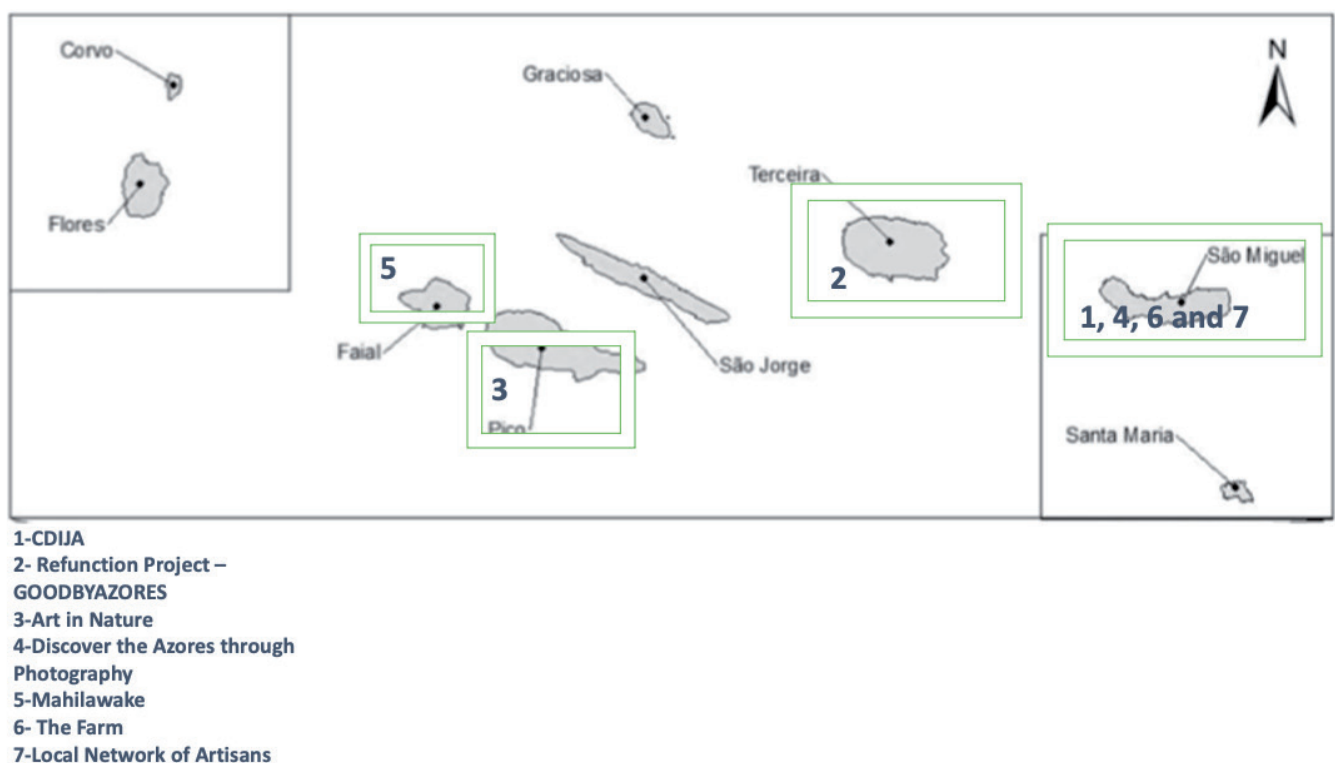


Figure 1. Azorean Creative Tourism Pilot-Projects Location. Source: Authors.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Through table 1, it is feasible to encounter an overview of the collected data about the total number of firms working in the Azorean territory (the pilot-projects study area) as well as the values of their capital and labor force. Besides, we can observe if those firms are domestic or foreign.

Around five hundred companies are working in the Azores Autonomous Region. Approximately 93% of the total enterprises do not have a foreign share. Also, if we compare the standards of domestic and foreign firms, it is possible to verify that the highest TFP numbers are related to foreign companies. Concerning the values related to capital and labor, the highest values could be found in domestic companies.

Moreover, assessing the seven Azorean creative tourism pilot-projects allows us to split them into thematic domains (table 2). The Azorean Creative Tourism Pilot-Projects will be identified by number:

1. DIJA
2. Refunction Project – GOODBYAZORES
3. Art in Nature



4. Discover the Azores through Photography
5. Mahilawake
6. The Farm
7. Local Network of Artisans

Table 1. Statistics overview.

Total number of firms	5,045
Fully domestic firms	4,685
Firms with foreign share	360
Mean (domestic firms)	
TFP	5,152
Capital	2,657,802
Labor	34
Mean (foreign firms)	
TFP	7,691
Capital	1,162,430
Labor	24

Source: Authors.

Table 2. Azorean Creative Pilot-Projects by thematic domains.

Domains	Azorean Creative Tourism Pilot-Projects						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Integrative	*					*	*
Human Regional Talent Development	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Artistic			*	*	*		*
Socio-Cultural and Gastronomy				*		*	*
Nature-based tourism focus on Endogenous Resources		*	*		*	*	

Source: Authors.

Throughout table 2, it is feasible to understand the applicability and importance of the Azorean Creative Tourism pilot-project in the various fields. Furthermore, we can comprehend the pertinence of the projects for the development of regional Human Re-sources.

Let's consider prior studies that have focused on the business model of the above-mentioned projects (under the CREATOUR AZORES main project), as is the case of the study of Santos et al. (2022). Those results tell us that two main models are viable in this remote territory: i) a model designed for international tourists and ii) a model designed for national and regional tourists. However, the study mentioned above also tells us that a precise pattern of tourist profile is identified in both models: "(...) a tourist that desires artistic, rural, and nature-based tourism." Such findings confirm the reality that occurred in the remote and low-density regions during the SARS-CoV-2 outbreak - where the tourists prefer these tourism typologies (Santos et al., 2022).



Analyzing this issue retrospectively, the year 2019 was remarkable regarding the outcomes delivered by tourism for the Azores Islands. Besides, in the Winter of 2020, the world abruptly stopped with the pandemic outbreak (COVID-19), and an exceptional loss of confidence in the tourist demand was verified (Wen et al., 2020). Regardless, rural tourism, creative tourism, and other typologies of slow and nature-based tourism that were attaining pertinence during the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic and post-pandemic momentum appeared to evolve as the new tourism movement. The remote and low-density territories are the most appealing destination for this new tourism dynamics (Baixinho et al., 2020; Walker et al., 2021; Matos Silva et al., 2022).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the European Parliament established several new measures and strategies that should be considered regarding tourism sustainability (European Parliament, 2021).

In this regard, the Strategic and Marketing Plan for Azores Tourism (PEMTA) arises from the need to qualify and sustainably develop the activity throughout the region in an effort to put the different partners and stakeholders to work in the same direction depending on the products, territory, and markets. In this plan, the five most significant challenges to the development of tourist activity are identified: accessibility, seasonality, the vulnerability of the territory (due to the fragility of the region's natural resources and this being its main tourist attraction, its conservation is essential), quality of the service offered (as a way of differentiating the competition and a way of segmenting the market) and the balanced distribution of tourist activity in the different territories of the archipelago (nine islands totally different in various aspects, from cultural to infrastructural and with unbalanced degrees of tourist development between yes).

Furthermore, the agreement for the liberalization of airspace in the Azores, in force since March 2015, is a critical event for the global growth of tourism and other economic areas, such as civil construction, which were going through a period of stagnation in the Azores region. Existing data at SREA show a more than double increase in passengers (embarked, disembarked, and in transit) in the region, with less than one million in 2014 (978,455 passengers) compared to more than two million in 2019 (2,027,154). The entry of new competitors in the market leads to a drop in prices and a daily increase in air connections, resulting in an expected increase in the number of passengers.

Contextually, the studied pilot projects of creative tourism go exactly in such a way. Thereby, it is suggested that the regional authorities, local governments, and several different pertinent players and actors in this territory sustain and design approaches to intensify these projects' effects once they not only add to the regional growth and destination marketing and advertising but also for the sustainable development. In fact, throughout such types of tourism, mass tourism is avoided. Besides, the above-mentioned creative tourism projects also enable a higher regional financial-economic revival via the alliances conducted by these projects with other organizations and local suppliers.

Based on such outcomes, creative tourism, can be seen a resurgence in popularity on islands following the pandemic. With the shift towards more localized and socially-distanced travel, many travelers may seek out unique and authentic experiences that can be found on islands. This could include attending local festivals and events, visiting artist studios, or participating in workshops and classes. Additionally, many islands may intensely focus on preserving traditional cultural practices, which can significantly interest tourists. However, it will be necessary for destinations to ensure the safety of both tourists and locals and to be sensitive to the potential impact of tourism on island communities.

So, it is possible to establish that in this ultra-peripheral territory, the tourism sector was already presuming relevance in 2019, benefiting from a large sample of entrepreneurs and actors in the tourism sector in the Portuguese Autonomous Region of the Azores.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In remote territories and low-density regions (usually less competitive), agriculture plays a primary function (Bryden, 2000; Sharpley & Vass, 2006), which is even more pertinent in the regions of Southern Europe. Contextually, the Ultra-peripheral Regions of these territories are no exception – the Madeira, Canary Islands,



and Azores archipelagos are just some examples; actually, this problem acquires more significant in these overseas regions (Scott & Laws, 2004; Cannonier & Burke, 2019; Behradfar et al., 2022; Matos Silva et al., 2022).

Besides, tourist destinations do not exist independently of their surroundings and have their regional context (Dolinaj et al., 2009; Raposo et al., 2018; Kaletová et al., 2019). The development of tourism very often takes place in ecological areas and can affect the landscape quality. These impacts are particular to quantifying because even though the evident structural change is not shown, changes in land use exist (McGarigal & Marks, 1995; Atik et al., 2009; Klauco et al., 2012; Jorda-Capdevila et al., 2020).

With regard to these specific regions, prior research has shown that entrepreneurship, associated with Small and Medium Enterprises, is one of the ways to reach SD – since, through these types of entrepreneurship, it is feasible to boost employment and, therefore, the regional economy (Mahony & Zyl, 2002; Labrianidis et al., 2003; Mazumder et al., 2009; Croes & Rivera, 2017; or Peixeira Marques et al., 2022).

Consequently, these territories have several barriers related to economic decay, high unemployment, population *exodus*, adverse consequences resulting from the transformation of agricultural land, and loss of sense of belonging or cultural identity (Santos, 2013; Cohen, 2020). Accordingly, tourism and the actions inherent to tourism can and should add extensively to the growth and development of rural areas and low-density or remote regions.

Nonetheless, if we consider the socioeconomic issue, low-density, rural and remote regions must offer some conditions to facilitate SD processes associated with Tourism. For example, regional and local know-how or quality resources (corroborated by the results shown at table 2). Moreover, let us examine Fleischer and Felsenstein's (2000) thematic research. It is possible to verify that these prerequisites enable: "(...) to benefit from the windows of opportunity created by the high regional unemployment rate".

Likewise, tourism can be a player capable of adding to the revitalization of regional economies, diversification of taxation, growth of other financial-economic pillars, qualified job creation, revenue generation, infrastructure progress transport, services (usefulness for the local community), and income creation by the regional government (Reeder & Brown, 2005). Also, to design a profitable strategy, a sustainable development focused policy must be conceived and established on substantial investments in critical infrastructure and services to get investors and consequent investments - i.e., accessibility and connectivity-movement between cities and territories, energy grids, among numerous other vital elements related to sustainable regional development as well as the creation of human assets.

To conclude, the sustainable tourism understanding of the local communities should also be enhanced to encourage public participation. The public should understand their participation's importance and how they can add to sustainable tourism development in their respective areas (Yair Grinberger et al., 2014; Remoaldo et al., 2019; Koçak et al., 2020). Also, the main actors in the tourism industry should be capable of aiding in this topic. In this era, tourists are becoming more conscious of their function in sustainability. In this line, by incorporating sustainable principles to foster a tourism destination, marketing and advertisement will have a critical role (Couto et al., 2021).

Generally, it is conceivable to demonstrate that the correlations between creative tourism and various development processes and techniques could lead to diverse effects depending on the territory's social characteristics and cultural and environmental assets. Here we can bring the case study of the creative tourism funded project: CREATOUR AZORES and how such project (and similar initiatives) could be the catalyst for the regional sustainable development.

- The practical implications of a resurgence in creative tourism in island regions will depend on the specific destination and community. However, some potential implications may include the following:
- Increased economic benefits: Creative tourism can bring in additional revenue for local businesses and organizations and individual artists and craftspeople.
- Preservation of cultural heritage: Creative tourism can help to support and preserve traditional cultural practices and crafts, which can be an essential aspect of island communities' identity.
- Job creation: Creative tourism can create new job opportunities for locals, such as tour guides, workshop instructors, and artists.



- Balancing tourism and community needs: It will be necessary for destinations to strike a balance between the economic benefits of tourism and the needs and well-being of the local community. This may involve limiting the number of visitors, promoting sustainable tourism practices, and supporting the development of community-based tourism initiatives.
- Managing the impacts of tourism: As tourism increases, it may strain the island's resources and infrastructure, such as housing, transportation, and waste management. It will be essential to plan and manage the growth of tourism to minimize negative impacts.

Overall, destinations must develop a strategy that prioritizes the community, cultural preservation, and sustainable tourism practices.

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Responsible Reporting and Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest. All the authors contributed equally for this paper elaboration.

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