

Sunny, Windy, Muddy and Salty Creative Tourism Experience in a Salt Pan¹

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Abstract/ Resumo

Algarve (Portugal) is a well known region by its exclusive rocky beaches. A mild weather and the availability of over 3,000 sunny hours/year are important factors a tourist should consider when making travel decisions. The present study investigates when the tourist is challenged to discover not the beaches, but the region's less known protected areas in the tidal marsh and its traditional human activities. A case study research is presented based on creative tourism experiences in the traditional activity of salt production, where the visitor can go beyond a simple visit to the site. Key findings from this research show the involvement of all parties in the production of the creative experience, the enthusiasm and willingness to co-create it, despite awareness of the need to balance visitors' skills with the experiential proposal. In the whole, results provide insightful information useful to the diversified stakeholders involved in creative tourism and the sustainability of activities embedded in specific territories.

O Algarve (Portugal) é uma região bem conhecida onde se podem encontrar praias rochosas ímpares. Um tempo ameno e a disponibilidade de sol acima de 3000 horas/ano são fatores importantes a considerar quando um turista toma decisões de viagem. O presente estudo investiga quando o turista é desafiado a descobrir não as praias, mas as menos conhecidas áreas protegidas no sapal de marés e as suas atividades humanas tradicionais. É apresentada uma investigação de caso de estudo baseada em experiências de turismo criativo numa atividade tradicional de produção de sal, onde o visitante pode ir além duma simples visita ao local. Os principais resultados evidenciam o envolvimento de todos os participantes na produção da experiência turística criativa, assim como o entusiasmo e a disponibilidade na sua criação conjunta, todavia revelam também a perceção da necessidade de equilibrar as competências dos visitantes com os desafios inerentes à proposta da experiência. No seu todo, os resultados deste estudo proporcionam informação útil para os diversos intervenientes dedicados ao turismo criativo e sustentabilidade de atividades em territórios específicos.

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JEL codes: Q25, Z30, Z31, Z32

Palavras-chave: Algarve; Experiência turística; Flor-de-sal; Sal; Turismo criativo.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is an ever-growing industry and keeps playing a very important role in sustaining the development of national, regional and local economies (Kärholm, 2011; Ramos et al., 2014). As competition between destinations grows, the ability to satisfy increasingly demanding, knowledgeable and curious tourists becomes more difficult. If tourism is to continue to help economies to thrive, regardless the level (national, regional or local), destination managers and tourism firms need to devise new ways to attract these tourists (Bianchi, 2002). Creative tourism is currently envisaged as a prominent type of tourism able to meet this goal (Djukic & Vukmirovic, 2012). Creative tourism is believed to respond of the aspirations of the 21st century tourists' (Richards, 2009; OECD, 2014), while at the same time contributing to maintain or even boost small and family-owned companies, traditionally connected to the use of a particular territory's natural resources or to brisk local cultural heritage activities (Getz et al., 2004; Richards, 2009).

Many destinations around the world that have adopted tourism as a strategy for economic growth have done so at the expenses of environmental and social sustainability. At present time, there is a general awareness concerning the contribution of planned tourism to the environment, local economies and social identity (Maretti & Salvatore, 2012). Such awareness has been leading regional and local public authorities to stimulate the development of traditional economic and cultural activities with a focus on tourism (Citarella & Maglio, 2014). At the same time, owners of small family businesses who built expertise and technical knowledge based on their activities over the years are becoming sensitive to the role of tourism in helping them to sustain and diversify the business (Karlsdóttir, 2009). Traditional production of sea salt is one such case.

Producing sea salt based on traditional processes, presently, is only possible due to the emergence of a "new" highly valued product:

the flower of salt (Lee et al., 2013). In Portugal, traditional salt pans became non-profitable for small-scale producers because the costs of re-shaping pans in the production area each year were significantly higher than the revenue taken from solely coarse salt extraction and selling (Nogueira et al., 2014). Therefore, adequate location is a highly important factor to consider when investing in contemporary salt pans, particularly when is intended to produce not only coarse salt, but also flower of salt (Figure 1). The availability of a high number of sunny hours in a year and low precipitation are important factors to take into consideration. Thus, with the increasing demand for the flower of salt and with the objective of attracting a highly interesting and valuable tourism market, some former and even newer entrants set to develop this activity (Rocha et al., 2012). The harvested flower of salt is seen by these producers as meeting the requirement of high quality standards desired by consumers (Galvis-Sánchez et al., 2011).

Consumers in general, but also tourists with an interest in gastronomy and seekers of traditional food experiences, became eclectic and demanding, as they want to know where the food items they buy and consume come from (Hume, 2013). The flower of salt, and up to a certain extent coarse sea salt, is a type of product to which this applies, i.e., tourists are willing to visit its source of origin (Drake & Drake, 2011). Underlying the interest in this product is a search for multi-sensorial experiences, in which tastes, smells and tactile sensations combine in rich experience environments (Agapito, Valle and Mendes, 2014), and where particular attention to the supra-cited aspect is given by cultural or eco-tourists (Boniface, 2001). Williams (2006) has highlighted that in tourism the more sensory is an experience, the more memorable it will be.

Creative tourism is currently under the spotlight of tourism researchers and practitioners as increasing examples are emerging which count as interesting approaches to tourism sustainable development as well as showcases of how

tourism initiatives are diverting from massified supply and destinations (Richards and Wilson, 2006). Still there is much to understand concerning the processes involved in these initiatives. Particularly when they take place in peripheral or regional tourism areas, where small family-owned businesses run their operations based on very territorially specific resources. One can speculate creative tourism experiences vary greatly in content, but also according to the location or the environment where they take place, and the culturally embedded human participants. Variability of influential factors may determine that different processes occur in creative experiences or that the degree of participants' involvement and contribution modulates

experience design approach and implementation.

In order to better understand specific contexts of participated conception of creative tourism experiences, two research objectives for this research are set, namely: (1) to analyze a co-creation approach design of the tourism experience in a salt pan where visitors are in continuous dialogue with facilitators, where in order to meet that purpose, this ancient human activity (salt production) must bring about a sprinkle of modernity to illustrate and describe the process; and (2) to contribute to the design of experiential proposals applied to the specific case of salt production and harvesting.

Figure 1: Main flower of salt production areas in Portugal mainland and location of the case study (Olhão municipality).



Source: Authors' own.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: CREATIVE TOURISM AND CO-CREATION

Richards and Raymond (2000: 19) defined creative tourism 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 undertaken”. Demand for creative tourism is growing as a sign of wider societal mutations that involve changes in individuals' mind-sets and lifestyles (Campos et al., 2018). These

mutations are grounded in the wider recognition of the power of human creativity to shape and revitalize urban development, develop the creative industries, innovate businesses and express the freedom of individual entrepreneurship (Smith, 2005). In this sense, the rise of a creative approach to contemporary life is a matter of social processes as well as of individuals committed to challenging traditional ways of thinking about and doing things.

Creative tourism is based on the acknowledgement of the contribution of individuals' cultural capital to approach tourism offers, products, and experiences in a whole new way (Richards, 2011). Cultural capital endows individuals with the necessary tools to interact differently with the environment. In turn, individuals demand more from interaction with others. Resourceful people, gathering certain capabilities (e.g., knowledge, expertise, technological skills, and so on), are interested in self-development and in connecting to environments where they can apply skills, be active and build up their sense of personal identity (Morgan & Pritchard, 2005).

Tourists who recognize their potential to be creative, identify proposals loaded with experiential content and welcome tourism offers which appeal to their sense of autonomy, achievement and self-efficacy (Su et al., 2016). Such proposals are in fact "first-hand genuine experiences" (Hung et al., 2014). Additionally, these tourists expect that experiences are not only opportunities to learn about local cultures and territories, but also to be engaged at different levels, such as: sensorially, intellectually and emotionally (Swarbrooke et al., 2003). In fact, creative tourism proposals are designed and facilitated in a way to allow tourists to express themselves in a variety of experiences (Richards, 2010) ranging from intellectually focuses activities, such as learning experiences and language classes, to sensorially-based activities which engage the individuals with all their senses. Gastronomy and cooking courses or perfume-making workshops serve as good examples of the multi-sensory dimension of creative experiences (Richards & Wilson, 2006), but also creative sport tourism is an opportunity for multi-sensorial experiences (Ihamäki, 2012). Creative tourism, in this sense, is argued to meet the motivations of new tourists who desire to live an experience through all the senses, and thus "the feeling of the materials, smells,

sceneries and sounds" (Ihamäki, 2012: 164) is a building block of the landscape of the creative experience.

Creative tourism is a new approach to the consumption of tourism and is a testimony of how tourists' expectations are evolving towards a superior meaning of this form of consumption, today inseparable of a perspective of quality of life and lifestyle (Ivanovic, 2008). As creative tourism accommodates the combination of both dimensions of entertainment and learning, it has been identified as a form of *edutainment* (Choo & Jamal, 2009). In fact, *edutainment* can be understood as a new way to approach cultures and their cultural assets, both tangible and intangible. Local traditions loaded with spiritual value, as well as celebrations of gastronomy, carry cultural meaning which is appealing to creative tourists. This cultural meaning however comes with the desire to engage in participatory experiences rather than being framed in passive tour visits (Lehman & Reiser, 2014). Creative tourism is thus one of the most representative forms of *the performance turn* heralded two decades ago by Mansfeldt et al., (2008).

Creative tourism is seen as a type of tourism closely linked to co-creation, and a strong basis for a co-creation approach to tourism businesses (Binkhorst & Den Dekker, 2009; OECD, 2014). Co-creation emerged as a new framework for business management (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004), based on the premise that value is jointly created by producers and consumers in the context of experiences during interactions where all parties involved apply skills and resources. Experiences, not services, are the base from which value emerges, and as these are subjectively lived by customers, value derived from it is contextualized and personalized. Thus, as customers commit themselves to the creation of the experience by applying skills, competences and a variety of capabilities, they are called *operant resources* of the company (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2008).

Creative tourism captures the spirit of the challenge addressed to tourism scholars and practitioners to better understand and develop co-creation tourism experiences (Binkhorst & Den Dekker, 2009). These, by exploring new ways of production which accommodate a greater number of tourists willing to actively participate in the process, allow them to create new and personalized meanings at a deeper level (Richards & Wilson, 2006). Co-creation

processes and facilitators include firms which have the organizational will and the structural requirements to interact with each customer in a personalized way, operating effectively if adopting flexible and innovative approaches to serve more demanding and skilled visitors, but also visitors who may vary greatly in their abilities to face the particular challenges involved in the experiential proposals.

3. MATERIAL AND METHODS

This research adopts a case study approach which holds, according to relevant literature sources, “a significant place in the exploratory stage of the investigation” (Beeton, 2005: 39). Additionally, case studies are understood as adequate contexts for insight elicitation by means of gathering rich and complex data (Huberman & Miles, 2002). According to Yin’s (1994) seminal work on the case study method, data are generated through multiple sources of evidence and the most important contribution of this approach to general knowledge is the emergence of insightful results, much more than the technicalities involved in its implementation and appropriate use. Primary data were obtained through participant observation and informal interviews or simply conversations with subjects belonging to the firm or that could be found in the experience environment; and secondary data sources include brochures and other commercial communication, business-related documents, historical data sources from public local records.

3.1 Participant observation

Participant observation took place during all the research’s stages and data were collected through the researchers’ field notes and photographic material and records. Depth of informative content was aimed through constant use of these tools, as visitor statistics, e.g., were lacking for that particular site, and accordingly not much was known about visitor profile. One of the researchers engaged in the case study site by becoming a part-time tour guide with technical knowledge on marine life and ecosystems, thus participant observation involved only a moderate degree of immersion in the research context. This researcher, though acquainted with business owners, wasn’t part of the family group. However, though not belonging to this community, the researcher had inner full acceptance by

owners and staff (Beeton, 2005). This proximity allowed researchers to get closer to relevant data sources and at the same time to develop informed interpretations of phenomena (Cole, 2005).

Simple attention, orientation and challenges proposed by salt pan guides make much of the difference and in fact they do contribute to the creation of meaning of the experience (Ooi, 2010) and joint creativity becomes the rule (Richards, 2011). The creative tourist experience proposal basically focuses on the following: Hands-on-approach, take a rake to break the hard salt rock and pile it artistically into a pyramid at the border of the rectangular pan; or else, take a long squeegee and, with a monastic patience, sieve the upper floating sensitive crystal without dissolving it until the person gathers the flower of salt.

This sort of experience provided to highly demanding tourists intends to result in a win-win situation. On the one hand, tourists more than solely gaze at the place where one of their daily food items is produced, they are able to join the staff in the harvesting task with their own hands and actually use the traditional tools, in this way bringing additional value to the mere passive experience. On the other hand, the producer by behaving with absolute transparency towards production processes and products, builds trust with tourists, and from this connection derive benefits of positive word-of-mouth, loyalty and recommendation (Litvin et al., 2008).

3.2 Experience design with a co-creation approach

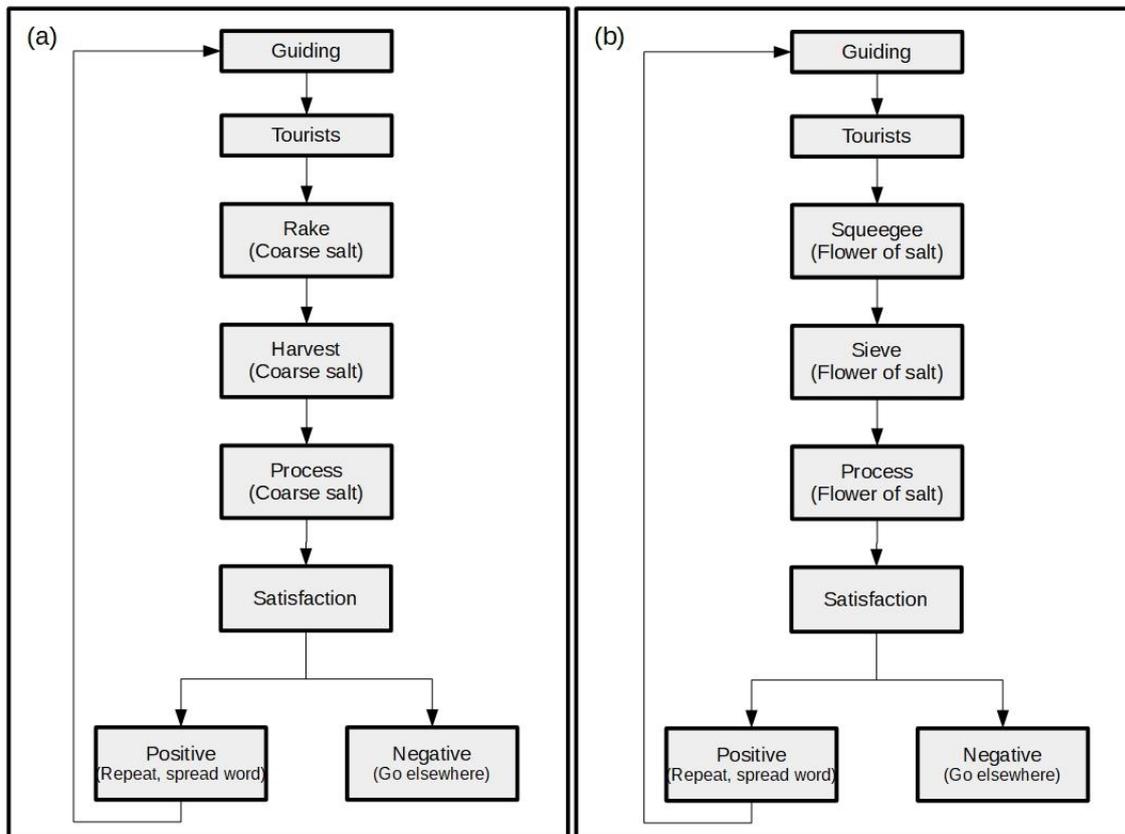
Creative tourism experiences are exciting challenges for tourists as they are stimulated to participate in the experience by applying some type of personal resources (physical, intellectual, cultural); however, they are equally challenging as business owners need to find the adequate facilitating conditions for tourists to engage in memorable creative events. New experiential proposals, if they are to succeed for both parties, develop from interactive processes conducive to a definite product offering. Interactions are crucial to building dialogue between all participants with coincident expectations towards creation of experiential value, and thus co-creation of experiences emerges from the early stage of design. These processes involved in the first place joint discussion between

owners and staff, since both groups are required to make decisions as what to propose to tourists, what are the needed skills to fully participate in the experience, the material and logistics resources, and the experience key stages.

Basically, a tourist is told a brief introduction where the most important parts of coarse salt production and flower of salt are explained (guiding). Then, the tourist is challenged to try each of the different rakes (for coarse salt) and squeegee (for flower of salt). Afterward, the tourist is expected to harvest, allocate the commodity into a plastic box and let it dry some

symbolic amount of both coarse salt and flower of salt (Figure 2). Tourist participation is supposed to extend through additional activities, e.g. carrying out their processing tasks (weighting, packing, labeling). A metric to measure the satisfaction obtained by tourist is deemed necessary. As long as a positive reaction is given (the tourist is satisfied), the word of mouth and to repeat the visit are possible scenarios. Oppositely, a negative reaction (the tourist is unsatisfied), may result in decreasing visits.

Figure 2: Experience design for the hands on approach creative tourism experience: (a) The coarse salt, (b) the flower of salt.



Source: Authors' own.

In the context of creative tourism, it was intended to study the perceived most “exciting” salt pan task combination experienced by tourists. By task combination it is meant the development of two lines of activities, one for coarse salt and the other for flower of salt. In that scope, it was decided to define an experience design (Table 1).

4. THE CASE STUDY: SALINA DO GRELHA

4.1 Settings

Across the *Ria Formosa* there is a trail of abandoned buildings sharing a common feature that is a stoned arch bending over a tidal plume of water that goes back and forth twice a day.

Table 1: Stages used in the hands on approach creative tourism experience for both coarse salt and flower of salt.

Stages	Coarse salt	Flower of salt
Specific pan area	Bottom	Surface
Type of grain	Coarse, irregular (precipitated)	Thin, squared regular (floating)
Tools	Racks (break, push, pile)	Squeegee (sieve)
Stage 1. Learning session Short technical information	Water source, evaporation, sieving, precipitation (higher density), crystallizing (chunks)	Water source, evaporation, sieving, fluctuation (lower density), crystallizing (thin layers)
Stage 2. Drying process	Piling between pans	Putting into plastic boxes
Dryers	Shaping into pyramids	Boxing (from box to drying tray)
Stage 3. Storage	Bags (wide range: small to big)	Boxes and bags
Stage 4. Packaging	Personalized by the tourist	Personalized by the tourist

Source: Authors' own.

Luckily, if the building is still in a reasonable state of conservation, with at least some walls upwards, some discrete tiny windows can be

observed. Basically, these signs are sufficient to identify and pinpoint this sort of buildings as tide mills (Figure 3).

Figure 3: João Pedro Grelha tide mill (east side). There can be found three pairs of stone mills. There are records attesting this mill was built in the Eighteenth century.



Source: Authors' own.

The *Salina do Grelha* is a private property located at the *Ria Formosa Natural Park*, roughly facing northwards Santa Maria cape lighthouse. In the real state, the main building is composed by an ancient tide mill and a building extension towards south. There are some records attesting that this property has been owned by the *Grelha* family since the late 17th century. In addition, from a collection of recorded evidence across the natural park border from Faro (west) to Cabanas (east), where one can find a decreasing number of tide mills and related salt-marsh properties, the family name *Grelha* is common, with particular incidence in the area of Bela Mandil (Olhão municipality).

In the former times, the *João Pedro Grelha* tide mill, consisting of three pairs of millstones, were powered by large ponds that fueled during the ebbing tide the not so efficient *rodízio* wheels. By the early 1800s a technological improvement took place and the *rodízio* wheel was replaced by the *rodete* technology, a turbine precursor. For over a century the miller had a very demanding business: reducing grains of corn, wheat or even other local cereals to the finest flour to make bread, the fundamental food item for any family. Even today, several traditional sayings include the word “bread” (*pão*) as central: “*Ganhar o pão de cada dia*” (Earn the bread of each day), “*Em casa onde não há pão, todos ralham e ninguém tem razão*” (In a house-

hold where there is no bread, all rage and no one is right), “*Ficar a pão e água*” (Let to be on bread and water), “*Sopas de cavalo cansado*” (Tired horse soups – a blend made of mashed hard bread and wine), etc.

The milling business lasted until mid of 20th century. Thus, with the advancement of grinding machinery, particularly in the U.S., it became too expensive to produce flour (Reynolds, 2002). As such, tide millers felt they should quit the business, but simultaneously without leaving the place. The apparently easy transition was converting tidal *caldeiras* (tide mill water reservoirs) into salt pans. Because Olhão is a fishing town by roots, so it made sense to the tide miller in order to prevent bankruptcy, to change the business to salt production to preserve fish in an epoch where electricity was still unavailable.

The *Salina do Grelha* tide mill was laboring until the end of 1960s, but as a residual activity. Salt production became during the WWII, and soon after, a vibrant man-powered activity, lasting until the 1970s. During the 1980s, machinery entered in an abrupt way in many salterns and several small producers left the business due to difficulties to compete with economies of scale. Economic loss of traditional salt producers became a fact.

4.2 The business and its origins

Salt pan tourism in the *Salina do Grelha* started in 2013, by chance when Czech tourists looking for specific tourism and cultural features that were not possible to be found in their home country. The Czech Honorary Consulate based in Faro suggested some visiting options and the salt pan exploratory tour was one of those. The average Czech tourist has demonstrated to be enthusiastic and looking for recalling sensations such as the whitish flat landscape found soon before the first harvest of coarse salt (i.e., about six weeks after the production units have been filled with dense waters), or the long quadrangular pyramids of piled compacted coarse salt found in between every two contiguous pans.

Since then on, it was spotted that salt pan tourism had an opportunity to start and eventually to succeed as at least a complementary business. Soon after, it was perceived that tourists differ and the experiences they are looking for may differ too. For instance, there are tourists that aim to diversify experiences, even when

each one is short (say shorter than one hour). Such tourists attribute value to the summation of a wide range of different short experiences. However, other tourists attribute higher value to deeper tourism experiences. A cultural experience where tourists are challenged to know the roots of their daily life consumption product, attribute a higher value to not only the place where the product comes from, but also to the way it is produced. These tourists are even willing to pay for a deeper experience, such as to put their own hands on approach. This is the case of salt, particularly flower of salt and coarse salt.

5. FINDINGS

5.1 Tourists’ perceptions on the creative experience proposals

The salt pan is a work environment. Skilled handcraft workers carry out their jobs in a partially open, exposed setting. There one can find a sunny, windy, muddy and salty place. The workers get used to it because there are mandatory rules to be applied in these sensitive work environments and they actually are recommended to adopt and follow them: e.g. the use of sunglasses, different types of head-covers and light-coloured clothing; additionally, drinking water is compulsory in order to get regular body hydration.

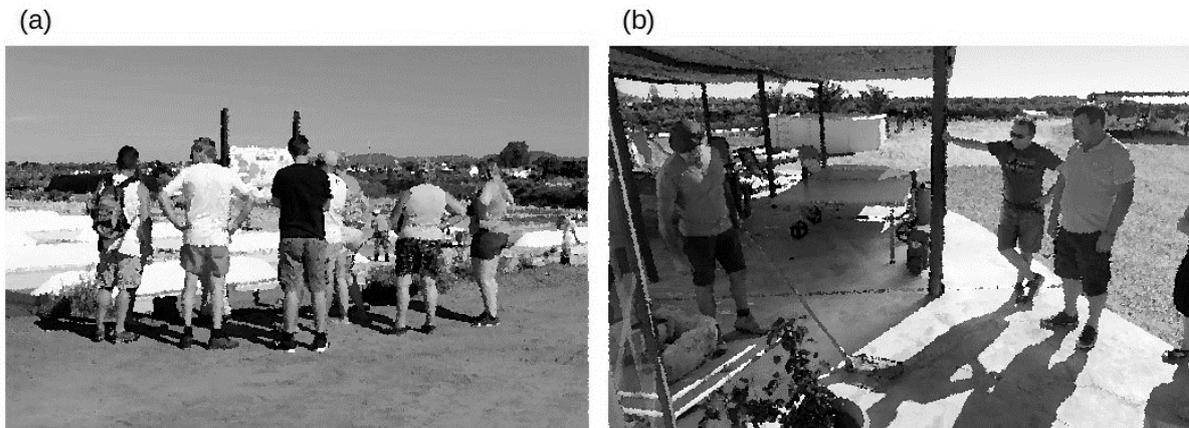
However, such hard conditions can be perceived by tourists as uncomfortable. Notwithstanding this fact, tourists also engage enthusiastically in a visit, in which a local and expert guide is able to transform it in an entertainment experience combined with a learning activity (*edutainment*). A short visit of about ½ to ¾ of an hour may however be extended to a longer period if, for instance, tourists go beyond performing as simple passive receptors of information. If it is the case, those tourists get into the experience process by actively participating in it and co-create it (Prebensen & Foss, 2011), they can stay for a longer period of time and interact in a closer and deeper manner with nature and people through salt pan activities and experiences.

Tourists' attitudes show that they want to participate actively throughout the visits. Tourists, not only pay attention to the guiding people when explaining the salt pan embedded in the natural park context, but also to the smooth balance between natural park nature and salt pan

activities. There the calm and healthy natural park setting coexists in harmony with men laboring (Fig 4a), namely by using simple and

almost absent technology, but efficiently handling tools such as the flower of salt squeegee (Fig 4b).

Figure 4: Some tourist experiences in a salt pan, where the activity is perfectly embedded into Ria Formosa. (a) 1st plan: Salt pan briefing (panel to aid), 2nd plan: *marnotos* (salt-workers) laboring; and (b) Squeegee demonstration before hands on approach experience.

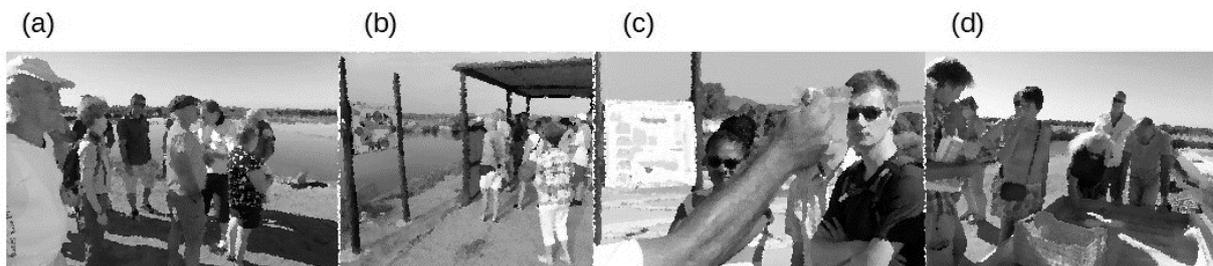


Source: Authors' own.

Tourists are also stimulated to use their five senses. Namely, they are given the opportunity to observe the calm and inspirational harsh landscape full of seabirds and other living organisms perfectly attached to the environment, as well as the different types of lagoons that work just due to gravity and sunshine power (Fig 5a). Other sense experience comprehend to hear the different salt pan attached seabird chantings (Fig 5b) and to smell the strong power of mother water (i.e. saturated water) freshness

full of a species of brine shrimp called *Artemia salina* used in the transitional process from evaporation to crystallizing after filtering (Fig 5c). Another experience is to touch the colder less saline waters in contrast to warmer fully saturated waters and the whole range of textures of recently harvested flower of salt, and finally to taste the finest flower of salt in the drying process and being able to differentiate it from the flavor of the traditional coarse salt (Fig 5d).

Figure 5: Tourists in creative tourism activities using their five senses: (a) Observing seabirds and natural features; (b) Hearing seabirds and other natural sounds; (c) Smelling the dense water; (d) Flower of salt touching and tasting (drying process).



Source: Authors' own.

5.2 Awareness of potential for tourism development

The creative approach adopted by this family-owned business was taken under the belief that business competitiveness, by maintaining in operation traditional economic activities, was aligned with general principles of sustainable

tourism development. Furthermore, business dimensionality was considered an internal strength of this firm, as visitors to the site have to harmonize with carrying capacity. Small groups of visitors at a time would better fit the area's characteristics, and creative tourism seemed an adequate and feasible option to develop sustainably (Fig 6a).

Based on perceptions of tourists' willingness to engage (demand side), owners felt there were conditions to develop and adapt some touristic experiential proposal, aiming to not only satisfy tourists' needs of learning new things about the site and salt production, but also to facilitate the experience environment conditions where salt pan working activities could be accomplished (supply side). Then emerged from participants the brainstormed idea of leading tourists inside the crystallization area so that they could have

direct contact with the physical, chemical and environmental elements by entering in the coarse salt and flower of salt formation (Fig 6b and 6c, respectively). The brainstorming process evolved to the stage of developing two distinct and distinctive experiences focused on how to communicate the differentiated products *coarse salt* and *flower of salt*, including their unique characteristics, production stages, and tools used during the production process (either in the gathering, drying and storage phases).

Figure 6: The hands on approach experience: (a) Small groups of tourists; (b) The coarse salt experience with a long metal rake; (c) The flower of salt experience with a squeegee.



Source: Authors' own

6. DISCUSSION

This research was conducted in order to understand the co-creation process underlying creative tourism experience design and also the outcomes of that process by using a traditional activity, namely salt production, as a case study. The most important finding of this exploratory research was that the whole process was developed and enthusiastically accepted by a local producer, support staff and tourists as a participative and engaging one, by stimulating all parties to actively contribute to creative inputs and resources.

Owners of the business, guiding people and tourists were seen as intervening parts, and tourists in particular willing to do their best as to derive knowledge and meaning from their involvement in the experience design process. Despite this, collected data revealed that there were concerns about tourists' willingness to participate in the experience and also about the expertise required to adhere to the creative proposals. These concerns have been expressed by both owner and tourists.

Additional findings point to owner's acknowledgement of creative tourism potential to help sustain their business and maintain traditional activities. In fact, this perception was of great value to the need of emphasizing the contribution of creative tourism to control the continuous growth of mass tourism in saturated destinations. In addition, creative tourism was acknowledged as a complementary tourism perspective felt as a necessity to diversify their offer to tourists, while meeting tourists' higher needs for knowledge and skill improvement (Campos et al., 2016). The research process has, in this sense, highlighted the close link between creative tourism and co-creation, as the new business management paradigm.

This research adopted a qualitative framework and used qualitative data collection methods, which were considered to fit exploratory research objectives and focused on analysis of case studies, following Robson & McCartan (2016) research lines. Participant observation was conducted by the researchers directly involved in the activities undertaken by the local producer of salt, staff and tourists, and informal

interviews were aimed at understanding the points of view of those involved in the case analyzed. This approach was important, as insights from these informants were valuable to the development of tourism researchers' understanding of creative experiences design processes, participants, roles, strengths and weaknesses, as well as their link to the cultural and social sustainability of places. As a qualitative design was adopted for conducting this research, additional data collection tools were used that proved of great value to better understand the voice of participants. Triangulation was appropriately implemented as strategy to minimize researchers' biases due to moderate immersion in the experience setting, hoping in that way to achieve rigor and validity of interpretation.

As tourists become more and more attached to valuable creative experiences, requiring more active participation and involvement with their tourism experiences, a fully comprehension of how this value builds and unfolds through interactions with local facilitators is becoming increasingly important. As coarse sea salt and flower of salt consumers, tourists have demonstrated to get satisfaction when are able to visit the place and contribute to the manufacture of products they use in their daily life.

7. CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The findings that emerged from this study are still precautionary, as more research is needed to better frame the experience design process and appraise the outcomes for both local providers and tourists. The facilitation of experience, with participants' involvement, the environment and strategies for attracting co-creative tourists, is a topic that researchers need to further explore in combination with local owners, willing to leverage their business with a view to capturing most active and committed tourists. Proximity to tourists is in this context strategic, basically because they are the key players in the experiential tourism framework.

As it can be assumed that not all tourists are equally able or willing to engage in creative experiences, which integrate some degree of active participation (low to high), tourism researchers and business owners alike are challenged to better know tourists, their creative potential, desire and motivation. These results are expected to be elicited from more comprehensive data sources that may help similar businesses, while contributing to tourism studies on creative tourism and experiences, as far as they link to the environmental and social sustainability of local traditional producers.

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