

ALGARVE CRAFT & FOOD: A CREATIVE AND RESPONSIBLE TOURISM INITIATIVE

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Abstract:

Algarve Craft & Food is a recent project taking place in the Algarve region, in the south of Portugal. The initiative focuses on developing creative programs for tourists, with a sustainable and responsible approach, thus respecting and including the local communities while preserving their culture and heritage. The main objective of this study is to describe the project and what has been achieved as of today, as well as its impacts on society.

Abstract: tourism, creative programs, sustainable and responsible approach

Resumo:

Algarve Craft & Food é um projeto recente desenvolvido na região do Algarve, no sul de Portugal. A iniciativa tem como foco o desenvolvimento de programas criativos para turistas, com uma abordagem sustentável e responsável, respeitando e incluindo as comunidades locais, preservando seu patrimônio cultural. O objetivo principal deste estudo é descrever o projeto e o que foi alcançado, assim como os seus impactos na comunidade.

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is an economic activity that is increasingly growing as a key area for the development of regions. The impacts of tourism are the consequence of a complex process of interaction between tourists and communities. Similar types of tourism can cause different impacts, depending on the nature of the contexts in which they occur and the managerial approaches (Rushmann, 1999).

In tourism, it is crucial to undertake a sustainable planning process where environmental, economic and socio-cultural impacts must be considered. This approach should focus mainly on sustainable tourism practices so that it can improve the living conditions of the local population and protect the region's unique resources and heritage, in which it operates. Therefore, sustainable tourism has been continuously more valued because its development encourages monitoring practices. In doing so, the negative impacts of tourism are mitigated, and the potential benefits are increased.

Liu (2009) highlights that the process of valuing local resources is impacted by tourists' preferences, motivations, emotions and perceptions. These factors can determine whether an object or a destination can become a tourist attraction and if it has a market value. Tourism operators and destination marketing organizations can, however, encourage the involvement of the community in creating products and activities focused on local features that can be valued by visitors that pursue unique and authentic products (Duxbury & Richards, 2019). Instruments of non-profit marketing and social marketing can thus be relevant in educating visitors to have a more responsible consumption behavior when traveling (Hall, 2014). This is aligned with Goal 12 of the United Nations' Development Goals related to responsible consumption and production (<https://sdgs.un.org/goals>).

Algarve Craft & Food is a project that aims to put tourists in touch with the essence of the Algarve and promote sustainable tourism as well as creative tourism. The initiative focuses on stimulating and internationalizing the cultural and creative industries based on local crafts and agri-food products of the Algarve. According to research, in a contemporary context, travelers are more conscious of their impact on the environment and on the locals' needs than they were in the past. As a result, they strive to personalize their experiences and seek more "responsible tourism" since they feel a certain "eco-shame" and guilt (Sharpley, 2021). On the other hand, experiencing unique cultural aspects in an active way is an important motivation for creative tourists (Duxbury & Richards, 2019).

Creative tourism is viewed as the next generation of tourism. It implies more interaction, in which the tourist has an instructional, emotional, social and

Cases

participative experience (UNESCO, 2006). The consumer being actively involved in the creation of tourism experiences can also generate situations where they interact with the local community. The relationship between visitors and locals can contribute to the sustainability of destinations, promoting its continuity, originality, and authenticity.

As advocated by Richards (2013) in tourism, creativity has been used in multiple forms:

- Growth of tourism products and experiences;
- Revitalization of available products;
- Valuing cultural and creative assets, providing economic spinoffs and improving the creative development;
- Encouraging the connection between creative methods and the improvement of the tourist experience;
- Creating an artistic atmosphere or buzz in the locations that appeals to tourists.

Against this background, the objective of this work is to describe the *Algarve Craft & Food* project as a good practice in adopting a responsible approach to tourism management and marketing using creative tourism characteristics that can contribute to sustainable and responsible tourism and to show how it impacts the community.

2. CASE DEVELOPMENT

2.1 Project Goals

Algarve Craft & Food was initiated on July 1, 2019, with a preliminary duration of 24 months. The project was developed and promoted by a partnership between Região de Turismo do Algarve (Algarve Tourism Board, which is the Destination Management Organization of the region; it is responsible for safeguarding the tourism interests of the region), Tertúlia Algarvia (a business focused in spreading gastronomy, history and traditions of the region through restaurants, local products stores and regional experiences)) and Cooperativa QRER (a cooperative focused on creating shared values by promoting low-density territories, with its headquarters in the Algarve). The approval of the project on October 21, 2019, meant that it would receive financial support of 724.234,80 € from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Programa Operacional CRESC ALGARVE2020.

The main objective of the project is to stimulate and develop the internationalization of the creative and cultural industries based on handcraft and agri-food, through the creation of 10 new Creative Tourism programs involving craft and food. The project was divided into six main activities that would represent the conclusion of the project:

- **Activity 1 - Project presentation and dissemination actions:** Consisted in presenting the project around the region to attract the interest of local food producers, artisans, and other actors to participate in the project.
- **Activity 2 - Training program for the internationalization of artisans and local agri-food producers:** The main goal was to deepen the actors' knowledge regarding the internationalization of the handicraft and food products.
- **Activity 3 - Design of new handicraft products and creation of Cultural and Creative Tourism programs:** This objective was one of those with the most activities, which involved artisans, chefs, designers, and food producers. The aim is to create the conditions to create new craft pieces to traditional cuisine, develop partnerships between these stakeholders and create 10 new Cultural and Creative Tourism Programs related to regional food and crafts. Part of this objective was also to perform some tests about the potential programs and simulate how the experience would be for the tourists who buy the activity.

At the end of this phase, the project as an innovative approach by given three awards to: a) the best work resulting from a creative residency/adherence to the *Algarve Craft & Food* project (for artisans, designers and chefs); b) the best creative tourism program/experience produced within the scope of the *Algarve Craft & Food* project; and c) the best journalist work on the theme of creative tourism, as well as cultural and creative industries, within the scope of the *Algarve Craft & Food* project.

- **Activity 4 - Design of physical and digital content to support the international promotion of handicrafts and local agri-food products from the Algarve:** For this objective, several materials were created, such as catalogues, videos, storytelling, and gastronomy content to support the promotion of the project.

Cases

- **Activity 5 - Preparation for internationalization and international promotion actions:** This phase consisted in using the materials created to promote the project internationally. The main places where there were communication campaigns for the project were Spain, the United States, some countries in Europe, and some specific tourism-related events.
- **Activity 6 - Publicity actions for the project and its results:** The last objective was to publish and present the project and its results, and to undertake a closing session.

2.2 Impact of the project on the region

In terms of Sustainable and Responsible tourism, *Algarve Craft & Food* is very relevant and aligned with these concepts. The project uses tourism to promote and preserve regional traditions and to internationalize the local culture while it helps economically the rural communities of the region.

On the other hand, as mentioned in the introduction, creative tourism is in demand as tourists wish to deepen their knowledge and understanding of a destination by getting a hands-on approach to traditions (Duxbury & Richards, 2019). This can be done by learning how to make pottery, creating bowls, plates or cups with an artisan, for example, and then using these creations later on during a cooking lesson focused on traditional dishes. As such, craftsmen's jobs are still valued, and it is a way to help with the employment of the community while keeping traditions alive and using local products.

Most of the activities and tasks of the project were done with and for local producers, artisans, chefs, tourism operators and other related businesses. In the initial activities, there were promotional campaigns, training, and seminars, to involve the different actors on the project, gain knowledge, and create a network and partnerships. The project leaders also needed to identify possible actors who could be responsible for offering the tourists products for the commercialization stage.

An activity was particularly interesting, the Creative Residency, where the artisans had the opportunity to discuss their art with designers and chefs, who gave some ideas of how they could rebuild their art, bringing more life to it. For 15 days, they explored together possibilities of creating new craft pieces related to gastronomy, and positive changes in the crafts that could be done by the artisans.

Many diverse groups of actors participated in the phase of tests, and even some journalists from Portugal and Spain were invited to try the newly developed programs. After those phases of learning, discussing, developing products and testing, there was the Algarve Craft Food Award, which awarded three categories considering all the participations in the previous phases of the project.

All described activities related to the first stages of the project allow for empowering the community within tourism and promoting the project. Relationships and partnerships had the opportunity to be built, and people had the opportunity to gain specific and valuable knowledge about how to promote regional traditions and culture internationally.

The different phases undertaken allowed for the consolidation of the project and the impact of the creative and sustainable tourism sector. The commercialization phase will have an impact on the local economy as the experiences can be priced as premium products considering their value and perceived authenticity by tourists. Tourists can actively co-create their experience and learn about local traditions and culture while supporting local businesses.

3. QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Question 1. *How can this project encourage visitors to engage in sustainable behaviors or become more environmentally conscious travelers in the future?*

The tourist product includes not only the goods or services supplied but also the visitor's engagement, experimentation and interaction with the surrounding environment, particularly with the locals. This project enables visitors to actively engage with the local population in the numerous traditional arts and trades of the Algarve, allowing them to actively experience the region's customs and flavors through touch, smell, sound, and taste. Consumers turn to projects like this to assist them in leading a more sustainable way in their daily lives because small acts made by many people may have a significant impact.

This project encourages tourists to behave in a more environmentally friendly manner while optimizing and enjoying the region's resources by using regional and seasonal products (such as oregano, almonds, olives, figs, etc.) and creating unique objects for domestic or ornamental use.

An action that has the least negative effects on the environment or has a positive indirect effect on it is referred to as environmentally friendly. Effective strategies can be used to intervene and guide such behaviors, which are influenced by both internal and external variables.

Cases

Being environmentally conscious while traveling implies adopting sensible habits to lessen any unwanted effects. *Algarve Craft & Food* is an initiative where visitors take action to lessen the damaging effects of their behavior on the environment or support a destination's sustainable growth. Because of this experience, tourists may become more aware of responsible tourism and will be more environmentally conscious travelers in the future.

Question 2. *How important is the tourist's own participation in their experience?*

In the past few years, the tourism sector has been witnessing the emergence of “a new profile of a more active tourist, with a more creative and participative role, who seeks to create and form unique and memorable tourist experiences, generating value and meaning through them as a vital part to living and traveling” (Solís-Radilla et al., 2019, p.7). In order to be as fulfilled and as satisfied as possible with their visit, tourists no longer merely expect a classic tourist trip, but indeed a personalized experience, one that reflects them and who they are to the fullest extent and that allows them to participate directly and actively in the co-created experience. The fact of being involved, of engaging in one's tourist experience has a great impact on the traveler's well-being, and even, transformation (Sheldon, 2020).

This recent trend regarding tourists' expectations fits the *Algarve Craft & Food* project perfectly, as the aim of this initiative is to offer travelers an immersive experience, which is precisely what creative tourists are looking for. This specific branch is defined by Richards and Raymond (2000, p.4) as a “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”. This once again underlines the importance of the tourist's active participation during their experience, which can also be linked to the concept of co-creation.

Algarve Craft & Food encourages active participation by bringing a hands-on approach to the table. This approach incites tourists to put in the effort themselves if they want to deepen their knowledge and understanding of the local culture and community. Learning the traditional way of making pottery, as well as having cooking classes focused on regional dishes, for instance, is a part of the experience that is just as crucial and important as the more ‘classic’ part of eating the food that was prepared. This creates a feeling of achievement in the traveler, which elevates their self-esteem because they are proud of having participated in such a unique experience. As was mentioned earlier, this also has a positive impact on their well-being, and will probably become a long-lasting memory for the tourist, even a transformative one (Sheldon, 2020).

Question 3. *How does this project bring traditional food from Algarve to international tourists?*

Algarve Craft & Food aims to spread knowledge among international tourists about typical Algarve gastronomic products by practical learning, establishing a closer relationship between them and the territory. The project does it by being conscious that gastronomy is a potential strong asset for the development of the region since it could represent an element of differentiation (Duxbury, 2021).

In order to show culture and tradition through food for the tourists, the decision-makers developed activities focused on traditional Algarve cuisine products and dishes. The emphasis is given, for example, to the olive oil and aromatic herbs for the preparation of the dishes; figs, almonds and carobs for sweets; orange and medronho as typical fruits; and various kinds of seafood as main dishes, among many other products rooted in the Algarve.

The south of Portugal is still attractive due to the 3S factors (sea, sun and sand); therefore, this project can contribute to diversifying the tourism offer and reducing seasonality (Duxbury, 2021).

Before implementing the project, it was key for the market study undertaken under to project to understand the conditions of the supply player and requests, desires, and trends of the demand. This was a determinant step to providing necessary basics to local businesses and creating a satisfying experience for tourists.

“There is growing evidence that tourists are consciously seeking out food experiences” (Richards, 2012, p.7). Food activities have always been present in destinations, although without a specific identity, which is now necessary because it can attract people who consider gastronomy as an integral part of the cultural experience, who want to socialize through food and acquiring new capital (Duxbury, 2021)

The structure of *Algarve Craft & Food* focuses on the concept of food co-creation: it includes tourist participating in food practices and learning about culture through gastronomy (Richards, 2012). In fact, “consumers of food increasingly want to become involved in the production and preparation of meals, including in their tourism experiences” (Richards, 2012, p. 5). For this purpose, some creative laboratories of Algarvian traditional gastronomy have been created.

Another fundamental step of the project is activity 2, which aims at teaching local actors and businesses how to create an international market for their food products. In fact, “tourists search for novel and authentic food experiences, although they are often frustrated by a lack of supply or barriers such as language” (Richards, 2012, p. 8).

Cases

Local actors are encouraged to take part in the program by offering them seminars and workshops in which they learn how to attract international tourists with their products.

Figure 1. On the left a cataplana with shellfish (mariscos) and on right the *medronho*, a fruit from the Algarve. Both are typical of the region and will be part of the creative tourism programs.



Source: Images provided by Tertulia Algarvia

Question 4. *Does this project help to preserve cultural heritage? How?*

This project is absolutely crucial to preserve cultural heritage. The gastronomic dimension of the project is very important to preserve cultural heritage, since it is an important part of the traditions and culture of the region. In this reflective question, the authors will focus on handmade crafts, which are fundamental items of local culture.

It is important to keep in mind that some types of traditional crafts are disappearing, and this initiative, together with others, is trying to preserve and bring them back to life. *Algarve Craft & Food* organized several activities together with artisans to give them the tools to continue performing their art by updating and adapting it to contemporary contexts. Young designers and artists joined artisans in brainstorming initiatives to create new products and also to learn local arts and pass them on.

Furthermore, this project will also promote handicrafts to the tourists who participate in the activities. Visitors will be more engaged when they have the opportunity to create a piece of traditional craft. As a consequence, the tourists will give more value to the crafts and to the artisan and probably economically contribute by buying some pieces to bring home as memorabilia.

The incentive and professional help to artisans, the creation of a specific and very interesting market for the crafts, and the use of the craft within creative tourism activities are all key factors that make the project a good practice as a responsible approach to tourism in terms of marketing management.

Figure 2. Three traditional Algarve handcrafts which the tourists will be able to experience with artisans and artists potentializing the local economy and valuing sustainability and creativity.



Source: Images provided by RTA – Região de Turismo do Algarve

4. CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this work was to describe the *Algarve Craft & Food* project as an example of how to manage tourism in a responsible manner while using creative tourism elements that can support sustainable and responsible tourism, as well as to demonstrate how this management approach affects the community. Considering this objective, the authors conclude that this case is a good practice in the region of Algarve by incorporating a responsible approach to marketing and management.

Cruz (2014) highlights that tourism-related industries account for a sizable percentage of the local economy in Algarve. The Algarve has earned a reputation as a major tourist destination on a global scale due to its year-round mild climate, natural sea and environmental conditions, cultural history, gastronomy, and unique offerings in niche markets such as golf. Therefore, this project shows a potential to impact many tourists, and, consequently, the local communities through this creative and sustainable approach. This approach can contribute to destination social responsibility strategies (Agapito et al., 2022).

Although it is a recent project and there are no tangible results or consumer feedback yet, from what has been done until now, we could see that this initiative supports the region's rural communities economically while using tourism to promote, protect, and internationalize local customs and traditions, in a responsible manner.

Cases

Responsible tourism calls on tourists to take responsibility for their own actions (and inactions), to have the opportunity to act and then react (responsible consumption) in a way that makes a difference for better tourism. *Algarve Craft & Food* is an example of good practice.

The project's next steps involve promoting tourism and handicraft product catalogs (through interactions with operators and participation in fairs, among other things) and presenting the catalog and offers to the region's animation agents in order to enlist their assistance in the commercialization of creative experiences.

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