Towards meaningful co-creation: a study of creative heritage tourism in Alentejo, Portugal

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Abstract

This paper discusses the impact of co-creation in the context of heritage tourism. By examining co-creative strategies that promote participative interpretation of archaeological heritage, the emphasis is on understanding how tour guides balance tourists' individual interpretations and the scientific narrative. The study conducts a qualitative analysis of the tour guiding activity of cultural tourism companies in Alentejo, Southern Portugal. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with local tour guides and from online reviews of archaeological tours in Alentejo. Findings evidence that despite widely employing co-creative strategies for heritage interpretation that tap into tourists' operant resources and encourage creative discussion, tour guides often dismiss individual interpretations in favour of the established authorised heritage discourse. It is argued that, in doing so, the potential of co-creation for delivering a meaningful experience is hindered. The study contributes towards a critical conceptualisation of the use of co-creation strategies in heritage tourism, with particular focus on the implications at deeper meaning-making levels. In practice, the findings can lead cultural tourism providers to reassess their approach to personalisation in order to increase their appeal to potential clients holding alternative sets of beliefs and motivations.

Keywords

heritage tourism; co-creation; interpretation; tour guide; authorised heritage discourse

1. Introduction

Co-creation has permeated tourism as a powerful strategy for value creation in personalised experiences (Campos, Mendes, Valle, & Scott, 2015; Phi & Dredge, 2019). Particularly, co-creation is a central concept in creative tourism. Creative tourism offers tourists and providers a platform to come together and apply their creative skills in exploring elements of place and local culture (Richards, 2011). When focused on historical and archaeological heritage, creative tourism experiences provide tourists the opportunity to formulate new meaning through creative engagement with the past (Ross, Saxena, Correia, & Deutz, 2017).

A key factor of creative heritage tourism is heritage interpretation. Tour guides and tourists interact with historical sites, monuments and artefacts and derive new ideas and meaning

from their experience. The style of interpretation may vary along a range that goes from a participative interpretation approach that stimulates tourist creative expression, on the one end, to a positivist interpretation style on the other end that emphasises passive consumption of current knowledge in heritage studies (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006).

In heritage tourism, participative heritage interpretation is a form of co-creation. Tourists are given an active role to interpret a historical site and construct a narrative based on their values, beliefs, knowledge and motivations (Prebensen, Chen, & Uysal, 2014). As a result, a multitude of individual interpretations is generated, many of which differ from the scientific narrative of the site. In this case, tour guides who promote co-creative heritage tourism experiences are often challenged to find a balance to manage their perceived duty to communicate a scientific narrative whilst simultaneously providing a personalised meaningful tourism experience (Hung, Lee, & Huang, 2016).

The aim of this paper is to assess the depth of co-creation strategies in creative heritage tourism with particular focus on the impacts of participative heritage interpretation on the outcome of the experience. While the concept of co-creation has spawned a body of literature in several fields of study, the implications of co-creation in heritage tourism contexts remain understudied. This issue is relevant and timely given that more and more tourists are driven by values such as creativity and self-fulfilment in their desire to experience cultural tourism destinations (Richards, 2018). Thus, this study is centred on two research questions: How can tour guides manage tourist agency and the scientific interpretation of an historical site to provide a personalised experience? What strategies can tour guides employ to satisfy tourists looking for a participative interpretation experience while simultaneously safeguarding the values of the heritage they are exploring? In order to answer these questions, the paper undertakes a qualitative examination of the tour guiding activity of cultural tourism businesses in Alentejo (Portugal). Tourism providers offering archaeological tours are interviewed to assess the extent to which they employ participative co-creation strategies, and the effects this has on the tourists they guide, namely in mediating deviant interpretations emerging in such circumstances. The study's contribution lies in highlighting and discussing strategies to manage paradoxical views of heritage tourism and meet tourist demand for personalised heritage tourism experiences whilst maintaining heritage sustainability.

The paper begins by reviewing the literature on co-creation and heritage tourism, with focus on heritage interpretation strategies. It then presents the research setting in Alentejo and the data collection and analysis methods. The discussion examines the implications of each interpretation strategy, before concluding the paper and offering questions for further research.

2. Literature review

Creative tourism foregrounds actors' creativity and participation in producing memorable experiences (Richards, 2014; Richards & Wilson, 2006). Creative tourism is conceptually founded on the notion of co-creation, a concept that gained traction with the emergence of service-dominant logic in management and service marketing fields (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2006, 2008). Service-dominant logic represents a shift in that it argues that value is created from the interaction between providers and consumers rather than being exclusively product-based (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). That is, value is not embedded in the product itself but derives

from consumers' perception of what makes the experience meaningful and personally satisfying (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). Thus, providers can only offer a value proposition that customers act on and co-create according to their needs and wants (Baron, Warnaby, & Hunter-Jones, 2014). The definition of value adopted here is 'the results or benefits customers perceive in relation to the total cost they have expended' (Prebensen, Vittersø, & Dahl, 2013, p. 243).

Service-dominant logic comprises a series of fundamental premises and is underpinned by the dynamic relationship between *operant* and *operand* resources. *Operand resources* refer to physical goods, for example raw materials or land. These primary resources can be exchanged on their own, and customers have little effect over the goods they purchase; all that is required from them is to cover the selling price (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Service-dominant logic argues that the value of operand resources is increased as a result of the employment of operant resources.

Operant resources refer to intangible factors such as competences and skills that act upon goods (operand resources) and hence transform their perceived value (Smith & Colgate, 2007). Consumers become key players in the process of value-making and enhance product appeal by applying their skills and evaluating the product based on their expectations and prior knowledge of past experiences with similar products (Galvagno & Dalli, 2014; Prebensen et al., 2013). Thus, operant resources are intrinsic to co-creative value creation.

In cultural tourism, co-creation is fundamentally linked with heritage interpretation. Cultural tourism providers, e.g. tour guides, gain competitive advantage once they understand and tap into tourists' operant resources (i.e. prior knowledge and skills, creative ability, expectations about the product, previous experience of similar experiences) as a way of enhancing the tourist experience of cultural operand resources, e.g. historical sites and monuments (Campos et al., 2015). The heritage tourism experience comprises several aspects that include experiencing the physical fabric of ancient sites, monuments and artefacts, celebrating cultural values and beliefs associated to the site, or learning about the scientific interpretation generated from archaeological research (Willems & Dunning, 2015). On the one hand, tourists co-create a tourism experience by actively participating in the coproduction process, by engaging with heritage at a psychological and emotional level, and by choosing to explore certain aspects of heritage according to their interests (Minkiewicz, Evans, & Bridson, 2014). On the other hand, tour guides enhance the heritage tourism experience by activating tourists' operant resources in the interpretation process leading to personal meaning-making (Ross & Saxena, 2019). The strategies tour guides apply for interpretation can vary along a continuum between constructivist and positivist approaches.

A constructivist (or participative) approach to heritage interpretation accentuates tourist participation in the process of interpretation whereby both tour guide and tourist jointly design and consume the experience (Ross et al., 2017). This approach implies that sense-making of historical sites and monuments is subjectively constructed by each individual and 'we can therefore expect a plurality of archaeological interpretations suited to different purposes, needs, desires' (Shanks & Hodder, 1995, p. 5). Heritage interpretation is an iterative and creative process of assimilating new information and interpreting the past in a participative and imaginative fashion (Antón, Camarero, & Garrido, 2018; Moscardo, 1996). The emphasis in participative interpretation lies on a series of strategies that encourage the tourist to engage meaningfully with historical sites and artefacts, tapping into visitors' prior

knowledge with a view to stimulating critical thinking and reflective discourse (Table 1) (Copeland, 2006; Hein, 1998).

(INSERT TABLE 1)

This is in stark contrast to a positivist approach to heritage interpretation based on an objective view of the past. From this perspective, tourists visit an archaeological site to consume the interpretation of the site produced by the 'authorised body' of experts. This authorised heritage discourse, as discussed by Smith (2006), foregrounds the scientific interpretation as the rightful heritage narrative while muting other stakeholders in their appreciation of heritage, including community groups or ethnic minorities. In tourism, this framework translates into instructive experiences focusing on authorised heritage discourse dissemination that shut the door to tourists co-creating a narrative adapted to their personal interests, values and beliefs (Ablett & Dyer, 2009).

In recent literature on tour guides as heritage interpreters, previous studies have focused on the strategies devised to improve visitor experience (Ababneh, 2017; Hansen & Mossberg, 2017; Weiler & Walker, 2014), on the performative and relational elements between tourist and tour guide in guided tours (Jonasson & Scherle, 2012; Larsen & Meged, 2013), on creativity and tactics employed in storytelling (Ross & Saxena, 2019), or on providing a sense of authenticity in guided tours (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006). These studies discuss aspects of co-creation as a service delivery strategy and mostly overlook the implications of tourist meaning-making resulting from the co-creative experience. Yet, as Saidi (2016, p. 23) states, tour guides are expected to take on a dual role: 'one as instigators of creativity vis-à-vis tourists and the second as preservers…expected to protect the heritage'. This contradiction assumes particular significance in co-creative heritage tourism, where individual values and interpretations are key to a meaningful experience. While some works in archaeology and heritage studies have discussed mediation between alternative and objective outlooks towards the past (e.g. see Cusack, 2012; Holtorf, 2005; Simpson, 2018), this issue has not been properly examined in tourism studies. This papers aims to address this gap by researching the way tour guides weigh their duty to convey scientific narratives whist still managing to provide a personalised tour experience.

The following section details the research methods employed to examine the depth of co-creation strategies applied by tour guides in Alentejo, Portugal.

3. Method

3.1 Research setting

The study focuses on Central Alentejo, a sparsely populated and economically depressed rural region in southern Portugal. Cultural tourism is an important sector for the region, which has earned two awards in the UNESCO World Heritage List: Évora's historical city centre and the 17th century Elvas fortified town. In addition, local cultural expressions such as the Cante (a traditional singing genre) (in 2014), Falconry (in 2016), and Craftmanship of Estremoz clay figures (in 2017) have been inscribed in the UNESCO representative list of

Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. These distinctions contribute to promote the image of Alentejo as a cultural tourism destination. Specifically, the listing of Évora as World Heritage in 1986 made it the centre for cultural tourism in Alentejo and played a significant role in the increase of tourists and local tourism businesses (Simplício & Camelo, 2015). The city is the main urban centre of Alentejo and acts as a platform to explore the region due to its central geographical position (Figure 1).

(INSERT FIGURE 1. Central Alentejo, in Portugal)

Archaeological heritage plays an important role in regional tourism. Alentejo's Megalithic monuments in particular are considered exceptional and unique in the context of the Iberian Peninsula, with hundreds of cromlechs, dolmens, menhirs and barrows identified in the region. Alentejo is also famous for its Roman and Medieval heritage with highlights including the city centre of Évora, with its Roman temple, baths and aqueduct, the São Cucufate villa in Vidigueira, and the ruins of Miróbriga near Santiago do Cacém.

3.2 Data collection and analysis

Primary data were collected from interviews with cultural tourism businesses operating in Central Alentejo. Alentejo's private tourism sector comprises micro and small enterprises, most commonly agro-tourism companies, rural tourism and small hospitality accommodation units, and cultural tourism businesses. An initial pool of participants was selected through a process of purposive sampling. In this non-probability approach the goal is 'to sample cases/participants in a strategic way, so that those sampled are relevant to the research questions that are being posed' (Bryman, 2008, p. 415). The criteria was to include tourism companies that offer cultural tourism experiences related to Alentejo's archaeological heritage, e.g. businesses offering tours to local archaeological sites.

Seventeen cultural tourism businesses based in Central Alentejo were identified and contacted. Two companies did not reply to both email and telephone contact, whereas three declined to take part in the study. During the course of June 2016, twelve tourism businesses were interviewed (see Table 2). All companies offer cultural experiences in Central Alentejo. The most popular are half-day tours to the historical city centre of Évora, half-day tours to Megalithic sites, and tours exploring the countryside and villages of Central Alentejo, including visits to vineyards and wineries, cork and olive oil production, among others.

(INSERT TABLE 2)

Heritage is a social construct charged with values and meanings ascribed to historical events, sites and artefacts by those living in the present (Harrison, 2013; Timothy & Boyd, 2006). In order to investigate the co-creative interpretation of heritage, the study thus adopted an interpretivist qualitative approach that is able to acknowledge the existence of multiple

perceptions of archaeological heritage and incorporate them in the analytical process. Moreover, the small number of tourism providers operating in the Alentejo region called for a qualitative approach that warrants a thorough examination of the role and perception of each individual in the process of interpreting heritage.

Qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted with these participants in order to understand the co-creation strategies tour guides apply in archaeological heritage interpretation. Participants were asked to describe their approach to tour guiding and encouraged to reflect on the role they play in facilitating tourist participation in the interpretation of archaeological heritage. The accounts provided shed light into their experience and views, and were examined against the principles and ideas established cultural heritage interpretation literature.

All interviews were audio recorded, transcribed in full and analysed using NVivo 11 software. Data were analysed by employing a thematic analysis approach, which consists of identifying patterns and themes in empirical data that are relevant to the research focus (Gibbs, 2007). In practice, this was done by following a concept-driven approach to coding sections of the interview transcripts based on a framework informed by interpretation strategies as described in relevant literature (see Table 1). Coding refers to a process of critical analysis in which sections of data are indexed to a specific code. In most cases, attention is directed toward the main themes identified in the data, for instance through the frequency that each topic or idea is mentioned by the participants (Bryman, 2008). This resulted in five main themes, each referring to an interpretation strategy, under which sub-themes and related topics were aggregated and interpreted.

In addition to the interviews, secondary data were collected concerning the tourist's point of view. TripAdvisor reviews by tourists who participated in archaeological tours in Alentejo with the companies interviewed were captured and analysed through the same framework of interpretation literature. This allowed to triangulate tour guides' perception about their role in delivering archaeological tours and tourists' views of the archaeological tourism experience, ensuring an analysis from multiple angles and perspectives. The following section discusses the data and is structured into five main themes, related to specific interpretation strategies.

4. Findings and discussion

4.1 Co-creation strategy #1. Tailoring to tourists' operant resources

Tailoring the experience to enhance tourists' operant resources is a central tenet of constructivist interpretation, and underlines the importance of consumer assessment (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). Tour guides create conditions for tourists to activate their operant resources by highlighting certain heritage features and adapting the tour script to each individual's interests (Prebensen et al., 2014).

In Alentejo, personalisation occurs in a proactive way, as participants explained that they often assess tourists' interests or their level of knowledge about certain themes and then deliver a narrative accordingly. Many tour guides spoke about how their tours are influenced by tourists' operant resources 'because people are different and they want and need different things, or they have different levels of knowledge and need more information, so no two tours are the same' (P03).

In some cases there is a notable degree of preparation to deliver a personalised tour script. For example, two companies assess tourists' interests days before the tour by emailing pre-tour surveys to clients who have booked, enquiring about their expectations and interests. One of these companies then assigns a guide whose personality, expertise and skills suit that tourist profile. These surveys are not limited to heritage and archaeology topics, but also include other aspects that influence the tour guide's stance 'such as their origin or their political affiliation - for example, one of the first things I try to understand with Americans is whether they are Democrat or Republican, it affects how I conduct the conversation' (P07). This approach to personalisation is reiterated by tourists, as one TripAdvisor review stated: 'The very first thing he did, was to ask us about our interests and what we'd expect from the tour, so that he could show us exactly the things we wanted to see' (27 May 2016).

Participants explained how they adapt the narrative to tourists' knowledge and beliefs by highlighting features that resonate with tourists' cultural background. Knowing tourists' nationality, for example, tour guides in Alentejo develop the tour narrative around historical links between the history of Alentejo and of the country of origin of the people they are guiding. Thus providers cultivate an affective link between tourist and heritage, which in turn increases the chances of providing a meaningful experience (Poria, Butler, & Airey, 2003). One company has compiled a folder with notes and information about several countries, so that the company's tour guides can easily access information tailored to each client depending on their country of origin or cultural background.

With groups from countries with little or no connection to Portugal or Alentejo, tour guides often resort to references from popular media, such as cinema and literature, to tap into visitors' knowledge. For instance, the Asterix comics can provide elements to enhance the discussion about remaining elements of Celtic culture in modern Alentejo, as one participant stated: 'the Asterix books, the druid Panoramix, the cauldron, the juniper, the bard, are part of our popular culture and our childhood imagination, so we use those elements to make heritage more attractive' (P02). In sum, enhancing tourists' prior knowledge in archaeological tourism can relate to academic knowledge, affective links or popular culture (Holtorf, 2010; Jones & Smith, 2005).

4.2 Co-creation strategy #2. Holistic presentation of the site

One co-creation strategy is to centre the presentation of a historical site or monument within its greater historical context rather than focus on site-specific details. Understanding how the archaeological site is situated in the big picture enables the visitor to be more selective in their approach to details, selecting or paying attention mostly to those that are relevant to his/her interpretation of the site (Copeland, 2006).

Most participants in Alentejo spoke about how they perceive the broader historical context as an essential part of the archaeological tourism experience. That is, archaeological details do not appeal as much as grander stories about the evolution of human occupation of territory and their social, cultural and economic organisation. In other words, engaging with themes of enduring concern is much more likely to make for a riveting and memorable encounter compared to details such as chronology, phasing and artefact typology (Grima, 2017, p. 83).

This is not to say that details are not an important part of the archaeological tourism experience. One tour guide argued that the appeal of visiting an archaeological site is learning facts concerning specific events and the livelihoods of the people who inhabited the site: 'a specific site deserves that you talk about specific things from that site, I think that is what enriches the story' (P01). Nevertheless, providing site details is often dependent on the interest tourists' show and the questions they ask during the tour. This idea is reiterated by another participant who explained that he only mentions specific details when asked or when tourists are particularly knowledgeable: 'If a tourist is interested, he will ask questions and we try to talk about everything, otherwise I will just explain the broader historical context' (P08).

The views above suggest that the choice to focus on the big picture or particular details of an archaeological site is influenced by the tourist's operant resources, namely level of knowledge and interest about the past. Participants often referred to the big picture as a simplified story of the past that is more appealing to non-experts. Indeed, 'sometimes we talk too archaeologically to the public, and it doesn't work, so we have to reduce the amount of archaeology in our communication' (P07). Furthermore, a simplified holistic narrative carries lower risks of overwhelming the visitor. This is confirmed by many reviews on TripAdvisor that highlight the guide's ability to convey archaeological knowledge in an intelligible and interesting fashion. As one review read: 'Our guide was extremely knowledgeable and did a great job explaining the significance of the sites without getting too bogged down in detailed jargon' (10 July 2016).

The data above portrays the tour guide as a figure that provides an overview enabling tourists to search and make sense of details within their own frame of understanding. Furthermore, keeping it vague opens up boundaries for tourists to explore their own ideas. This is further discussed in the following section.

4.3 Co-creation strategy #3. Enabling tourist interaction with primary evidence

Promoting free exploration of the archaeological site allows visitors to examine elements first-hand and to raise questions about particular aspects that draw their attention and intrigue (Copeland, 2009; Simon, 2010).

Most tour guides stated that they regularly invite tourists to freely explore archaeological sites in order to assimilate information provided during the tour. An adequate framework is important in that it will help tourists organise the space and the information available to enable proper reading of the site: 'We must first educate the eye, then the rest can be learned, and that's essentially what I try to stimulate in the tour' (P09). Indeed, place-exploration tools and knowledge such as maps enable visitors to 'negotiate new pathways and novel interpretations… in a creative interchange with the place, its history, urban form and everyday life' (Maitland, 2010, p. 183). This idea that tourists require a general framework to make sense of prehistoric monuments is confirmed by many TripAdvisor reviews, for example: 'Megaliths do not tell their own story. Piles of rocks are hard to decipher. But the tour guide made for a fun, informative and learning experience in his 3 hour tour' (12 November 2016). Exploration of a site is seen as an opportunity to assimilate the information provided by the tour guide while discovering site details that the tourist may find relevant.

Despite these advantages, many participants also stated that allowing visitors to wander in sites of historical interest has its drawbacks. For example, the efficiency of this strategy is reliant upon tourists' prior knowledge and willingness to explore on their own. Others argued that free exploration of a site serves mainly for tourist enjoyment and relaxation, and does not significantly impact a tourist's interpretative process. In sum, tour guides in Alentejo view tourist interaction with primary evidence essentially as a complement to the archaeological tourism experience.

4.4 Co-creation strategy #4. Encouraging tourist interpretation and discussion

A fundamental aim of constructivist heritage interpretation is to encourage visitors' participation during the experience allowing for individual interpretation of the past (Ross et al., 2017). Furthermore, participation is also a fundamental principle of creative tourism, as it offers a channel for tourists to express their creativity and share their thoughts with others (Larsen & Meged, 2013).

Participants in Alentejo explained that they try to let tourists reach their own conclusions, arguing that this process of discovery enhances the experience. For example, tour guides often ask questions to stimulate tourists' critical thinking and greater engagement. This strategy arguably enables tourists to practice their ability to think imaginatively and actively construct an image of the past (Copeland, 2006). However, guides feel responsible for leading the thought-process so that tourists do not arrive to scientifically incorrect conclusions (i.e. not compliant with the authorised heritage discourse). As the following participant explained: 'It's important to arouse their curiosity, it gives a certain freedom, but leaving them to interpret on their own has very strict limits… I have to explain the archaeological narrative, of course, otherwise I'm not doing my job' (P06). Thus whenever possible care is taken to ensure that tourists' interpretation takes place within the boundaries of what is determined in the authorised heritage discourse.

Nonetheless, some participants argued that it is difficult to provide and discuss a scientific narrative when visiting Megalithic sites because there are many unanswered questions about prehistoric heritage. Current gaps in scientific knowledge may present an opportunity to promote creative thinking in tourism. This may explain why some tour guides tolerate different perspectives, and will often entice tourists to come up with questions to stir debate during the tour and discuss their ideas with the guide and fellow tourists. This is similar to interacting with primary evidence, but concerns tourist-provider and tourist-tourist interaction as opposed to tourist-heritage interaction. Discussion and debate is an important part of the heritage tourism experience, given that 'this is a very demanding audience, we often enter discussions and end up having authentic field trips to an archaeological site' (P02).

In addition, tourists' participation directly shapes the tour they are taking. One tour guide stated that 'I can almost create an improvised narrative by taking questions from the tourists' (P06). Others stated that they often modify their tour script with information learnt from clients. This interaction between tourists and provider is confirmed in TripAdvisor reviews: 'The tour guide is a warm and intelligent man who delights in sharing archaeology and information about Portugal. But he also listens and learns from his travellers. One can ask him anything and he engages' (17 July 2016).

In sum, tour guides apply techniques and strategies to stimulate tourists' individual interpretation, but have reservations about deviating from the official narrative of archaeological sites visited. The implications of this are discussed further below.

4.5 Co-creation strategy #5. Emphasise provocation over instruction

Although tailored experiences are developed around visitors' prior knowledge, new ideas represent an added challenge that encourage critical and creative thinking (Ludwig, 2015). The choice to adopt a positivist or constructivist approach to heritage interpretation is borne from tour guides' perception concerning the nature and purpose of archaeological tourism as a platform for either a) educating the audience about knowledge generated through archaeological research; or b) promoting a creative discussion to allow visitors to reflect about the past.

Few providers interviewed in Alentejo view archaeological sites, artefacts and monuments as a resource for tourists' creative interpretation. In one exception, one participant explained how he tries to stimulate the imagination of tourists and 'create some mystery to make them think' (P02). Furthermore, he added, archaeological tourism should be about getting tourists to 'question the past, the present and imagine the future… to create imagination in the future'. From this perspective, the value proposition of archaeological tourism experience is the opportunity to critically examine historical elements and creatively construct meaning from the past. The interpretation process, similar to the creative process, requires a situation that challenges an individual's current understanding of a phenomenon, given that 'we only have to interpret if we are puzzled or ignorant about something' (Tilley, 1993, p. 2).

However, the majority of participants interviewed argued that very few tourists have sufficient knowledge or interest about archaeology and history to engage in a significant creative discussion about the past. Some stated that such discussion is better left to archaeologists and heritage professionals, since 'to have a creative discussion we need people who are more educated' (P11). To these, the authorised heritage discourse is the reason people visit archaeological sites, and archaeological tourism is a channel to communicate that narrative. Such views indicate an inclination towards a positivist thinking as it impels tourists to become passive consumers of knowledge produced through scientific enquiry, while silencing tourists' voice in the process of sense-making.

Yet, what is curious is that these same tour guides still employ participative strategies encouraging tourist participation and creative thinking. As one tour guide put it: 'I encourage creative discussion in the sense of generating interesting questions and to verify or dismiss certain theories and ideas' (P06). This response illustrates co-creative discussion as a mere service strategy that disregards the potential value of tourist participation. Instead, the instructive nature of archaeological tourism is highlighted to the extent that tourists' individual interpretation needs 'verifying' or 'dismissal' against the mainstream narrative of the authorised heritage discourse.

In sum, tour guides employ co-creation strategies, despite not supporting the product of participative heritage interpretation. This contradiction in method and aims creates situations where tour guides are faced with individual interpretations that deviate from the scientific

interpretation they are trying to communicate. The following section discusses such issues and implications in the context of archaeological tour guiding.

4.6 Promoting co-creative heritage interpretation

The findings described above indicate that the majority of tourism providers in Alentejo employ co-creation strategies to foster tourist participation and capitalise on tourists' operant resources. For the most part, tour guides of Alentejo personalise their content and provide an overarching narrative to support tourists' critical thinking, in addition to encouraging interaction with primary evidence and sharing of ideas that promote individual sense-making. Despite this, it is clear that many tour guides become uneasy when tourists' interpretations do not line up with the authorised heritage discourse. Participants revealed some difficulties to overlook their duty to communicate the scientific interpretation of an archaeological site as opposed to facilitate tourists' personalised interpretation.

By restricting tourists' freedom to interpret the past according to their values, motivations and knowledge, tour guides in Alentejo are hardly adopting a truly co-creative approach. The boundaries established by tour guides drive tourists towards passive consumption of an objective scientific narrative and reduce tourists' active role in the sense-making process. Ultimately, this implies that tourists' individual interpretation is meaningless and severely hampers the potential of co-creation to create meaningful experiences with personalised content. Thus the efforts put into co-creation by both tourists and providers yield limited return. But this is somewhat expected, since heritage tourism abides to dominant currents in the broader heritage sector. Indeed, the Archaeological Institute of America point out in their Guiding Principles for Responsible Archaeological Tourism that 'Proper interpretation is a critical component of an authentic experience and site managers and tour operators should ensure that interpretations are accurate and current' (AIA, 2013, pp. 10-11). In this sense, Alentejo's tour guides are following mainstream course of action.

Nevertheless, opportunities for more meaningful co-creation can be found emerging, with providers in Alentejo occasionally showing openness to accept subaltern interpretations. For instance, at some archaeological sites, the current scientific narrative does not provide an appealing story, which can leave tourists underwhelmed and negatively affect tourist satisfaction. As one tour guide suggested 'I like to explain different perspectives, even though not everyone is into that… I don't mention only the archaeological-historical angle because I think that something is missing' (P03). In this sense, gaps in scientific knowledge can leverage some degree of liberty and creativity for personalised interpretations.

Another opportunity is the growing popularity of neo-pagan movements, for instance, which are widely associated to Megalithic sites in Europe in particular (White, 2014). These groups comprise audiences motivated to visit ancient sites due to spiritual and esoteric properties rather than to acquire scientific knowledge. In Alentejo, some tour guides acknowledge these audiences and have begun to market new experiences tailored to these interests. Others have started to include alternative interpretations in regular tours as a way of enriching the narrative provided. In one particular case in Alentejo, local archaeologists suggested that a monument may have been a pagan sanctuary in the past, drawing the attention of neo-pagan visitors and in turn increasing the site's visibility as a local tourism attraction. This example illustrates how tourism can offer a space where both scientific and alternative narratives come

together (Everett & Parakoottathil, 2018; Lowenthal, 2015). As Holtorf (2005) has argued, rather than dismissing neo-pagan, cult and pseudo-archaeologies, alternative archaeologies should be embraced because 'the main significance of archaeology does not lie in the specific insights gained about the past but in the very process of engaging with the material remains of the past in the present' (Holtorf, 2005, p. 546).

Building on these recent developments could help promote greater inclusiveness towards subaltern visitor segments and highlight under-explored markets for cultural tourism businesses. For instance, including elements of neo-pagan narratives in heritage destination tourism marketing could contribute to normalise and increase the appeal of these alternative views. From a business perspective, a better understanding of the assortment of interests on archaeology and ancient sites would allow tour guides to increase tourist satisfaction by engaging their operant resources at a deeper level rather than limiting personalisation to superficial tunings, e.g. tour schedules and script. Furthermore, developing such processes would contribute towards greater inclusivity and diversity in archaeological tourism, opening up heritage tourism supply to reach a wider market.

5. Conclusion

This paper set out to study the strategies for co-creation employed in heritage tourism and the way tour guides manage the outcomes of this approach. Co-creation is increasingly widespread in cultural tourism and is a significant determinant to tourist satisfaction (Sugathan & Ranjan, 2019).

Despite the popularity of co-creation, it is argued that its application in heritage tourism has been mostly restricted to the service encounter. The paper has demonstrated how tour guides in Alentejo engage with tourists' operant resources to promote participation in many ways, including tourist interaction with primary evidence, tailoring to tourists' interests, or encouraging questions and critical interpretation during the tours provided. In a seeming paradox, though, tour guides constantly underline the rightness of the scientific narrative, thus failing to integrate the product of the co-creative process (i.e. tourists' individual interpretation) into the broader tourist experience. As a result, the interpretation, narrative and ideas that tourists come up with during the experience are arguably bounded by the authorised heritage discourse and thus are generating limited value to tourists against total costs expended (Prebensen et al., 2013). In addition, visitors holding different set of values, such as neo-pagan or ethnic minorities, may be left without access to engage in meaningful heritage tourism experiences.

In practice, the paper identifies issues that tour guides face in mediating disparaging perspectives of the cultural heritage on which they ground their offer. The findings discussed can benefit cultural tourism companies in redefining strategies to engage with their clients for a more profound and meaningful experience. Furthermore, some practical recommendations are suggested, namely integrating alternative interpretations of local heritage in destination marketing and developing tours with scripts that cater to specific segments thus exploring new business opportunities.

Theoretically, the paper differs from previous studies that assess co-creation at service delivery level and focuses on the implications of co-creation in the context of heritage

tourism. In particular, the role of tour guides in facilitating co-creative heritage interpretation is examined. The insights derived point towards the need for a broader conceptualisation of co-creation in current literature that is able to accommodate the output of participative interpretation as a key part of a personalised heritage tourism experience (Ross et al., 2017; Saidi, 2016). Based on this, future studies could explore the way tourism providers can offer heritage tourism experiences that are truly co-creative and foster personalised outputs, tourist demand for co-creative interpretation of heritage, as well as the impacts of co-creative interpretation on marketing and disseminating of authorised heritage discourse of a destination.

The main limitation of the study concerns sample size. Even though two thirds of cultural tourism businesses in Alentejo were interviewed, the insights into co-creation have limited capacity to be generalizable to other destinations or tourism segments. As such, it would be valuable to examine these research questions in other destinations with higher density of providers, as well as in contexts where other types of cultural heritage are prevalent.

Notwithstanding these limitations, the study adds to the understanding of the implications of co-creative approaches as they are widely used in cultural and creative tourism. Importantly, also, the paper emphasises at a broader level the need for stimulating multivocality in heritage tourism enabling different views and values of heritage can co-exist and be meaningfully celebrated.

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Table 1. Participative strategies for cultural heritage interpretation (adapted from Copeland, 2006).

Strategy	Description
Holistic presentation of the archaeological site	Providers should present the site as a whole and highlight 'big' concepts over details, which can then be viewed by visitors not as unique or special but rather 'as part of a wider historic environment' (Copeland, 2006, p. 89).
Encourage interaction with primary evidence	Providers should present visitors with primary evidence in order to enable first-hand interpretation and encourage them to come up with their own questions. The focus is on finding appropriate pieces of evidence to maximise interpretation.
Tap into visitors' knowledge of the past	The experience should act as an enhancer of visitors' prior knowledge, Understanding visitors' own conceptions of the past allows providers to tailor to their expectations and deliver a more meaningful experience.
Emphasise provocation over instruction	Instead of offering ready-made facts, providers should aim to develop problem-solving situations that require critical thinking and should be sufficiently complex to allow several approaches and interpretations.
Encourage discussion and sharing of ideas	Discussion can facilitate the meaning-making process and the assimilation of new concepts and ideas about the past. Visitors should be encouraged to share their own ideas and interpretation with fellow visitors and guides.

Table 2. Profile of cultural tourism businesses interviewed.

Participant #	Position	Type of business	Work regime	Observations
P01	Tour guide	Sole trader	Part-time	Archaeologist
P02	Tour guide/ co-founder	Two-person business partnership	Part-time	Full time teacher
P03	Tour guide	Freelance	Full-time	
P04	Tour guide	Freelance	Part-time	Owns a agro-tourism B&B
P05	Tour guide	Freelance	Full-time	
P06	Tour guide	Sole trader	Full-time	
P07	Tour guide / co-founder	Two-person business partnership	Full-time	Archaeologist
P08	Tour guide / co-founder	Two-person business partnership	Part-time	
P09	Tour guide	Sole trader	Full-time	Retired teacher (History)
P10	Manager	Small tourism company	Full-time	Boat tours company
P11	Tour guide / manager	Family business	Full-time	Bike tours company
P12	Tour guide	Family business	Full-time	