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Analyzing Pilot Projects of Creative Tourism in an Ultra-Peripheral Region: Which Guidelines Can Be Extracted for Sustainable Regional Development?

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Abstract: Several authors have shown that some tourism typologies—i.e., rural tourism, nature-based tourism, or creative tourism—have a more predominant role in attaining regional sustainability. In this regard, this paper explores the impacts of five pilot projects of creative tourism on the sustainable development of the insular Autonomous Region of the Azores. Through direct exploratory tools, such as interviews and site analyses, the present study enabled us to provide greater insight into creative tourism projects and their relevance to the development of an ultra-peripheral island region. As part of the CREATOUR AZORES Project, this study is based on five creative tourism pilot projects operating in the Azores, Portugal. As such, it is recommended that the regional government, local authorities, and other relevant actors and players in this region actively support and create strategies to strengthen these projects (and similar initiatives) once they not only contribute to regional development and destination promotion but also promote much-desired sustainable development—once these kinds of tourism, in theory, and practice, counteract the dire effects of mass tourism.

Keywords: Azores Islands; creative tourism; regional development; regional strategies; sustainable tourism

1. Introduction

The touristic competitiveness of a destination (in all its forms) can be scrutinized as a catalyst for the economic development of the destination, as well as be measured by a ranking of the touristic potential in relation to other destinations [1–4]. In fact, however, few studies focus on measuring tourism destination competitiveness through creative tourism projects—even though competitiveness is a critical issue.

Tourism is often considered to be interconnected with business models that collaborate to guarantee tourist attraction to a specific destination or region [5–9]. Contextually, tourism development evidently implies the promotion of equipment, facilities, and activities to attract visitors. Furthermore, these activities are meant to attend to tourists, community members, and the tourism destination and region according to the sustainable practices and objectives of today [10–13].

If we look at research, it is possible to understand that several authors have shown that some tourism typologies—i.e., rural tourism, nature-based tourism, or creative tourism—have an even more predominant position in reaching regional sustainability (see: [14–20]).

For example, based on Williams' [21] research, it is possible to verify that "(...) employment in tourism contributes to national and regional economies". Likewise, the observed evidence suggests that tourist spending produces more jobs and profits than any other market sector and develops and supports jobs in other spheres of the economy—as is the case of selling products to visitors and tourism companies, among several other examples [22–24].

Furthermore, considering the bibliometric research carried out by Pimenta et al. [25], we can notice the strong relationship between creative tourism and regional development. In such a study, the authors tell us that creative tourism acts "(...) through some type of reality transformation process and demonstrates direct correlations with cultural, material and immaterial factors, by committing and involving local development agents—public and private—in the elaboration and implementation of cultural policies that attract creative tourists."

In this context, we designed the following research question: "Which Guidelines Can be Extracted for Sustainable Regional Development in the Autonomous Region of the Azores through the Pilot Projects of Creative Tourism?" The introduction to this paper is followed by a brief literature review regarding creative tourism, island territories, and regional development. After, we present a methodological framework about the methods used in the exploratory phase of the research, ending with the obtained outcomes and the subsequent discussion and conclusions.

2. Creative Tourism and Ultra-Peripheral Territories

If we focus on remote, more isolated regions—the so-called peripheral and ultra-peripheral territories—the available literature tells us that economic growth represents a stimulus for sustainable development (see: [26–31]). Therefore, the prospect of developing different types of tourism, such as rural tourism, religious tourism, or creative tourism, is strongly associated with entrepreneurship, new business models, and Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) (see: [31–35].)

This belief is supported by data from prior studies related to the long-term impact of economic activities on jobs and income creation in low-density, peripheral, or ultra-peripheral regions [4]. In this regard, just after WWII (World War II), the contribution of the agrarian sector to the Gross National Product (GNP) and employment reduced overall; accordingly, methods for rural growth and development began to be concentrated on industrial activities [4,21].

In their studies, nonetheless, Meller and Marfán [31] state that "(...) the industrial sector is not the most appropriate approach to activate sustainable development processes in all contexts of peripheral regions". In this sense, other academics, such as King [32], corroborate that "(...) employment created are transient as their continuity relies on the regular flow of emigrants and tourists returning to the places of origin". Similarly, through the 1980s, the rise in employment in peripheral and ultra-peripheral territories was basically due to an expansion in the services sector [36–38].

However, not all tertiary sector economic activities show the related ability to develop employment and revenue [38–40], while tourism has delivered a substantial enrichment to sustainable development [14]. In this sense, multiple regional studies carried out in these specific territories have demonstrated that tourist spending generates more employment and revenue than any other sphere of the economy, as it makes and keeps jobs in many other sectors of the economy that sustain or supply visitors and tourism enterprises (see: [41–43]).

The SIDS (Small Island Developing States) are a specific group of thirty-eight UN (United Nations) Member States and twenty Non-UN Members or Associate Members of United Nations commissions in regions that encounter particular socio-economic and environmental susceptibilities and have typical features. Moreover, these territories face many obstacles and challenges, including small scale, isolated locations, difficult accessibility conditions, restricted resources, and the threat of facing global environmental challenges as well as socio-economic problems [44].

Contextually, we should emphasize a new trend in tourism that seems to have arisen during the COVID-19 pandemic period: rural tourism, which, in fact, seems even more

relevant in peripheral territories [45]. In this context, UNWTO (World Tourism Organization) [9] defines rural tourism as the “(. . .) kind of tourism activity in which the visitor’s experience is connected to an expansive range of products typically linked to nature-based activities, agriculture, rural lifestyle/culture, angling, and sightseeing”.

Concerning creative tourism, it is known that it promotes regional development by valuing endogenous resources, encouraging a creative economy, and not reducing culture to the action of consuming products [46]. In fact, this produces space for emancipation, autonomy, new experiences, and solidarity, creates contact with traditions and generates income through unconventional tourist itineraries. Nevertheless, and according to Pimenta et al. [25]: “(...) one could be left to wonder about the kind of development concept addressed in the reviewed literature and its correlation with creative tourism”.

Based on the studies of Corrêa, Silveira, and Kist [47], we evince conclude that there is a necessity to work on development strategies, concepts, and formats that include regional economic, social, and environmental issues—the pillars of much-desired sustainable development. Still, different approaches are possible regarding creative tourism. For example, Richards [48] tells us to consider the recent situation of creative tourism and its diverse underlying experiences available around the world.

In general, it is possible to verify that the correlations between creative tourism and diverse development strategies and methods could lead to different outcomes depending on the, socio-cultural features, and cultural and environmental assets of the region [49–51]. Such is the case of the CREATOUR AZORES Project.

3. Materials and Methods

In this regard, considering the purpose of this study—analyzing pilot projects of creative tourism in the Autonomous Region of the Azores and delineating which guidelines could be extracted for sustainable regional development—the following research methodology was developed (Figure 1).

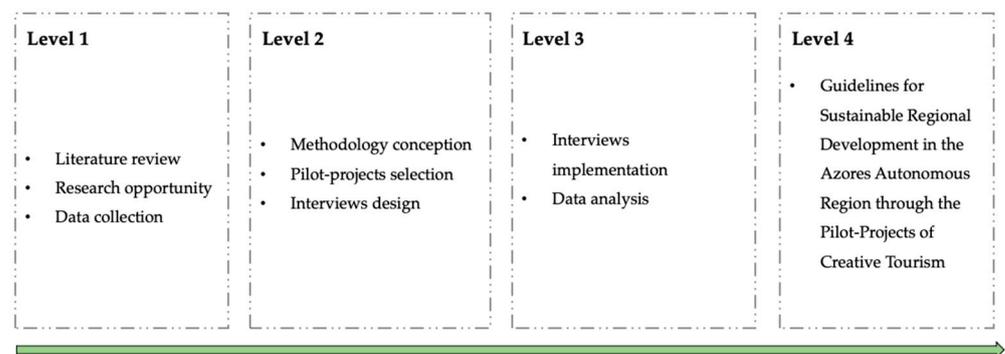


Figure 1. Methodology: the research phases.

Level 1: At this level, the authors have collected and analyzed the most relevant thematic literature, found a research opportunity, and defined the investigation’s main lines.

Level 2: Here, the methodological framework was designed as well as the interviews based on the pre-selected pilot projects.

Level 3: At this stage, the interviews were conducted, and consequently, the obtained data were selected and analyzed.

Level 4: Finally, based on the previous literature review as well as on the research outcomes, a discussion was formulated to disclose potential guidelines for sustainable regional development in the Azores Autonomous Region through pilot projects of creative tourism.

The study comprises five pilot projects of creative tourism operating in the Azores Archipelago, Portugal. The pilot projects analyzed were: (i) CDIJA (The acronym CDIJA means Azores Child and Youth Development Center; in Portuguese: Centro de Desenvolvimento Infanto-Juvenil dos Açores); (ii) Refunction Project—GOODBYAZORES; (iii) Art in Nature (Arte na Natureza)(The original name (in Portuguese) of the project Art in Nature

is Arte na Natureza); (iv) Discover the Azores through Photography (Descubra os Açores através da fotografia)(The original name (in Portuguese) of the project Discover the Azores through photography is Descubra os Açores através da fotografia); and (v) Mahilawake. In terms of the archipelago (Figure 2), these pilots are located on four of the nine islands. Two of them are on the most populated Island (São Miguel)—namely CDIJA and Art in Nature projects, one on the Terceira Island (Refunction Project—GOODBYAZORES), and another one on Faial Island (Mahilawake).

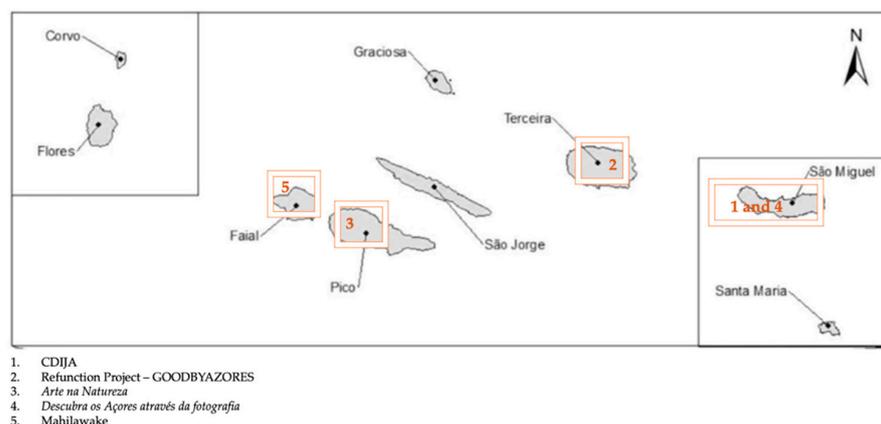


Figure 2. Pilot project locations.

The interviews were divided into three distinct but complimentary sections: (A) Brief Description of the Project and Planned Activities; (B) Business Model; and (C) Culture, Creativity and Community Impact. The twelve major interview questions were divided among all the sections, with questions sub-divided and formulated by the interviewer (when necessary). As a result, the entire interview was made up of around fifty questions. Throughout the interview questions, we used open-ended questions, item selection questions, and agreement level affirmations (through a Likert Scale).

Considering the scope of the investigation research and the data acquisition methodology, the research team opted for a data treatment based on simple, descriptive statistics and compared the results obtained with the existing thematic literature to look for a nexus and connections between the pilot projects of creative tourism and regional development. Overall, the interviews comprised, among others, the questions presented in Tables 1–3 and Appendices A and B.

Table 1. Summary of outcomes of the open-ended questions from section A.

Description and Activities	Pilot Projects Name				
	CDIJA	Refunction Project—GOODBYAZORES	Art in Nature	Discover the Azores through Photography	Mahilawake
(1.1) Identify the activities carried out from January to April (2022):	International survey of families with children with autism; Survey of Azores tour operators; Return of study results to the community; Certification of Inclusive Tourism for Autism training; Promotion of certified training in Tourism for Autism; Participation in the Island Innovation Awards Forum, as a finalist project in the Innovative Island Research Award category.	Activities were carried out at the Tomás de Borba Primary School as part of Arts Week. Presentation of the project, techniques, and pieces to be developed in creative tourism. Some students participated in practical workshops.	Pico Mountain Festival, mountain art, monster theater, international days, and other activities.	Landscape, Botany, and Gastronomy photography workshops	No answer

Table 1. Cont.

Description and Activities	Pilot Projects Name				
	CDIJA	Refunction Project—GOODBYAZORES	Art in Nature	Discover the Azores through Photography	Mahilawake
(1.2) Planned activities:	Reception of families to participate in the project's pilot phase, with the individual assessment of the impact (by families and tourism agents) of the partners involved in the inclusive tourist itineraries that participated in the training of the azoresallinblue project.	Work with local artists; In Refunction Art Residence; Workshop of urban arts & crafts in Oficina d'Angra Cultural Association.	International arts days, Azores Fringe Festival, art trails	No answer	Sea Therapy Experience, Motion & Nature Experience, and Awake Trail Experience
(1.3) Are activities for the high season (summer) already planned? What is the calendar?	The inclusive tourist itineraries are still under construction and will include tourism agents who receive training until the date of reception of the families.	The activities are only planned for June—Oficina d'Angra—June 10th (no appointments yet); Refunction Art Residence—June 16th (group of 9 people); Refunction Art Residence—June 25th (no appointments)	Activities scheduled between June 1st and 30th at the Azores Fringe Festival	All activities are planned and take place by appointment. There is already a 3-day forecast for June 30th	Activities planned for July 8-13 and September 20-26.
(1.4) Are the activities developed in your project always different, or do they always follow the same pattern regardless of the season?	The inclusive tourist itineraries to be made available will depend on the season.	At the moment, we follow the same pattern regardless of the season.	It may change depending on the artistic area.	Always follow the same pattern but may vary with the weather forecast.	Differ in the activities.
(1.5) Do you already have reservations? For what dates?	The project will invite families that will participate in the pilot phase. It is expected to take place in late September 2022.	To 16th June (10:00am–12:00am).	We only book a few days before.	Three days scheduled for June 30th.	We have four reservations for July (Sea Therapy).

Table 2. Summary of the item-selection questions and Likert scale from section B. (The full table with all this section's answers can be analyzed in Appendix A.).

Questions	Pilot Projects Name				
	CDIJA	Refunction Project—GOODBYAZORES	Art in Nature	Discover the Azores through Photography	Mahilawake
(2.1) Are most of your customers local, from Mainland Portugal or foreign?	Foreigners	Foreigners	Foreigners before the pandemic; Portuguese in the pandemic period	All	Portuguese
(2.2) Do you know who your potential customers are?	Mostly USA citizens	Yes	People interested in artistic culture	People interested in photography	Middle/upper class women
(2.9) Assess the degree of demand for your creative tourism offer between January and April 2022.	3	2	5	3	3
(2.10) Do you have partnerships with tourism companies?	Azorean Travel Agency DMC and Cresaçor	Ongoing	Yes	Hotels	Yes

Table 2. Cont.

Questions	Pilot Projects Name				
	CDIJA	Refunction Project— GOODBYAZORES	Art in Nature	Discover the Azores through Photography	Mahilawake
(2.11) Do you have partnerships with City Councils or Parish Councils?	Not yet	Yes	Yes	No	No
(2.12) Do you have partnerships with national and international magazines to publicize and promote your project?	IBCCES; Blog: TravelingDifferent.com; Australian magazine called "Travel Without Limits".	No	No	No	No
(2.13) Do you have partnerships with raw material suppliers?	No	No	Yes	No	No
(2.20) Have the investments in the project to date been low, moderate, high?	Moderate	Low	Low	Low	Low
(2.21) Are the main costs of your project fixed (they maintain the same value throughout the year), variable or hybrid?	Variable	Variable	Differs according to activities	No answer	Variable
(2.22) For the success of your project, is there a need and possibility to invest more?	Yes	Yes	Yes	No answer	Yes
(2.23) What are the elements of your project that have the greatest cost burden? Human resources? The physical resources?	Physical resources	Human resources	Promotion	No answer	Physical resources
(2.24) Is your project making a profit?	Not at this stage	No	No	Yes	Yes

Table 3. Summary of item-selection questions from section C. (The full table with all this section's answers can be analyzed in Appendix B).

Questions	Pilot Projects Name				
	CDIJA	Refunction Project— GOODBYAZORES	Art in Nature	Discover the Azores through Photography	Mahilawake
(3.3) Do participants interact with local habits and customs during your project activities?	Yes	Not yet	Yes	No answer	Yes
(3.4) Are your project's creative experiences related to day-to-day activities in the local community?	No	No	Yes	No answer	Yes
(3.5) Identify the degree of proximity of participants to the local community (very high, high, moderate, low, very low) justify if possible.	Moderate	Low since the project is positioned a little on the fringes of the community.	Moderate	No answer	High to moderate. For example, during the SeaTherapy Experience, participants will have the opportunity to connect with the sea and understand how it is an indispensable resource in the lives of many locals.

Table 3. Cont.

Questions	Pilot Projects Name				
	CDIJA	Refunction Project— GOODBYAZORES	Art in Nature	Discover the Azores through Photography	Mahilawake
(3.6) Do your project's creative tourism initiatives reflect the authenticity of the place and the culture of the island or the Azores in general?	Dolphin watching tours, stew making workshop.	Yes	In terms of history and location, the rest is artistic cultural development.	Yes	Yes, because we interact very intensely with Nature.
(3.7) Identify which elements the participants have the most contact with in creative activities: regional cuisine, regional music, nature, contemporary arts, traditional dances, religion, rurality, others.	Regional cuisine and nature.	Nature, the arts and the sustainability of processes.	Nature and contemporary arts.	Nature, botany, gastronomy and arts.	Nature, rurality and way of life.
(3.8) Do you consider that your project satisfies the creative interests of the participants/visitors?	Creative interests are not a priority for our target audience, but they become an asset.	Yes	Very much	Yes	Yes
(3.9) Does your creative tourism project contribute to the development of the visitor's social, cultural and environmental awareness in relation to the Azores destination?	Not quite	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
(3.10) Do you consider that your creative tourism project is a dynamic element of the local culture and is it recognized for that?	Not quite	Not yet	Yes	No answer	Yes. However, as we have just started, it is still not recognized.
(3.11) Did your project's impact on your island/locality exceed your expectations?	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No answer
(3.12) Identify the impacts of your project on your island so far (has it contributed to the local economy, to the dissemination of culture, etc.).	Not quite	No	Contribution to the local economy, cultural development, island and local promotion.	No answer	Local economy
(3.13) Do you think your project highlights your location? Puts your parish/city/island on the "tourist map"?	Azoresallinblue has allowed the Azores to stand out on the world map of the entire community that has emerged around the qualification for autism.	Not yet	Yes, no doubt	No answer	Yes

Table 3. Cont.

Questions	Pilot Projects Name				
	CDIJA	Refunction Project— GOODBYAZORES	Art in Nature	Discover the Azores through Photography	Mahilawake
(3.15) Overall, has your creative project exceeded your expectations?	Not applicable	No	Yes	No answer	No answer
(3.16) Do you know creative tourism projects on your island or in the Azores, in addition to the CREATOUR AZORES pilot projects?	Yes	Yes	No	No answer	No
(3.17) Do you consider that Creative Tourism should be a bet on tourism in the Azores, as it promotes sustainable tourist consumption patterns?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

4. Results

Based on the considerable number of outcomes acquired through the interviews, this section was divided into three Subsections A, B, and C (4.1–4.3) to help with the arrangement and interpretation of the results (Tables 1–3).

4.1. Brief Description of the Projects and Planned Activities

The CDIJA Project, in terms of activities carried out from January to April 2022, did several activities such as international Auscultation for families with children with autism; auscultation in the Azores Autonomous Region to tour operators; return of study results to the community; certification of Inclusive Tourism for Autism training; promotion of certified training in Tourism for Autism; participation in the Island Innovation Awards forum as a finalist project in the Innovative Island Research Award category. In this sense, as a follow-up, they intend to receive families to participate in the project's pilot phase, with the individual assessment of the impact (by families and tourism agents) of the partners involved in the inclusive tourist itineraries that participated in the training of the azoresallinblue project. The inclusive tourist itineraries are still under construction and will include tourism agents who receive their training until the date of reception of the families. Moreover, the inclusive tourist itineraries to be made available will depend on the year's season. The pilot phase is expected to take place in late September 2022.

The Refunction Project—GOODBYAZORES carried out activities at the Basic School Tomás de Borba as part of the arts week from January to April 2022, such as presentation of the project, techniques, and pieces to be developed in creative tourism. Some students participated in practical workshops. This project intends to work with local artists, In Refunction Art Residence, an urban arts & crafts workshop in Oficina d'Angra Cultural Association. They planned activities only for June: Oficina d'Angra on June 10th (no appointments yet); Refunction Art Residence on June 16th (a group of nine people); Refunction Art Residence on June 25th (no appointments yet). By the moment of the interviews, the project actors told us that the activities were planned to follow the same pattern regardless of the season.

The project Art in Nature organized, between January and April 2022, Pico Mountain Festival, Mountain Art, Monster Theater, International Art Days, the Azores Fringe Festival, and art trails. For the high season (summer), activities occurred, between June 1st and 30th, at the Azores Fringe Festival. The activities planned may vary depending on the artistic area, but not the season. The reservations will be booked only a few days before the event.

The project Discover the Azores through Photography organized, from January to April 2022, photography workshops on Landscape, Botany, and Gastronomy themes. The activities for the high season (summer) are planned; the calendar takes place when there are appointments, for there is already a 3-day forecast for June 30th. The activities carried out to follow the same pattern throughout the year but may vary with the weather forecast.

Lastly, the Mahilawake project focuses on activities such as the SeaTherapy Experience, the Motion & Nature Experience, and the Awake Trail Experience. They have planned activities for July 8–13 and September 20–26. Furthermore, they had guaranteed four reservations for July (SeaTherapy) by the time this interview was conducted. Their activities depend on the season.

4.2. Business Model

The majority of the CDIJA project's clients are foreigners—most of them potential customers from the United States of America. In terms of audience, their offer intends to cover families with children with autism. By training agents for this target audience, they will be able to strengthen the response to a comprehensive target in the area of family tourism, inclusive tourism, and health tourism. They believe that it is essential for their clients to participate in their activities, recognizing the “ready for autism” seal as a capable, differentiated, and sensitive response to the problems of these families with children with autism. Currently, the project does not yet have any clients or expectations for the summer. They are analyzing the profile and motivations of their customers through the International Certification as a Tourism Agent for Autism by IBCCES; many online meetings with International Autism Associations in between intensive bibliographic searches. On a Likert scale, they consider that the degree of demand for their creative tourism offer between January and April 2022 is on level 3. This project has partnerships with tourism companies like the Azorean Travel Agency DMC or the Cresaçor, as well as cooperation with national and international magazines to publicize and promote the project, such as IBCCES, the blog *TravelingDifferent.com* and Australian magazine, the renowned “Travel Without Limits.” They do not have any partnerships with City Councils or Parish Councils yet, nor with raw material suppliers. The human resources in this project are Travel Agents and Therapists specializing in autism; the physical resources are the CDIJA—Children and Youth Development Center of the Azores; the financial resources are based on financing by PO2020; the intellectual resources lay on the Partnership with a team of UAc (University of the Azores) researchers and a Ph.D. researcher funded by the project. They consider that the revenues from the creative offer are sufficient to support the costs at some points; the investments in the project to date have been moderate; the main costs of the projects are variables (the value differs according to the activities and the seasons of the year); for the success of the project, there is a need and possibility to invest more. The elements of the project that have the greatest cost burden are the physical resources. At this stage of the project, there is not any profit.

Most Refunction Project—GOODBYAZORES clients are foreigners. This project targets different customer segments/multiple audiences. Based on customer feedback, the reasons for customer participation in this project initiative rely on contact with new creative realities. At the moment, this project does not yet have any paid customers. The activities were integrated into other Cultural initiatives. They have nine customers confirmed in June. They would like to reach 100 customers by the end of the summer. They analyze the profile and motivations of their customers through interaction and by observing the path of other similar promoters. On a Likert scale, they consider that the degree of demand for their creative tourism offer between January and April 2022 is on level 2. This project has not yet partnered with tourism companies, national or international magazines to publicize and promote the project, or raw material suppliers. However, they have had partnerships with City Councils or Parish Councils, Cultural Associations, Artists/Promoters, and Schools. The human resources in this project are qualified; they have physical resources, their own and supported financial resources, and their intellectual resources. They consider that

the revenues from their creative offer are not sufficient to support the costs; the investing investments in the project to date have been low; the main costs of the projects are variables (the value differs according to the activities, the seasons of the year); for the success of the project, there is a need and possibility to invest more. The elements of the project that have the most significant cost burden are human resources. This project does not have any profit, and they are not satisfied with the project's profit.

The majority of Art in Nature project clients are, since the pandemic, Portuguese. Before that, they were foreigners. Their potential clients are people interested in artistic culture. This project targets different customer segments based on this age. Based on customer feedback, the reason for customers participating in this project is looking for something different; their interest in culture. In 2021 they had 58 clients since they started recording in June. Now, they have 32 since January. Currently, they have zero confirmed clients for future times because they only know that days before the event. They analyze the profile and motivations of their customers only through interaction during experiences. On a Likert scale, they consider that the degree of demand for their creative tourism offer between January and April 2022 is on level 5. This project has partnerships with tourism companies, City Councils or Parish Councils, and raw material suppliers. However, it does not have any national and international magazines to publicize and promote its project. They have qualified human resources and financial and intellectual resources. They do not have physical resources. They have their physical resources, their supported financial resources, and their intellectual resources. They consider that the revenues from their creative offer are not sufficient yet to support the costs; the investing investments in the project to date have been low; the main costs of the projects are variables (the value differs according to the activities); for the success of the project, there is a need and possibility to invest more. The elements of the project that have the most significant cost burden are to promote it. This project does not have any profit.

The Discover the Azores through photography project clients are local people, Portuguese in general, and foreigners. People who like photography are their potential customers and their target audience. The taste for photography is the main explanation why clients participate in this project, according to their feedback. From the beginning of their creative tourism project to the present, they have had forty-one clients, and they have had one from January 2022 to the present. This project does not have confirmed or expected customers in future times. They analyze the profile and motivations of their customers through interactions during experiences. On a Likert scale, they consider that the degree of demand for their creative tourism offer between January and April 2022 is on level 3. This project has partnerships with tourism companies (hotels), but not with City Councils or Parish Councils, national or international magazines to publicize and promote their project, or raw material suppliers. Regarding the existing resources in the project (human, physical, financial, intellectual), there is no information available. They consider that the revenues from their creative offer are sufficient to support the costs; the investment in the project to date has been low; this project has profit, and they are satisfied with the project's profit.

The majority of Mahilawake project clients are Portuguese. Their potential customers are middle/upper-class women. The project's target audience is interested in adventure, travel, and personal development. Based on customer feedback, the reasons for customer participation in this project initiative rely on the fact that it is a different product in the Azores and is related to well-being. From the beginning of the project until now, they have had twelve clients. They have four customers from January 2022 to the present. Four clients are confirmed for the summer activities, and from eighteen to twenty are expected. They analyze the profile and motivations of their customers through interactions during experiences. On a Likert scale, they consider that the degree of demand for their creative tourism offer between January and April 2022 is on level 3. This project has partnerships with tourism companies, but not with City Councils or Parish Councils, national or international magazines to publicize and promote their project, or raw material suppliers. The human resources in this project are qualified in some aspects and not others;

they have physical resources; the financial resources are their own; the intellectual resources lay on their brand and logo. Moreover, they consider that the revenues from their creative offer are sufficient to support the costs; the investing investments in the project to date have been low; the main costs of the projects are variables (the value differs according to the activities, the seasons of the year); for the success of the project, there is a need and possibility to invest more. The elements of the project that have the most significant cost burden are physical resources. This project has profit, but they are not yet satisfied with the project's profit.

4.3. Culture, Creativity and Community Impact

The CDIJ Project defends that this is a creative project, as all the activities suggested include a playful therapeutic aspect that, with creativity, makes the experience unique. This project essentially explores their proposed itineraries' natural, cultural, and gastronomic heritage. Through some activities from the project, such as organic farms and potteries, among others, the participants interact with local habits and customs during the experience. However, it is possible to assume that the project's creative experiences are not related to day-to-day activities in the local community. As a result, the proximity of participants to the local community is moderate. This project intends to reflect the authenticity of the place and the culture of the island or the Azores, for example, through dolphin-watching tours and stew-making workshops. In this sense, the participants have the most contact with creative activities related to regional cuisine and nature. In this project, the priority focus is not the creative interests of the participants, but considering them is an added value. Regarding this project's target audience, the customers do not have the freedom/autonomy to develop their creativity. Considering if this creative project is a contribution to the development of the visitor's social, cultural, and environmental awareness about the Azores destination, and if its impacts on the island (local economy, dissemination of culture, among several others) constitutes a dynamic element of the local culture, respondents considered that this is not exactly what characterizes the project. However, the impact on the island exceeded their expectations as there was an enormous sensitivity and openness towards inclusive tourism. In addition, the actors emphasize the importance of azoresallinblue since it allowed the Azores to stand out on the world map of the entire community that has emerged around autism. The actors consider that Creative Tourism should be a bet on tourism in the Azores, as it promotes sustainable tourist consumption patterns. They indicate that they know some creative tourism projects on their island or in the Azores, in addition to the CREATOUR AZORES pilot projects. They assess their activity between January and April 2022 as corresponding to an Innovation and Development project and look forward to receiving families in the second semester of the year. Among the main needs felt, they consider that the CREATOUR AZORES project can help by sensitizing pilot projects to join the inclusive tourism training for autism and to include their projects in the inclusive tourist itineraries of azoresallinblue.

The Refunction Project—GOODBYAZORES agents argue that it is a creative project based on artistic creation and interaction with the participants. This project essentially explores artistic and natural heritage with creative experiences that are not related to day-to-day activities in the local community. The degree of proximity of participants to the local community is low because the project is positioned a little on the fringes of the community. However, in the future, they anticipate that the participants will interact with local habits and customs during the project activities and intend to reflect the authenticity of the place and the culture of the island or the Azores in general. The participants have the most contact with nature, the arts, and the sustainability of processes through creative activities. They consider that their project satisfies the creative interests of its participants and, on the other hand, contributes to the development of the visitor's social, cultural, and environmental awareness concerning the Azores' destination. In this project, the customers have little autonomy to develop their creativity. Customers produce products with active participation in creative experiences and workshops given by a local artist working on a

particular brand and concept previously established. In terms of considering this creative project a dynamic element of the local culture with impacts on their island/locality (local economy, and dissemination of culture, etc.), the actors affirm that it is not yet recognized for this but intends to be. Additionally, this project intends, in the future, to be a bridge to highlight their location and put their parish/city/island on the “tourist map.” The actors consider that Creative Tourism should be a bet on tourism in the Azores, as it promotes sustainable tourist consumption patterns. They affirmed knowing some creative tourism projects on their island or in the Azores, in addition to the CREATOUR AZORES pilot projects. They comment that they do not claim to be such, but they could be. Overall, their creative project does not exceed their expectations. The actors consider that the project needs an implementation of processes that it has not yet had (weaknesses). However, this 2022 peak season promises to provide that start, implementation, and affirmation (strengths). Finally, they affirm that CREATOUR AZORES has been an excellent help to solve the primary needs felt.

The Art in Nature promoter believes that this project is creative because it is related to artistic creation and explores cultural, intangible, historical, natural, and artistic heritage. Depending on the activity, the participants interact with local habits and customs. This project’s creative experiences are related to day-to-day activities in the local community because it is in direct contact with the local artistic community, even though the proximity of participants to the local community is moderate. This project reflects the authenticity of the place and the culture of the island or the Azores in terms of history and location; the rest is artistic and cultural development. The participants have the most contact with creative activities related to nature and contemporary arts. The actors consider that their project very much satisfies their participants’ creative interests. In this project, the customers have some autonomy to develop their creativity, depending on the different activities—some are very open and liberal, and others are more structured. Overall, the project exceeded their expectations. This creative tourism project contributes to the development of the visitor’s social, cultural, and environmental awareness concerning the Azores’ destination is a dynamic element of the local culture and is recognized for that, it has an impact on their island/locality—contribution to the local economy, cultural development, island, and local promotion—and exceeds their expectations. Moreover, this project highlights their location, putting their parish/city/island on the “tourist map”. The actors consider that Creative Tourism should be a bet on tourism in the Azores, as it promotes sustainable tourist consumption patterns. They do not know about creative tourism projects on their island, in the Azores, or the CREATOUR AZORES pilot projects. The project’s actors stated that they felt the need to invest more in developing and creating specific programs and promoting the project.

The project Discover the Azores through photography explores geological, artistic, and gastronomic heritage. Their project’s creative tourism initiatives reflect the authenticity of the place and the culture of the island or the Azores. The participants have significant contact with the project’s activities, nature, botany, gastronomy, and arts. The actors consider that their project very much satisfies their participants’ creative interests. In this project, the customers have total autonomy and freedom to develop their creativity—the participants have to take an active and creative part and “shoot for themselves”.

This creative tourism project contributes to the visitor’s social, cultural, and environmental awareness about the Azores’ destination and impacts their island/locality that exceeds the actors’ expectations. On the other hand, the actors consider that Creative Tourism should be a bet on tourism in the Azores, as it promotes sustainable tourist consumption patterns. Among the primary needs felt, the CREATOUR AZORES project helped solve them in some way by giving good ideas in the idea lab implemented in the project.

The Mahilawake project defends itself as a creative project because it is a pioneer in the Azores and encompasses several areas: dance, diving, yoga, and meditation in a context always close to Azorean Nature. This project mainly explores natural heritage, but not only this. Through the project’s activities, the participants interact with local habits and customs

because the project’s creative experiences are related to day-to-day activities in the local community. The degree of proximity of participants to the local community is moderate to elevated. For example, during the SeaTherapy Experience, participants will have the opportunity to connect with the sea and understand how it is an indispensable resource in the lives of many locals. This project reflects the authenticity of the place and the culture of the island or the Azores in general, and the participants interact very intensely with Azorean nature. The participants have the most contact with nature, rurality, and lifestyle through creative activities. The actors consider that their project satisfies the creative interests of their participants. The participants in this project have the autonomy to be creative, which is the objective. They also intended to use the tools given to them to reproduce them in their environment. The actors consider that this creative project contributes to the development of the visitor’s social, cultural, and environmental awareness about the Azores’ destination, is a dynamic element of the local culture (however, not recognized yet), and impacts the island (local economy). Moreover, they think this project highlights their location, putting their parish/city/island on the “tourist map.” The actors consider that Creative Tourism should be a bet on tourism in the Azores, as it promotes sustainable tourist consumption patterns. They do not know about creative tourism projects on their island, in the Azores, or the CREATOUR AZORES pilot projects. In terms of the project assessment, between January and April 2022, they affirm that it is impossible to answer this question as they will only be promoting activities from July 2022. Among the primary needs felt, they consider that the CREATOUR AZORES project could help with marketing strategy, developing new products, or improving the offer.

5. Discussion and Final Considerations

Islands are tourist destinations with their own particularities [52]. The problems associated can vary greatly depending on geography, size, archipelagic character, and cultural relations with nearby outbound markets, among other examples [10]. Some of the problems arise from the fragility of island ecosystems in terms of biodiversity, water resources, or food production [53–56]. At the same time, these territories are often problematic due to their genesis, their geomorphology (coastal erosion), the scarcity of resources, and geographic situation—i.e., excessive pressure on productive resources and land and too much competition regarding its uses, resulting in coastal pollution [57–60]. From an anthropogenic perspective, islands reveal other problems, such as labor market difficulties (lack of labor and low-skilled labor) and the challenges in attracting capital and channeling it towards sustainable, productive investments, and guaranteeing infrastructure or services [61,62].

If we focus on the five creative tourism pilot projects analyzed, we can divide them into different themes (Table 4).

Table 4. Pilot projects by Themes.

Themes	Pilot Projects				
	CDIJA	Refunction Project— GOODBYAZORES	Art in Nature	Discover the Azores through Photography	Mahilawake
Integrative	x				
Human Local Talent Development	x	x	x	x	x
Artistic			x	x	x
Cultural and Gastronomy				x	
Nature-based tourism and Endogenous Resources		x	x		x

Table 4 shows the relevance of each pilot project in the different themes. In addition, it is possible to understand the relevance of the five pilot projects of creative tourism for the local human development of the Azores Region.

Additionally, when we focus on the business model of each pilot project, from the obtained results, it is feasible to verify two main models: (a) for the foreign tourist (international); and (b) for the Portuguese (national) and regional tourists. Nevertheless, a specific pattern of tourist profile seems to appear in both business models: “a tourist that seeks an artistic, rural and nature-based tourism.” In fact, these results seem to corroborate the reality that happened in the low-density, remote, and insular territories during the COVID-19 pandemic, where the tourist looks for these typologies of tourism [63–65].

In this regard, if we look retrospectively, 2019 was excellent in terms of results provided by tourism for the Autonomous Region of the Azores. Then, in March of 2020 the world stopped with the pandemic outbreak caused by COVID-19 and an unparalleled loss of enthusiasm in the tourist market [15,66]. Nevertheless, rural tourism, nature-based tourism, and other typologies of slow tourism that were gaining relevance during the pandemic and in the post-pandemic period seemed to become the new tourism trend. Thereby, the remote, low-density, and ultra-peripheral regions are the most attractive for this new tourism dynamics [63–66]. Furthermore, UNWTO also supports that rural tourism is even more meaningful because tourists looked for uncongested destinations with open-air activities during the COVID-19 pandemic [67–70]. Moreover, after the COVID-19 outbreak, the European Parliament established several new measures and strategies that should be considered regarding tourism sustainability—namely the resolution on 25 March 2021 on establishing an EU strategy for sustainable tourism [71].

Therefore, the five analyzed pilot projects of creative tourism go just right in that direction. It is recommended that the regional government, local authorities, and other relevant actors and players in this region support and create strategies to strengthen these projects (and similar initiatives) once they not only contribute to the regional development and destination promotion but also for the so-desired sustainable development—once through these kinds of tourism the mass tourism is, in theory, avoided. Moreover, the analyzed creative tourism pilot projects also allow for a regional economic revival through the partnerships carried out through these projects with other companies and regional suppliers.

As final remarks, it is feasible to affirm that in this remote region, the tourism sector was already assuming pre-eminence in 2019, profiting from a significant sample of entrepreneurs and players in the tourism sector in the Azores Autonomous Region; in fact, the above-mentioned was demonstrated by previous thematic studies (see: [12,15,26]).

6. Research Limitations and Prospective Studies

Among the limitations of this research, it was possible to highlight the implementation of the exploratory tools within the COVID-19 pandemic period. In fact, conducting the study during this period, we felt some limitations; not only for the research team to travel and develop the interviews on the scheduled dates but also in the responses given by the participants, as it was a moment of uncertainty within the tourism sector. Somehow, some of the obtained answers from these actors were unclear. If different techniques or analysis methods were applied, as is the case of advanced statistics, we would expect to obtain more insight, as well as if different questions were asked and if more projects were studied. In addition, if a more extensive and different sample was used—i.e., comprising the population in general as well as the tourists, entrepreneurs from different projects, and several other participants—it might be possible to address this issue from a different perspective. On the other hand, we should stress the novelty of this investigation, which could be found in its application to the measurement of the impacts caused by the pilot projects of creative tourism in the Azores Archipelago and their relation to future regional development. Furthermore, this study can be reproduced in other geographic locations and, therefore, contribute to comparison studies, promoting the debate on this specific topic, and obtaining advances in the thematic literature.

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Appendix A

Outcomes of the interview's questions from section B.

Questions	Pilot Projects Name				
	CDIJA	Refunction Project— GOODBYAZORES	Art in Nature	Discover the Azores through photography	Mahilawake
(2.1) Are most of your customers local, from Portugal mainland or foreign?	Foreigners	Foreigners	Before the pandemic were foreigners; in the pandemic period were Portuguese	All	Portuguese
(2.2) Do you know who your potential customers are?	USA Citizens	Yes	People interested in artistic culture	People interested in photography	Middle/upper class women
(2.3) Are your creative tourism initiatives targeting different customer segments based on age, interests, gender? Does your offer cover multiple audiences or just one audience?	Our offer covers families with children with Autism. By training agents for this target audience, we are able to strengthen the response to a very broad target in the area of family tourism, inclusive tourism and health tourism.	Different segments, various target audiences.	Different customer segments and ages.	People interested in photography.	A more specific target audience, based on their interests, namely adventure, travel and personal development.
(2.4) Based on customer feedback, identify reasons for customer participation in your project initiatives?	Recognition of the "ready for autism" seal as a capable, differentiated and sensitive response to the problems of these families with children with autism.	Contact with new creative realities.	Looking for something different; interested in culture.	They are interested in photography.	Because it is a different product, it is in the Azores and it is related to well-being.

Questions	Pilot Projects Name				
	CDIJA	Refunction Project— GOODBYAZORES	Art in Nature	Discover the Azores through photography	Mahilawake
(2.5) Identify the number of clients from the beginning of your creative tourism project to the present.	0	We haven't had any paid customers yet. The activities were integrated into other Cultural initiatives	In 2021 we had 58 since we started recording in June.	41	12
(2.6) Identify the number of customers from January 2022 to present.	0	No answer	32 since January	1	4
(2.7) Identify the number of confirmed and expected customers in your summer activities.	0	9 were confirmed in June. We would like to reach 100 customers by the end of the summer.	At this moment zero because we only knew a few days before.	No answer	4 confirmed; 18/20 expected.
(2.8) How do you know the motivations and profile of your customers?	Through the International Certification as a Tourism Agent for Autism by IBCCES; many online meetings with International Autism Associations in between intensive bibliographic searches.	Through Interaction and by observing the path of other similar promoters.	Only through interaction during experiences.	These are people who come from various hotels, from acquaintances and from my other businesses.	Through interactions during experiences.
(2.9) Assess the degree of demand for your creative tourism offer between January and April 2022.	3	2	5	3	3
(2.10) Do you have partnerships with tourism companies?	Azorean Travel Agency DMC and Cresaçor	Ongoing	Yes	Hotels	Yes
(2.11) Do you have partnerships with City Councils or Parish Councils?	Not yet	Yes	Yes	No	No
(2.12) Do you have partnerships with national and international magazines to publicize and promote your project?	IBCCES; Blog: TravelingDifferent.com; Australian magazine called "Travel Without Limits".	No	No	No	No
(2.13) Do you have partnerships with raw material suppliers?	No	No	Yes	No	No
(2.14) Other partnerships	No answer	Cultural Associations; Artists/Promoters; Schools.	No answer	No answer	No answer
(2.15) Existing human resources in the project? Are they qualified?	Travel Agents and Therapists specializing in Autism	Yes	Yes	No answer	Yes in some aspects and no in others.

Questions	Pilot Projects Name				
	CDIJA	Refunction Project— GOODBYAZORES	Art in Nature	Discover the Azores through photography	Mahilawake
(2.16) Physical Resources e.g., company headquarters, transportation, etc.	CDIJA—Children and Youth Development Center of the Azores	Own	No	No answer	No
(2.17) Financial Resources eg. equity and income from the sale of services, financial support, etc.	Financing by PO2020	Own and supported by public funding.	Yes	No answer	Own financial capital
(2.18) Intellectual resources eg: intangible resources, which include trademarks, patents, databases, etc.	Partnership with a team of UAc researchers and a Ph.D. researcher funded by the project.	Own	Yes	No answer	Brand/logo
(2.19) Were the revenues from the creative offer sufficient to support the costs?	In some magazines headings.	No	Not yet	Yes	Yes
(2.20) Have the investments in the project to date been low, moderate, high?	Moderate	Low	Low	Low	Low
(2.21) Are the main costs of your project fixed (they maintain the same value throughout the year), variable (the value differs according to the activities, the seasons of the year) or hybrid?	Variables	Variables	Differs according to activities	No answer	Variables
(2.22) For the success of your project, is there a need and possibility to invest more?	Yes	Yes	Yes	No answer	Yes
(2.23) What are the elements of your project that have the greatest cost burden? Human resources? The physical resources?	Physical resources	Human resources	Promotion	No answer	Physical resources
(2.24) Is your project making a profit?	Not at this stage	No	No	Yes	Yes
(2.25) Are you satisfied with the project's profits? Do they always exceed your expectations?	Expectations counted on this wait.	No	No answer	Yes	Not yet

Appendix B

Outcomes of the interview's questions from section C.

Questions	Pilot projects Name				
	CDIJA	Refunction Project— GOODBYAZORES	Art in Nature	Discover the Azores through photography	Mahilawake
(3.1) Why do you think your project is creative?	All suggested activities include a playful therapeutic aspect that, with creativity, makes the experience unique.	It is artistic creation and interactive with the participants.	Artistic creation	No answer	Because it is a pioneer in the Azores and encompasses several areas: dance, diving, yoga and meditation in a context always close to Azorean Nature.
(3.2) What kind of heritage does it explore? Intangible cultural heritage, historical, natural, geological, artistic, gastronomic, etc.?	The natural, cultural and gastronomic heritage are the most selection in the proposed itineraries.	Artistic and natural.	Cultural, intangible, historical, natural, and artistic.	Geological, artistic, and gastronomic.	Mainly the Natural Heritage.
(3.3) Do participants interact with local habits and customs during your project activities?	In some activities, such as visiting biological farms, potteries, etc.	Not yet.	Depends on the activity.	No answer	Yes
(3.4) Are your project's creative experiences related to day-to-day activities in the local community?	No	No	Artistic community	No answer	Yes
(3.5) Identify the degree of proximity of participants to the local community (very high, high, moderate, low, very low) justify if possible.	Moderate	Low—due to the project is positioned a little on the fringes of the community.	Moderate	No answer	Elevated to moderate. For example, during the SeaTherapy Experience, participants will have the opportunity to connect with the sea and understand how it is an indispensable resource in the lives of many locals.
(3.6) Do your project's creative tourism initiatives reflect the authenticity of the place and the culture of the island or the Azores in general?	Dolphin watching tours, stew making workshop.	Yes	In terms of history and location, the rest is artistic cultural development.	Yes	Yes, because we interact very intensely with Nature.
(3.7) Identify which elements the participants have the most contact with in creative activities: regional cuisine, regional music, nature, contemporary arts, traditional dances, religion, rurality, others.	Regional cuisine and nature.	Nature, the arts and the sustainability of processes.	Nature and contemporary arts.	Nature, botany, gastronomy and arts.	Nature, rurality and way of life.

Questions	Pilot projects Name				
	CDIJA	Refunction Project— GOODBYAZORES	Art in Nature	Discover the Azores through photography	Mahilawake
(3.8) Do you consider that your project satisfies the creative interests of the participants/visitors?	Creative interests are not a priority for our target audience, but they become an asset.	Yes	Very much	Yes	Yes
(3.9) Does your creative tourism project contribute to the development of the visitor's social, cultural and environmental awareness in relation to the Azores destination?	Not quite	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
(3.10) Do you consider that your creative tourism project is a dynamic element of the local culture and is it recognized for that?	Not quite	Not yet	Yes	No answer	Yes. However, as we have just started, it is still not recognized.
(3.11) Did your project's impact on your island/locality exceed your expectations?	The impact exceeded expectations as there was an enormous sensitivity and openness towards inclusive tourism.	No	Yes	Yes	No answer
(3.12) Identify the impacts of your project on your island so far (has it contributed to the local economy, to the dissemination of culture, etc.).	Not quite	No	Contribution to the local economy, cultural development, island and local promotion	No answer	Local economy
(3.13) Do you think your project highlights your location? Put your parish/city/island on the "tourist map"?	Azoresallinblue has allowed the Azores to stand out on the world map of the entire community that has emerged around the qualification for autism.	Not yet	Yes, no doubt	No answer	Yes
(3.14) Do your customers have the freedom/autonomy to develop their own creativity? Do you produce any products in the activities? Is there active participation in workshops and experiences beyond observation?	No	Little autonomy. Customers produce products with active participation in creative experiences and workshops given by a local artist working on a certain brand and concept previously established.	Different activities, some are very open and liberal and others are more structured.	Of course, they all have to take an active and creative part.	Yes, they have the autonomy to be creative and that is the objective. It is also intended that they use the tools given to them to reproduce them in their environment.

Questions	Pilot projects Name				
	CDIJA	Refunction Project— GOODBYAZORES	Art in Nature	Discover the Azores through photography	Mahilawake
(3.15) Overall, has your creative project exceeded your expectations?	Not applicable.	No	Yes	No answer	No answer
(3.16) Do you know creative tourism projects on your island or in the Azores, in addition to the CREATOUR AZORES pilot projects?	Some	Some. They do not claim to be such, but they could.	No	No answer	No
(3.17) Do you consider that Creative Tourism should be a bet on tourism in the Azores, as it promotes sustainable tourist consumption patterns?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
(3.18) What is your assessment of your project between January and April 2022?	Corresponds to what was planned as an Innovation and Development project. We are looking forward to receiving families in the 2 nd semester of the year.	Weaknesses—the project needs an implementation of processes that it has not yet had. Strengths—the 2022 peak season promises to provide that start, implementation and affirmation.	We need to invest more in developing and creating specific programs and promotions.	We just got out of a 2 year pandemic, it was only in March that we started having tourists at home.	It is not possible to answer this question as we will only be promoting activities from July 2022.
(3.19) Among the main needs felt, at what level can the Creatour Azores project help to solve them?	Sensitize pilot projects to join the inclusive tourism training for autism, with a view to including their projects in the inclusive tourist itineraries of <i>azoresallinblue</i> .	Creatour Azores has done a good job.	No answer	It has given good ideas in the idealab that has been realized.	The Creatour project could help with marketing strategy, for example, developing new products or improving the offer.

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