

## Beyond the co-creating tourist: The role of the artist in experiential value in creative tourism

Makni Turki Amal (Corresponding author)

PhD in Marketing

Higher Institute of Commercial Studies of Carthage

University of Carthage, Tunisia

Interdisciplinary University-Business Management Laboratory (LIGUE)

amalmakni2106@gmail.com

ORCID: 0009-0002-6484-9997

Temessek Behi Azza

Associate Professor

Higher Institute of Commercial Studies

University of Carthage, Tunisia

Interdisciplinary University-Business Management Laboratory (LIGUE)

azza.temessek@ihec.car.tn

ORCID: 0000-0002-2319-5977

Francois-Lecompte Agnès

Full Professor

University of Southern Brittany, France

West Economics and Management Laboratory (LEGO)

agnes.lecompte@univ-ubs.fr

ORCID: 0000-0001-7813-0364

### Abstract

Creative tourism asserts itself as a sustainable and culturally vibrant alternative to mass tourism, by prioritizing the active engagement of visitors, through workshops, learning, and authentic encounters, and by promoting exchange, the co-creation and strengthening of social ties with local communities. Yet, the foundations of experiential value creation within creative workshops remain insufficiently understood, particularly with regard to the contribution of local artist-artisans. Indeed, existing research mainly focuses on co-creation from the tourists' point of view, analyzing their experiences, perceptions and interactions, while often leaving aside the active and strategic role of artists-local artisans in the structuring and enrichment of this experiential value. To explore this, a methodological triangulation was adopted, combining twenty-four interviews with Tunisian artist-craftsmen, twenty-four interviews with domestic and international tourists, six interviews with organizers and sixteen participant observations. The results show that the artist acts as a catalyst for the experience, promoting learning, self-confidence and positive emotions. It reinforces authenticity and cultural anchoring, values intangible heritage and supports local development. This research enriches the literature on creative tourism by showing that co-creation relies on the interaction orchestrated by the artist, integrating aesthetic, relational and narrative dimensions. It also reveals that the artist structures technical, emotional and identity learning, highlighting the importance of considering him as a co-designer and valuing his skills to create authentic and culturally engaging experiences.

**Keywords:** Local artist, Co-creation, Creative workshops, Cultural interaction, Experiential learning

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## 1. Introduction

Creative tourism is characterized by the active involvement of the visitor in artistic or cultural activities such as pottery, crafts, visual arts, cooking or dance, offering an authentic immersion in the cultural and intangible heritage of the territories (Richards & Raymond, 2000; Sharma et al., 2025). This type of tourism is part of a co-creation logic: the visitor is no longer a simple passive consumer but an involved actor, co-producer of meaning and emotions (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995; Richards & Wilson, 2006; Argod, 2014).

Despite the importance given to co-creation and experiential value, the literature focuses mainly on the role of the tourist or on organizational dynamics (service providers, destinations, institutions) (Binkhorst & Den Dekker, 2013; Ribeiro et al., 2023; Deng et al., 2024). Recent reviews show that research focuses mainly on the characteristics of visitors, service innovations or strategic implications, while highlighting gaps concerning certain actors in the process. In particular, in the field of creative tourism, if the needs for authenticity, immersion, participation or learning are widely documented, the role of the local artist or craftsman in the co-creation of the experience remains largely under-studied. A review dedicated to the living arts notes, for example, the absence of empirical work on the direct contribution of artists to the tourist experience, despite the theoretical importance of this dimension (Mazlan et al., 2025). Similarly, research on cultural mediation recognizes the importance of cultural actors in the co-construction of meaning and memory, but remains focused on classic forms of cultural tourism (Saidi, 2016).

However, these reflections often remain theoretical or focused on traditional forms of cultural tourism (heritage visits, museums, shows). They explore very little the particular nature of creative workshops, characterized by a close and continuous interaction between the artist and the participant, simultaneously mobilizing practical learning, creation, emotional exchange and active participation. This specificity, made of proximity, shared gestures, narration, guidance and co-production, remains little analyzed, especially when it comes to understanding how the artist concretely contributes to experiential value.

In other words, current literature mainly deals with co-creation from the perspective of the tourist or the destination, but rarely from that of the artist or the artisan. This creates a significant "blind spot" for understanding the creative experience in all its dimensions: aesthetic, relational, emotional and identity-related.

Furthermore, bibliometric analyses show that creative tourism has established itself, between 2002 and 2024, as a lever for enhancing intangible heritage, sustainable development and community engagement (Benhaida et al., 2024). However, a central player remains on the sidelines: the local artist, often reduced to a simple facilitator, whereas he potentially constitutes a real cultural, sensory and emotional mediator.

This gap is all the more notable given that, in creative workshops, the artist goes beyond a technical function: he transmits know-how, embodies a cultural identity and mobilizes emotions (Makni & François-Lecompte, 2024; Makni Turki et al., 2025). However, the mechanisms by which the artist participates in the creation of experiential value remain largely unexplored.

Faced with these observations, the present research aims to explore the role of the artist in creative workshops, to identify the components of his intervention and to understand how he contributes to the co-creation of experiential value. To meet these objectives, a methodological triangulation was mobilized, articulating two complementary approaches: (1) semi-structured interviews with tourists and artists, and (2) participant observation enriched by photographic shots.

It thus aims to enrich knowledge on creative tourism by repositioning the artist as a key player in the experiential value and cultural branding of destinations. From a managerial point of view, it provides levers for designing and managing memorable, authentic and aesthetic creative experiences.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 Creative tourism and co-creation of value

The concept of creative tourism was initially popularized in the 2000s, in the research work of Greg Richards and Crispin Raymond who define creative tourism as a form of tourism where the visitor actively participates in workshops or artistic, craft or cultural experiences that characterize the holiday destination where they are taken, rather than remaining a simple passive consumer (Richards and Raymond, 2000). This definition is reflected in a variety of creative activities and immersive activities, testifying to the richness and diversity of the experiences offered to tourists around the world. These activities include, for example, discovering traditional Brazilian dances, creating floral arrangements in Japan, producing argan oil in Morocco or practicing pottery in Tunisia.

The creative tourism can be thus perceived as an extension or an alternative to cultural tourism. It is based on the transition from passive to active consumption on the one hand, and from a static and tangible heritage to a living and intangible culture on the other. Unlike cultural tourism, which is more distanced, creative tourism is part of a participatory, interactive and relational approach, centered on an active learning experience (Richards and Wilson, 2006; Fernandes, 2011; Richards, 2011; Argod, 2014; Chen et al., 2021).

From the point of view of marketing and tourism management, the theoretical framework of co-value creation (value co-creation), based on the logic that consumers/tourists become co-producers, is particularly relevant (John and Supramaniam, 2024). The work of Deng et al. (2024) shows that the co-created experience is based on a set of key dimensions, including entertainment, immersion, a sense of accomplishment, novelty, authenticity, uniqueness, learning as well as interaction. These dimensions illustrate the potential of creative tourism to provide rich, diverse and personalized experiences, likely to meet the current expectations of tourists seeking meaning, authenticity and active participation.

In addition, the report of the Organisation for Cooperation and Development Economics (OECD, 2014) highlights the growing interest of States and territories in developing synergies between tourism and creative industries, to stimulate employment, innovation, local development, and diversify the cultural and tourist offer.

Thus, creative tourism appears as a major lever for renewing tourism offers, by allowing not only cultural immersion but also the active participation of visitors, which confers added value at the experiential, economic and sociocultural level. Despite the importance given to co-creation and experiential value in creative tourism, most work focuses on the role of the tourist, as a co-creator, or on organizational structures and management dynamics (service providers, destination, institutional mediators). For example, the recent systematic review in the field of hospitality and tourism highlights that research focuses primarily on the characteristics of tourists, services or innovations, the consequences of co-creation, and strategic dynamics, but explicitly mentions gaps concerning certain actors in the process (Ribeiro et al., 2023). In creative tourism, the role of artists and craftsmen in the co-creation of the experience remains largely under-explored. While the literature highlights the importance of authenticity, immersion and participation, empirical studies analyzing the direct contribution of artists are rare (Mazlan et al., 2025). Studies on cultural mediation certainly consider cultural actors as essential to the construction of meaning and identity (Saidi, 2016), but they often remain theoretical or focused on traditional forms of tourism. Thus, the specificity of creative workshops, based on close interaction between the artist and the participant, remains little studied, leaving a blind spot in the understanding of the experience from the point of view of the artist or craftsman.

## *2.2 Experiential value in creative workshops: between emotions, aesthetics and cultural mediation*

The concept of experiential value, already widely used in experiential marketing, is based on aesthetic, emotional and relational dimensions, making the experience itself the main vector of value for the consumer (John and Supramaniam, 2024). In a context of creative tourism, this approach makes it possible to account not only for learning or simple participation, but also for the authenticity experienced, the attachment, the memorability and the symbolic meaning attributed to the experience (Makni et al., 2024).

Recent research confirms that emotional experiences, nostalgia, flow, aesthetics, social interaction, play a central role in co-value creation, by promoting engagement, deep satisfaction, and behaviors favorable to the destination (return, recommendation, loyalty) (Zhou et al., 2025). Furthermore, some studies highlight that the co-creation of tourist experience is based on several key dimensions, including authenticity, novelty, immersion, learning and interaction. They thus show that the value of a creative workshop goes beyond the act of creation itself and is based on the entire lived experience (Deng et al., 2024).

However, although these studies provide a solid conceptual framework, most remain focused on the tourist or on the measurable effects of co-creation (satisfaction, loyalty, behavior). In doing so, they largely omit the analysis of the role of artists or artisans as mediators of meaning, emotions and identity, yet these aesthetic and emotional dimensions are precisely what makes a creative workshop so appealing: the interaction with an artist, the sharing of know-how, the transmission of a tradition, sensitivity, bodily presence, cultural mediation.

The literature recognizes the social and cultural role of the artist, but rarely their place in the creation of tourist value (Fillis, 2015). However, the artist influences aesthetic perception (Dewey, 1934), emotional states (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997) and cultural mediation (Duffy, 2014), in a context where creativity is becoming an economic issue (Pyykkönen, 2015).

### **3. Methodology**

#### *3.1 Choice of research approach*

Given the emerging nature of the theme and the lack of previous work positioning the artist as an actor in the co-creation of experiential value, a qualitative exploratory approach was favored. This choice allows access to emotions, artistic sensitivity, relational mechanisms and meanings that tourists and artists attribute to their creative experiences (Charmaz, 2014; Patton, 2015).

#### *3.2 data collection methods*

Methodological triangulation was mobilized through two complementary devices: (1) semi-structured interviews and (2) participant observation enriched by photographic recordings (Appendices, table 1).

##### **3.2.1 Approach of the participant observations**

###### *Field and posture of the researcher*

Sixteen peripheral participant observations were made (Cléret, 2013) over a period of one year, spread over several months, during workshops of pottery, painting, sculpture, bookbinding, culinary arts, copper work offered by Tunisian tourist agencies. Each workshop welcomed an average of twenty participants of various nationalities and lasted approximately four hours. The study was based on direct paper-pencil observation, recording descriptive, analytical, and methodological notes in a field notebook, with a focus on the location, actors, and the course of activities (Dion and Sitz, 2013).

The researcher adopted a researcher-participant stance (Spradley, 1980), sharing activities with tourists and interacting directly with artists and artisans through the manufacture of objects, the manipulation of materials, and verbal exchanges. This immersion made it possible to grasp tacit dimensions difficult to obtain solely through interviews, such as artistic gestures, the emotional climate established by the artist, and micro-interactions of guidance, encouragement, and valorization.

###### *Data collection tool*

Observation was systematized using a grid inspired by visual ethnography (Pink, 2013), focusing on three main areas: artistic behaviors, including demonstration, guidance, correction, and evaluation; tourists' reactions and expressions, such as the emotions, concentration, feeling of pride, and engagement; and spatial and social dynamics, including proximity, collaboration, and verbal or non-verbal exchanges.

In parallel, an instrumented approach was implemented (Deslauriers, 1991) through the taking of 287 photographs during the 16 workshops, an average of approximately 18 shots per session (Appendices, Figure 1). For each workshop, eight photographs were selected to illustrate different aspects of the experience, including the manipulation of materials, interactions with artists, exchanges between participants, guidance gestures, and the staging of activities.

###### *Ethical considerations*

All photo taking were carried out in compliance with ethical rules. No recognizable face was published without the explicit consent of the participants. The artists and craftsmen agreed to be photographed in their professional role and the tourists were informed of the scientific and dissemination uses of the photos, with the possibility of withdrawal at any time.

##### **3.2.2 Course of semi-structured interviews**

In-depth individual semi-structured interviews were conducted to understand the posture, role and tensions felt by the artists, the experiential experience of the tourists, as well as the strategic and organizational vision of the workshop designers or mediators. Three categories of actors were selected. The Tunisian artists-craftsmen directly involved in the workshops were questioned to explore their role in the co-creation of experiential value and the interactions with the visitors. Domestic and international tourists were asked to report on their experience in these workshops. The Tunisian organizers and mediators, responsible for the design, programming and marketing of the workshops, were questioned to shed light on the strategic and organizational dimension of these activities.

A non-probabilistic and reasoned sampling was adopted in order to guarantee the theoretical relevance and the diversity of perspectives (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The selection of participants was based on the following criteria: being an artist-craftsman actively involved in a creative workshop in direct interaction with visitors, having participated in a creative workshop during the last six months for tourists and being involved in the design, coordination or marketing of workshops for organizers.

The data collection pursued theoretical saturation and resulted in a total of fifty-four interviews. This number reflects the recommended sample size for qualitative research, in which 70 to 80% of the essential information can be collected from eight to ten participants (Ragin, 1994; Kuzel, 1999).

*Interviews with artists.* Twenty-four interviews were conducted with Tunisian artists-craftsmen, aged 26 to 50, including sixteen men and eight women. This male predominance is mainly explained by the fact that certain traditional artisanal disciplines, such as sculpture, pottery or calligraphy on metal, have historically been practiced by men, due to the physical dimension of the work or inherited professional traditions. The interviews took place in their professional environment, within the workshops, allowing simultaneous observation of the creative device, the organization of the workspace, the implicit interactions and the aesthetic atmosphere (Appendices, table 2). The artists were invited to express themselves on their artistic identity in a tourist context, their role in the co-creation of value, the tensions that may arise between artistic, educational and commercial requirements, as well as the impact of their interactions with visitors on their practice and artistic sensibility.

*Interviews with tourists.* The interviews were carried out with Twenty-four domestic and international tourists, aged 26 to 44, comprising thirteen women and eleven men. The participants were from Tunisia, France, Germany, Italy and Spain, which allows us to cross-reference different cultural perceptions of the creative experience. The interviews were conducted face-to-face or by videoconference, depending on the availability of the participants (Appendices, table 3). This double modality made it possible to collect both immediate impressions after the experience and more stabilized memories when they were carried out remotely (Tung and Ritchie, 2011). The discussions focused on aesthetic, emotional and sensory feelings, the perception of the relationship with the artist, the learning and co-creation processes, as well as the authenticity of the experience, personal commitment and overall satisfaction.

*Interviews with organizers or mediators.* Six interviews were carried out with organizers and cultural mediators, aged 36 to 50, comprising four men and two women. The interviews took place mainly in person, allowing detailed information to be collected on the organization of workshops, the selection of artists, the staging of the tourist experience as well as organizational and institutional constraints and cultural and tourist development strategies (Appendices, table 4).

Each interview, lasting forty to fifty minutes, made it possible to explore the participants' experiences in depth while minimizing their cognitive fatigue, in accordance with the recommendations of Evrard et al. (2009) and Braun and Clarke (2021). All interviews were recorded with the explicit consent of the participants.

#### *Ethical considerations*

The research protocol respected the ethical principles in force in qualitative studies (Seidman, 2006; Tracy, 2010). The participants were informed of the objectives of the study, the scientific use of the data and their right to withdraw at any time. The names of the participants, workshops and places have been anonymized and the recordings have been stored securely.

### *3.3 Data analysis approach*

#### *3.3.1 Preparation of qualitative data for analysis*

All observation notes were first cross-referenced with audio recordings to ensure a faithful restitution of the participants' speeches and actions (Pellemans, 1999; Giannelloni & Vernet, 2001, 2012; Andreani et al., 2005). This preliminary step aimed to ensure the accuracy of the raw data before processing.

When the interviews with tourists were conducted in a language other than French, particularly in Arabic dialect for Tunisian participants or in English, German, Italian, Spanish depending on the nationality of the participants, a back-translation procedure was applied (Carricano et al., 2010). The verbatim transcripts were translated into French by a specialized translator, then translated back into the original language by a second independent translator. The systematic comparison of the two versions made it possible to verify the fidelity of the content and to limit interpretation biases (Miles et al., 2005).

The final transcription was thus developed from the translated and validated versions, which ensured linguistic coherence and respect for the original meaning. This familiarization phase, described as "data discovery" by Pellemans (1999), resulted in a complete corpus transcribed in 227 pages, entirely ready for analysis.

#### *3.3.2 Analysis method of content of qualitative data*

We conducted an inductive thematic analysis inspired by Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, 2017; Charmaz, 2014), assisted by QDA Miner, whose effectiveness has been demonstrated in several marketing studies (Kim & Yoon, 2013; Dickinger & Lalicic, 2016).

### 3.3.3 Reliability and validity measures of the qualitative study

To ensure the reliability of our analysis, a double coding was carried out in accordance with the recommendations of Masmoudi & El Aoud (2021) and Touzani (2013). Five representative interviews, covering both categories of participants (managers and tourists) and the diversity of topics covered, were coded independently by the author and a research assistant (Drucker-Godard et al., 1999; Giannelloni & Vernet, 2001; Bardin, 2003). The consistency of the interpretations was evaluated using three reliability indicators. The results showed a Scott's Pi of 0.76, exceeding the acceptable threshold of 0.70 (Lombard et al., 2004), a Krippendorff's alpha of 0.73, described as "good" by Giannelloni & Vernet (2012), and an overall agreement rate of 84 %, higher than the recommended threshold of 80 % (Ronan & Latham, 1974). These results confirm the reliability and consistency of the coding, thus allowing the interpretation of the data to be continued with confidence.

The validity of this qualitative research was evaluated along two axes (Andreani and Conchon in 2003 and 2005). Methodological validity was ensured by a rigorous examination of the quality of the sample, data collection methods, and analysis instruments. The validity of the analysis, on the other hand, was guaranteed by respecting the criteria of interpretive, experiential, and internal validity.

## 4. Results and discussion

The results revolve around four main themes, each including sub-themes: the role of the artist as a catalyst for the creative experience, learning and reinforcing confidence and positive emotions, authenticity and cultural immersion, as well as the artist's contribution to cultural branding and local development.

### 4.1 The artist as a catalyst for the creative tourist experience

The analysis of observations and interviews highlights that the artist plays a central role in the co-creation of the experience, going far beyond simple technical transmission. The artist acts as a cultural, emotional, and aesthetic mediator. These results confirm and enrich the work of Richards & Raymond (2000), Binkhorst & Den Dekker (2013) and Sharma et al. (2025) on co-creation and the active involvement of tourists, and align with Zatori et al. (2018) on the importance of personalized support to promote participation and satisfaction.

#### 4.1.1 Transmission of local and heritage know-how

The tourists indicated that the artist's accompaniment allowed them to understand the cultural and historical context of the art practiced; *"Working with the craftsman allowed me to feel the heritage, not just look at it."* (Tourist 1, Female, 27 years old). An artist also stated: *"My role is to tell the story behind each gesture, not just to show how to do it."* (Artist A1, Male, 32 years old). We also noticed, during the workshops, that the participants attentively observed the artist's gestures, reproduced the techniques, and exchanged ideas on the origin and meaning of artisanal practices. A cultural mediator from the workshops added: *"We ensure that each visitor understands the context and leaves with real knowledge."* (O3, Male, 50 years old).

This illustrates the importance of interaction and dialogue with local actors to reinforce perceived authenticity (Lu et al., 2022; Capelli & Sabadie, 2007).

#### 4.1.2 Personalization of the interaction

The artists adapt their instructions and value individual initiatives, reinforcing the feeling of active participation and personal recognition; *"He showed me a different way of doing it, adapted to my hand. It gave me confidence."* (Tourist 5, Female, 33 years old). An artist commented: *"I always try to understand how each participant can express themselves through their style."* (Artist A6, Male, 29 years old). During the pottery workshop, we observed that the artist encouraged each participant to develop their style, corrected individually, and congratulated original ideas, thus creating a motivating and stimulating climate.

These elements confirm that adapting to individual needs increases engagement and satisfaction (Tan et al., 2014; Sheldon et al., 2001).

#### 4.1.3 Stimulation of curiosity and exploration

The participants show a keen interest in discovering raw materials and the different stages of creation, reinforcing their cognitive and sensory engagement; *"I was curious to know how each color was chosen. I tested all the options!"* (Tourist 9, Female, 31 years old). An artist pointed out: *"I encourage them to touch, mix, experiment. It's by testing that they really learn."* (Artist A3, Male, 28 years old). We observed that the participants manipulated different pigments, touched the fabrics or clay, experimented, and exchanged ideas with each other on the stages

of creation. This shows how the artist simultaneously encourages individual creativity and collective learning, an aspect less documented in the literature.

#### 4.1.4 Creation of an aesthetic and emotional atmosphere

The artist's posture, style, and creativity generate pleasure, wonder, and aesthetic satisfaction, intensifying the lived experience; *"Each gesture of the artist inspired me, I wanted to reproduce their fluidity and attention to detail."* (Tourist 2, Male, 35 years old); *"Just by watching his gestures, I was amazed. Each movement seemed to tell a story."* (Tourist 4, Male, 41 years old). An artist commented: *"I want each gesture to have meaning and awaken emotions."* (Artist A11, Male, 33 years old). We noticed during the workshops that the participants smiled spontaneously, tilted their heads to observe the details, and exchanged admiring comments. This enriches the literature on experiential marketing and creative tourism, highlighting the central role of the emotional and sensory dimension in the perception of success and pleasure.

#### 4.2 Contribution to learning, confidence, and self-esteem

The artist not only promotes technical and cognitive learning, but also the personal and psychological development of the participants, which is in line with Zhou and George (2001) and Proctor and Burnett (2004) on the relationship between creativity, learning and satisfaction. These results also align with studies on experiential tourism (Hoffman et al., 2010; Susnea & Vasiliu, 2016) and highlight the emotional and sensory dimension.

##### 4.2.1 Skill acquisition and personal development

Participants acquire new skills while exploring cultural and symbolic dimensions; *"I never thought I could create this dish or painting. I feel so capable now"* (Tourist 15, Female, 30 years old). A workshop coordinator added: *"We see visitors gain confidence as soon as they succeed with their first piece"* (O5, Male, 42 years old). We observed that the participants repeated the gestures, tried different techniques and took photos of their achievements to keep a record of their learning.

##### 4.2.2 Feeling of accomplishment and pride

The feeling of accomplishment and pride are reinforced by the experience; *"Holding my finished work gave me a real sense of accomplishment"* (Tourist 19, Female, 27 years old). A craftswoman commented: *"Seeing their eyes shine when they finish a piece is the greatest reward for me"* (Artist A14, Female, 44 years old). During the workshops, we noticed that the participants showed their creations to others, smiled broadly and exchanged congratulations, illustrating how the creative experience contributes to personal satisfaction.

##### 4.2.3 Strengthening self-confidence and curiosity

Self-confidence and curiosity are stimulated: *"I dared to try something new and it worked, I feel more confident to create other things"* (Tourist 3, Female, 29 years old). A chef from the workshop noted: *"Encouraging experimentation and accepting mistakes is essential to stimulate their creativity"* (Artist A24, Female, 40 years old). We found that participants asked for additional advice, took creative initiatives, and explored different ways to personalize their achievements, showing the stimulating effect on individual and collective creativity.

##### 4.2.4 Positive emotions and overall satisfaction

The creative experience strongly influences emotions and overall satisfaction; *"I'm really surprised at what I managed to create, it's rewarding!"* (Tourist 12, Male, 40 years old), *"I was intimidated at first, but now I feel proud and satisfied"* (Tourist 6, Male, 38 years old). The head of cultural activities for the workshops emphasized: *"Visitors leave with positive emotions and often the desire to return"* (O2, Female, 39 years old). We observed that the participants exchanged smiles, applauded their own achievements, enthusiastically discussed their progress and wanted to share their works on social networks, confirming the importance of the emotional and sensory dimensions.

#### 4.3 Strengthening authenticity and immersion

Direct interaction with the artist promotes a more authentic immersion in the local culture, where participants perceive the artist as a guarantor of authenticity. These elements confirm MacCannell (1976) and Richards (2018) on the importance of the immersive experience to strengthen the connection with the local culture.

##### 4.3.1 Authentic cultural immersion

A participant indicated: *"You really feel that this technique is part of the village's history"* (Tourist 7, Female, 26 years old). An artisan completed: *"Every gesture tells the story of our community"* (Artist A4, Male, 37 years old). We observed during the workshops that the participants listened attentively to the artist's stories and anecdotes, repeated the traditional gestures, and asked questions about the origin and meaning of the techniques.

#### 4.3.2 Memorable moments

The moments experienced are perceived as memorable; "*This will remain etched in my memory, it's much more than a workshop*" (Tourist 23, Female, 28 years old). A workshop project manager specified: "*We want each workshop to leave a lasting and unique impression*" (O6, Male, 38 years old). Throughout the activity, it appears to us that the participants spontaneously take notes, capture photos, and share their impressions, demonstrating the intensity and value given to the experience.

#### 4.4 The artist as an actor in cultural branding and local development

Interviews with organizers and artisans indicate that the artist contributes to the valorization of intangible heritage and the differentiation of the tourist offer, while creating a lasting link between the visitor and the territory, confirming Kotler et al. (2002), Richards (2011) and Chen et al. (2017).

##### 4.4.1 Valorization of heritage and differentiation of the offer

The artist strongly contributes to the differentiation of the creative tourist offer thanks to the quality of the interaction, their cultural mediation, and their ability to awaken the curiosity of visitors. They thus reinforce the identity and image of the destination; "*We left with a real piece of your culture, not just an object*" (Tourist 10, Male, 37 years old). The head of workshop design and coordination added: "*The artisan transmits a story that truly distinguishes our offer*" (O1, Male, 45 years old). During the workshops, we observed that tourists emphasize the uniqueness of local techniques and take notes on the materials used, reinforcing the identity and image of the destination.

##### 4.4.2 Creating a lasting link with the territory

Some tourists stated that "*I want to come back to discover other workshops and meet the same artists*" (Tourist 16, Male, 42 years old); "*Visitors leave with more than objects, they take away a piece of our culture and want to come back*" (Tourist 20, Male, 39 years old). A marketing and sales manager for the workshops commented: "*The creative experience promotes loyalty and positive word-of-mouth*" (O4, Female, 36 years old). We noticed that the participants exchanged their contacts, asked questions about other local activities, and showed a marked interest in the culture and history of the destination, illustrating the impact of creative experiences on loyalty and positive word-of-mouth.

### 5. Conclusion

The local artist-craftsman plays a central role in the creative tourist experience, as an aesthetic, emotional, and identity mediator. Through co-creation with visitors, they enrich the tourist experience while contributing to experiential branding and the cultural image of the destination. Their recognition is essential to value local know-how, strengthen territorial identity, and support the sustainability and competitiveness of creative territories.

#### 5.1 Contributions

##### 5.1.1 Theoretical contributions

This research proposes several theoretical contributions in the field of tourism marketing and creative tourism, positioning itself as one of the first exploratory studies, to our knowledge, to examine the role of the artist in the creative tourist experience.

First, it strengthens the understanding of co-creation by highlighting that the artist acts as a catalyst for the experience, mobilizing emotional, aesthetic, and cultural dimensions. This observation enriches existing co-creation models (Richards & Raymond, 2000; Sharma et al., 2025) by integrating a sensory and emotional dimension that has been little explored in the literature until now.

Next, the study provides elements on authenticity and immersion, showing that participation in the workshops promotes an authentic and memorable experience, connecting technical learning and cultural understanding. This emotional and sensory dimension complements the work on perceived authenticity (MacCannell, 1976; Richards, 2018) and contributes to broadening the conception of the creative tourism experience as an integrative phenomenon, combining learning, pleasure, and cultural engagement.

Furthermore, the results highlight a link between creativity, learning, and personal development. Participation in the workshops seems to stimulate not only the acquisition of skills, but also self-confidence, pride, and curiosity, which contributes to the theoretical understanding of self-perceived creativity and its potential links with tourist behavior (Zhou & George, 2001; Proctor & Burnett, 2004; Hoffman et al., 2010).

Finally, this study suggests an extension of cultural loyalty and branding models, showing that the artist can play a role in building a lasting link between the visitor and the territory, and in the positive perception of the cultural and heritage offer. These observations complement the work on territorial and cultural marketing (Kotler et al., 2002; Chen et al., 2017), highlighting dimensions that are still poorly documented in the literature.

### 5.1.2 Methodological contributions

On the methodological level, this research constitutes a notable contribution by mobilizing a combined approach based on participant observation, the taking of photos as a tool for capturing actions and interactions, as well as individual interviews carried out. The articulation of these three sources of data made it possible to cross-reference observable behaviors, speeches, and expressed perceptions, thus offering a fine, contextualized, and holistic understanding of the unfolding of the creative workshops.

### 5.1.3 Managerial contributions and practical implications

This research proposes several managerial contributions and opens up avenues for action that can be directly mobilized by creative tourism actors, workshop organizers, and cultural institutions. The results show that the design of experiences can be strengthened by taking into account the individual needs of the participants, by stimulating their spontaneous creativity, and by promoting social interactions. Organizers can thus further personalize the workshops by providing, for example, a short introductory moment where the artist presents the history of the technique, illustrated by objects, photos, or archives, in order to contextualize the know-how and initiate immersion.

To improve participant engagement throughout the activity, it is recommended to provide individual support time, even brief, reinforcing the perception of personalized support and encouraging everyone to dare to create. The addition of stations of varied material (tools, pigments, textures) in free access also stimulates curiosity, sensory exploration, and creativity.

The research then highlights the importance of valuing local heritage by positioning the artist as a true cultural mediator. This valorization can be achieved through the systematic integration of a cultural narrative associated with the practice or by displaying in the workshop venue an explanatory sheet retracing the origin of the techniques and the role of local artisans. Destinations can also strengthen their cultural image by highlighting the artist as an identity figure, by presenting his portrait, his story, his works, or his involvement in the community.

Furthermore, creative workshops appear to be an effective way to foster a lasting connection between visitors and the destination. Tourism stakeholders can extend the experience by sending a personalized thank-you message, accompanied by a photo taken during the workshop, by recommending other cultural activities, or by creating an online group to share achievements. Providing a roadmap of creative experiences can also encourage visitors to return to complete a series of workshops.

The training of artists is another essential lever. A short training course (2–3 hours) in cultural mediation, small group management and animation techniques can strengthen their ability to transmit their know-how, welcome participants and create an atmosphere conducive to creative expression. This approach harmonizes practices and ensures a consistent quality of the experiences offered.

Finally, tourism managers can use workshop photos, verbatim and produced creations as communication supports. A simple device can be set up: a photo space where participants pose with their creation, an online gallery grouping the works created, or a QR code allowing instant sharing on social networks. These tools promote word-of-mouth, enhance the visibility of the offer and help to disseminate a more authentic and emotional image of the destination.

### 5.2. Limitations and future directions

This research has several limitations that open up avenues for further investigation. It is mainly based on a qualitative approach using participant observation and individual interviews. While this method makes it possible to grasp with precision the experiential dynamics and the meanings attributed by visitors, it nevertheless restricts the scope of the results, which cannot be easily transposed to other types of workshops or to other territorial contexts. In addition, the data were collected from a limited number of creative workshops and in particular situations, which may affect the variety of behaviors observed and perceptions expressed.

The research also focuses on the in-situ dimension of the experiment, without including systematic longitudinal follow-up. Although the interviews reveal intentions to review or recommend, it remains impossible to evaluate their achievement over time. The long-term effects of the creative experience on attachment to the destination and on post-visit behaviors thus remain partially explored.

A first way in the future would be to complete this qualitative approach with quantitative or mixed devices, allowing for a larger-scale examination of the identified mechanisms. The implementation of analytical models or surveys with more diverse visitors would provide an opportunity to test the transferability of results to other workshops or destinations.

Moreover, the absence of longitudinal follow-up invites to conduct research focused on the temporality of the experiment. Panel studies, post-visit surveys or the use of digital tools such as e-mailing, social platforms or digital logbooks would make it possible to observe how declared intentions materialize, as well as to analyze the evolution of memory and emotions associated with creative activity.

Finally, a final track consists in examining more deeply the conditions favoring the sustainability of creative engagement. It would be particularly relevant to study how visitors reinvest the skills acquired in their daily lives, how their relationship with local culture is transformed after the experience, or to what extent they develop a prolonged interest in other creative activities. Such investigations would contribute to a better understanding of the potential of creative tourism as a vector for continuous learning, sustainable cultural participation and gradual construction of territorial attachment.

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## APPENDICES

Table 1. Qualitative survey design

Data Collection Method	Sample	Objectives	Sample Size	Mode / Setting	Data Collected
Semi-structured individual interviews	54	- Understand the role of artists, the tourists' lived experience, and the strategic vision of organizers/mediators	- Artists/crafts people (n = 24) - Tourists (n = 24) - Organizers/mediators (n = 6)	- In-person or via videoconference depending on availability	- Verbal transcripts - Observation notes
Peripheral participant observation	16 creative workshops (pottery, painting, sculpture, bookbinding, culinary arts, copperwork)	- Capture tacit dimensions of the experience: gestures, interactions, atmosphere, micro-behaviors	- Artists and tourists present in the creative workshops	- In-person researcher participant stance	- Field notes - Analytical notebook - 287 photographs



Figure 1. Photographs taken during the workshop observations

Table 2: Profile of artists and craftspeople participating in the interviews

ID	Age	Gender	Artistic discipline	Interview mode
A1	32	Male	Pottery	In-person
A2	45	Male	Sculpture	
A3	28	Male	Ceramic Painting	
A4	37	Male	Weaving	
A5	50	Male	Traditional Embroidery	
A6	29	Male	Artisan Jewelry	
A7	41	Male	Arabic Calligraphy	
A8	35	Female	Traditional Cuisine	
A9	26	Male	Wood Painting	
A10	48	Male	Metal Sculpture	
A11	33	Male	Pottery	
A12	39	Male	Weaving	
A13	31	Female	Traditional Embroidery	
A14	44	Female	Artisan Jewelry	
A15	36	Male	Ceramic Painting	
A16	30	Male	Arabic Calligraphy	
A17	42	Female	Traditional Cuisine	
A18	27	Male	Sculpture	
A19	34	Female	Weaving	
A20	46	Male	Pottery	
A21	29	Female	Traditional Embroidery	

A22	38	Female	Artisan Jewelry	
A23	32	Male	Wood Painting	
A24	40	Female	Traditional Cuisine	

Table 3: Profile of tourists interviewed

ID	Age	Gender	Nationality	Interview Mode
T1	27	Female	Tunisian	In-person
T2	35	Male	French	In-person
T3	29	Female	German	Videoconference
T4	41	Male	Tunisian	Videoconference
T5	33	Female	Italian	Videoconference
T6	38	Male	Tunisian	In-person
T7	26	Female	French	In-person
T8	44	Male	Spanish	Videoconference
T9	31	Female	Tunisian	In-person
T10	37	Male	German	In-person
T11	28	Female	Italian	Videoconference
T12	40	Male	Tunisian	In-person
T13	32	Female	French	Videoconference
T14	36	Male	Spanish	Videoconference
T15	30	Female	German	In-person
T16	42	Male	Tunisian	In-person
T17	29	Female	French	Videoconference
T18	34	Male	Italian	In-person
T19	27	Female	Tunisian	In-person
T20	39	Male	German	Videoconference
T21	33	Female	Spanish	In-person
T22	41	Male	Tunisian	Videoconference
T23	28	Female	Italian	In-person
T24	36	Male	French	In-person

Table 4: Profile of interviewed workshop management stakeholders

ID	Age	Gender	Role / Position	Interview Mode
O1	45	Male	Head of Workshop Design and Coordination	In-person
O2	39	Female	Head of Cultural Animation of Workshops	
O3	50	Male	Cultural Mediator of Workshops	
O4	36	Female	Marketing and Workshop Commercialization Manager	
O5	42	Male	Workshop Coordinator	
O6	38	Male	Workshop Project Manager	