

CHANGING PERSPECTIVES: THE ROLE OF CREATIVE INDUSTRIES IN SOCIAL INNOVATION PROJECTS TO EMPOWER LOCAL COMMUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the notions of social life as we know them, so it is important to develop and mediate projects that meet the contexts of great social transformation we live. The COVID-19 crisis also affected rural areas that have sought to control rural exodus. However, new opportunities emerged for rural territories as the world adapted to the pandemic. In the central region of Portugal, the Association for the Integrated Development of the Mountain Villages Network, through its *Mountain Villages* project, seeks to promote the regional development of these cultural territories. For this purpose, it has been developing social innovation projects with enormous potential for the region's social, economic, and cultural development. The association has begun creating two social innovation projects essential in developing the communities located in the Mountain Villages: the *Queijeiras Project* and the *Cooperativa Coworking Spaces @Mountain Villages*. This article presents both projects and emphasizes the importance of practices that lead to the positive development of society through the convening of creativity and creative industries in social innovation projects. The professional work and fieldwork carried out at the Association for the Integrated Development of the Mountain Villages Network and the Mountain Villages territories frame the study conducted, as do interviews and questionnaires with people and entities linked to the projects. The results presented in the article demonstrate how both projects are extremely valuable to understand the importance of building possibilities for the reinterpretation and empowerment of local communities that are often neglected. Furthermore, they also reveal an expansion from the local to the global, that is, an interaction of global environments with local cultures, creating an intercultural space so important in our globalized world.

KEYWORDS

local communities, social development, creative industries, social innovation, empowerment

MUDANDO PERSPETIVAS: O PAPEL DAS INDÚSTRIAS CRIATIVAS EM PROJETOS DE INOVAÇÃO SOCIAL PARA EMPODERAR AS COMUNIDADES LOCAIS

RESUMO

A pandemia da COVID-19 afetou as noções de vida social tal como as conhecemos, pelo que é importante desenvolver e mediar projetos que vão ao encontro dos contextos de grande transformação social em que vivemos. A crise causada pela pandemia também afetou as zonas rurais que têm procurado controlar o êxodo rural. No entanto, surgiram novas oportunidades para os territórios rurais à medida que o mundo se começou a adaptar à pandemia. Na região centro de Portugal, a Associação de Desenvolvimento Integrado da Rede das Aldeias de Montanha, através do seu projeto *Aldeias de Montanha*, procura dinamizar a promoção destes territórios culturais. Para o efeito, tem vindo a desenvolver projetos de inovação social com enorme potencial para o desenvolvimento social, económico e cultural da região. A associação criou dois projetos de inovação social essenciais no desenvolvimento das comunidades localizadas nas Aldeias de Montanha: *Projeto Queijeiras* e *Espaços Cooperativa Coworks @Aldeias de Montanha*. Este artigo apresenta ambos os projetos e sublinha a importância das práticas que conduzem ao desenvolvimento positivo da sociedade através da convocação de indústrias culturais e criativas em projetos de inovação social. O trabalho profissional e o trabalho de campo realizado na Associação de Desenvolvimento Integrado da Rede das Aldeias de Montanha e dos territórios das Aldeias de Montanha enquadram o estudo realizado, assim como entrevistas e questionários com pessoas e entidades ligadas aos projetos. Os resultados apresentados no artigo demonstram como ambos os projetos são extremamente valiosos para entender a importância de construir possibilidades para a reinterpretção e capacitação das comunidades locais que são muitas vezes negligenciadas. Além disso, também revelam uma expansão do local para o global, isto é, uma interação de ambientes globais com culturas locais, criando um espaço intercultural tão importante no nosso mundo globalizado.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

comunidades locais, desenvolvimento social, indústrias criativas, inovação social, capacitação

1. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 crisis was initially seen as a challenge for rural areas. However, adapting to the pandemic sprung new opportunities for rural territories. The current global context led to the creation of two social innovation projects, employing creativity and elements of the creative industries, leading to the empowerment of local communities.

This article seeks to demonstrate how the *Queijeiras Project* and *Cooperativa Coworking Spaces @Mountain Villages*, as cultural and social creative interventions, have important roles in developing and disseminating a given geographic context. The first part of the article presents a literature review about the social innovation projects' use of creativity to empower local communities. The following two subsections describe the Association for the Integrated Development of the Mountain Villages Network (Adiram) and Mountain Villages. Subsequently, two social innovation projects, *Queijeiras Project* and *Cooperative Spaces-Coworks @Mountain Villages*, are analyzed. Finally, the last section presents the conclusions.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. POSITIVE DEVELOPMENT OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES: CREATIVITY AS A KEY POINT

The positive development of local communities requires the employment of strategies. Creativity has appeared as a key point to that development in recent years. Creativity is a mental ability and human behavior. It is influenced by various social, developmental, and educational experiences (Andriopoulos, 2000; Runco & Sakamoto, 1999). This literature review attempts to give a broader account of the various definitions of the term.

According to Arthur Cropley (2011), we can use the word “creativity” in three ways:

it refers to a set of processes (e.g., “creative” thinking), a cluster of personal characteristics of people (e.g., the “creative” personality), and to results (e.g., a “creative” product). Thus, creativity is treated as both a cause (e.g., creative processes yield products; peoples’ creativity causes them to behave in a certain way) and also as an effect or result (a certain kind of product resulting from person and process). (p. 512)

Modern research about creativity has its origins in 1950, when J. P. Guilford (1950), in his presidential address, called the attention of the American Psychological Association to focus on this area.

Creativity includes two dimensions. The novelty notion considers it an everyday phenomenon and assumes that anyone can be creative. It is regarded as something essential for the person to contribute to the business environment, but this notion also believes that everybody should be involved in creative processes. The second dimension, related to the usefulness notion, refers to the material or practical methods of assessing the usefulness of new ideas (Shalley et al., 2004).

Creativity involves two principles: problem finding and problem-solving. That is essential because creativity is able not only to generate new ideas or to increase efficiencies but also to solve complex problems (DiLiello & Houghton, 2008). Besides, understanding creativity is important because it is extremely relevant for us to recognize the industry that carries its name: the creative industry.

2.2. CREATIVE INDUSTRIES AND THE GROWTH OF THE CREATIVE SECTOR

The 1990s, especially in Australia and the United Kingdom, saw the origins of the concept of the creative economy, leading to the introduction and use of the term “creative industries” in policy development circles. According to the United Kingdom government’s Department for Culture, Media and Sport (2001), “creative industries are those industries that have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent that have the potential to create employment and wealth through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property” (p. 5).

In many regions, the creative sector is growing rapidly. Creative economy and the creative industries retain several qualities useful from the point of view of local

development, namely their potential for social development and the inclusion of the entire community. In this way, creative industries are more than ever a key input for businesses and public authorities to publicize their territory.

Nowadays, as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (2021) website states, “the creative economy has also gained significant traction as a lever for local sustainable development, particularly over the past two decades” (para. 6). The creative economy’s potential for sustainable development has grown throughout the years, including aspects of public policy agenda, such as economic growth, education and skills, social inclusion, ecological transition, and social innovation and citizenship (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2021).

2.3. SOCIAL INNOVATION: SUMMONING CREATIVITY AND THE CREATIVE INDUSTRIES

The COVID-19 crisis worsened the complex social, economic, and environmental contexts with which the world was already being challenged. The concept of social innovation appears as a new means to address such issues, working as a sustainable solution (Howaldt et al., 2015, p. 29). Using sustainable strategies and innovative approaches, we help to preserve the landscape as cultural heritage (Lekic & Milovanovic, 2018).

The concept of social innovation is commonly referred to as “new ideas that work in meeting social goals” (Mulgan et al., 2007, p. 8). That is a wide definition of the term. Mulgan et al. (2007) also refer to social innovation as “innovative activities and services that are motivated by the goal of meeting a social need and that are predominantly developed and diffused through organizations whose primary purposes are social” (p. 8).

Nicholls et al. (2015) pointed out two interlinked conceptualizations of social innovation. According to them, the first is related to changes in social relations, focusing on readjusting power disparities created by economic inequalities in society (Mehmood & Parra, 2013). The second conceptualization presents social innovation as a response to social market failures in providing vital public goods (Nicholls et al., 2015).

In addition, Manzini (2014) unravels the concept of innovation and emphasizes:

Social Innovation is a process of change emerging from the creative recombination of existing assets (from social capital to historical heritage, from traditional craftsmanship to accessible advanced technology), the aim of which is to achieve socially recognized goals in a new way. (p. 57)

Here, creativity in social innovation is advanced as a crucial factor in creating innovative things.

2.4. EMPOWERING LOCAL COMMUNITIES: USING ELEMENTS OF THE CREATIVE INDUSTRIES IN SOCIAL INNOVATION PROJECTS

Another concept appears when we describe the concepts referred to before: the concept of empowerment. Empowerment can be seen as an outcome of processes aimed at

undoing negative social constructions so that people, in this case, residents, can understand how they can influence their surroundings. Rappaport (1987) describes empowerment as “a process, a mechanism by which people, organizations, and communities gain mastery over their affairs” (p. 122). Empowerment can be divided into several types: psychological, social, political, economic, and environmental (Strzelecka et al., 2017).

Empowerment is essential and plays a pivotal role in community development. Through it, people obtain the ability to become more aware of their interests, having the possibility to make part of the discussion. In this case, the local communities, often neglected and which usually stay outside the decision-making process, gain a voice (Strzelecka et al., 2017).

When put into practice, all the concepts referred before can help empower local communities and lead local identities to collide with global flows, bringing the concept of “glocal”.

2.5. “GLOCAL” AS A HYBRID SPACE TO PUSH LIMITS

The interaction between global cultural flows with local environments results in the “glocal”. According to *The Oxford Dictionary of New Words* (1991, as cited in Robertson, 1995), the term “glocal” and the process noun “glocalization” are:

formed by telescoping global and local to make a blend; the idea is modelled on Japanese dochakuka (deriving from dochaku “living on one’s own land”), originally the agricultural principle of adapting one’s farming techniques to local conditions, but also adopted in Japanese for global localization, a global outlook adapted to local conditions. More specifically, the terms “glocal” and “glocalization” became aspects of business jargon during the 1980s. By now it has become (...) “one of the main marketing buzzwords of the beginning of the nineties”. (p. 28)

Different influences interconnect with the application of global concepts to local cultural territory, creating space for something new, subversive, creative, and innovative. Following this line of thought, Adiram, with the project *Mountain Villages*, used social innovation projects combining local and global aspects. In this way, such projects help nourish and develop the cultural territories and the communities of Serra da Estrela and Serra da Gardunha.

These projects keep the traditions and identity of the villages but use and practise them with the help of globalized and technological sources. This connection creates a hybrid space at the junction of a local environment with global influences. A hybrid space that pushes limits creates change and opens new spaces for local communities’ social and economic development.

3. METHODOLOGY: JOINING PRACTICE WITH THEORY

To create this article based on the case studies of Adiram and the project *Mountain Villages*, it was used qualitative data. The article focuses on the description of the activities developed at Adiram and on the association's work and projects, including creating social innovation projects summoning elements of the creative industries to develop the Mountain Villages' local territories and communities.

To better address the issue, one of the authors developed professional and fieldwork at Adiram. Her professional experience began on February 15, 2021, and ended on June 11, 2021, while doing her curricular internship in the association. During that time at Adiram, she developed several tasks, such as creating databases, social media management, translation and text revision, and fieldwork, mainly through press trips. Additionally, she helped create one questionnaire for the *Queijeiras Project*, presented below. She was also able to work with the coworking spaces project, *Cooperativa Coworking Spaces @Mountain Villages*, which will be analyzed in some of the following sections and subsections.

Additionally, she used theoretical research to frame her professional experience at Adiram and better address the issues established throughout the paper. In terms of bibliographic research, it was used especially Google, Scielo, and EBSCO repositories, books, and documents from the Porto Accounting and Business School library and the library of the Center for Intercultural Studies.

The professional experience achieved in the association, the fieldwork in the Mountain Villages, and the contact with professionals and the local communities linked with the academic research developed led to the descriptions made in this article.

3.1. THE ASSOCIATION FOR THE INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT OF THE MOUNTAIN VILLAGES NETWORK

The first step towards creating a network to develop the territory of Mountain Villages was taken on April 22, 2012. Adiram was established and registered at Seia notary's office (Associação de Desenvolvimento Integrado da Rede das Aldeias de Montanha, 2012). The association's headquarters are currently located at Serra da Estrela Interpretation Center.

The main goal of Adiram is to promote the integrated and touristic development of the Mountain Villages network as a brand that aggregates the tourist potential of the region of Serra da Estrela and Serra da Gardunha through sustainability, innovation, and creativity.

3.2. THE MOUNTAIN VILLAGES PROJECT

Following the creation of Adiram, the *Mountain Villages* project was created to value the unique endogenous characteristics of Serra da Estrela and Serra da Gardunha. Mountain Villages is a group of villages located in the center of Portugal, under the scope

of Tourism Center of Portugal, between the Serra da Estrela Natural Park and the Serra da Gardunha Protected Landscape.

These Mountain Villages are distributed over nine municipalities: Covilhã, Seia, Guarda, Manteigas, Celorico da Beira, Oliveira do Hospital, Gouveia, Fundão, and Fornos de Algodres. The project combines three axes: nature, people (tradition, culture) and gastronomy.

The work developed by Adiram in the Mountain Villages territories has generated employment. It has led to the assertion of these cultural territories as a national reference both in environmental and sustainable terms (Associação de Desenvolvimento Integrado da Rede das Aldeias de Montanha, 2012).

4. ANALYSIS

The search for the positive social, economic and cultural development of the Mountain Villages led to social innovation projects to empower and develop the communities of the Mountain Villages: *Queijeiras Project* and *Cooperative Spaces-Coworks @ Mountain Villages*. They represent an innovative way to transform and regenerate the analyzed territories, building possibilities and empowering the local community.

The first project, *Queijeiras Project*, is related to empowering the female community of the Mountain Villages through traditional knowledge, arts, and crafts. The second project, *Cooperative Spaces-Coworks @ Mountain Villages*, is linked to the empowerment and development of the community through the creation of coworking spaces, thus, creating a new type of visitor, the digital nomad, but also developing several activities in which the members of the communities can participate.

4.1. EMPOWERMENT AND RECOGNITION: THE SPECIFIC CASE OF THE *QUEIJEIRAS PROJECT*

The *Queijeiras Project* aligns the innovation and entrepreneurship strategy of the Mountain Villages network action plan, integrated with the *Experimentation Villages of Knowledge Hub* under the PROVERE iNature Collective Efficiency Strategy co-financed by Centro 2020. The project was launched on March 27, 2021. The *queijeiras* (women cheesemakers) of Serra da Estrela are responsible for one of the region's most traditional and sought-after product: cheese (<https://queijeiras.pt/>). Thus, they play an important role in that territory's social, cultural, and economic development.

However, nowadays, and in all sectors of society, some women still do not receive the personal and professional recognition they should, despite their unique and fundamental role. That has been happening with the women cheesemakers for several years. These women deserve a protagonist role in this success story. Hence, to value their art and knowledge, the decision was made to develop a special project to recognize the work of the extraordinary women responsible for this globally recognized product.

As the Queijeiras website states:

this is a project for women, carried out by women. It will benefit (at least) 40 *Queijeiras* from 9 municipalities, but we have the ambition to increase this number. The *Queijeiras* project arises to honor these women and contribute to their personal and professional development. (Queijeiras, n.d.-d, para. 5)

The way chosen to create the project consists of three steps (Queijeiras, n.d.-d). The first one corresponds to the design of an exclusive burel cape, representing the boldness of innovation. The second one involves content production, the creation of a book to celebrate tradition. Finally, the last one includes the training of soft skills to allow knowledge sharing.

4.1.1. HONORING THROUGH DESIGN: THE BUREL CAPE

As part of the cultural and creative industries, the design brings recognition to women cheesemakers. The first step was the design of a cape by designer Sandra Pinho.

Creative design is expressed in several ways by creating unique decorative items. Design products are usually aesthetic, but they also fulfill a function based on concepts and specifications. Creative designs fit into the “functional creations” category that United Nations Conference on Trade and Development defined for creative industries (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development & United Nations Development Programme, 2010):

it is the result of creativity expressed as a knowledge-based economic activity, which produces goods or services with creative content, cultural and economic value and market objectives. As such, the design industry is part of the creative economy given that it cuts across the artisan, manufacturing and services components of the value chain, interacting with technology and qualifying for IPRs (Intellectual Property rights). As an artistic work, design is associated with copyrights and specifically with “design rights” although the delimitation between the artistic expression and the industrial manufacturing is not evident. Certainly, without design, most goods and services would not exist or would fail to be differentiated in the marketplace. (pp. 155–156)

The inspiration for the design of the burel cape came from the values and identity of the *queijeiras*, leading to the creation of a cape made of burel, another of the noble products of the Serra da Estrela territory, an exclusive design piece produced with the support of the Burel Factory. Burel also has the power to give a voice to minorities. In a written interview with the Burel Factory representative, Romeu Lebres stated that burel “has always represented a minority: a culture from an interior region of the country that was, until now, deprived of a voice”. Now, with the association of the burel factory with the *Queijeiras Project*, it can give voice to these hardworking and talented women.

The cape is called “queijeira”, and it was drawn from the circle, the simple shape of the cheese. Creativity is represented in the shape of the cape and its color. The cape can be bought in different colors. Each one represents an expression of personality and is associated with a different attribute: from serenity to strength, from wisdom to determination, each *queijeira* is unique (Queijeiras, n.d.-a). The sales of the cape will provide tools to empower the women cheesemakers personally and professionally.

4.1.2. CREATING A LARGER AUDIENCE: TELEVISION AS A MEANS OF DISSEMINATION

Television has been used to disseminate the *Queijeiras Project*. Interestingly, two of the soap operas that were recently broadcasted on the Portuguese national television channels TVI and SIC (*A Serra* [The Mountain] and *Bem Me Quer* [Wish Me Well]) were recorded in the region of Serra da Estrela.

According to the written interview made to SP Televisão in 2021, “the choice of the location for filming the soap opera was a decision SIC made months before the first lockdown, clearly driven by the unique beauty of Serra da Estrela, transversal to all seasons of the year”.

The soap operas highlight the local culture and traditions of Serra da Estrela. The figure of the woman cheesemaker, *queijeira*, is notoriously central. The female protagonists of both soap operas are women cheesemakers, which is extremely important for the recognition of this profession. In the SIC’s soap opera *A Serra*, the production of burel, the material that makes the *Queijeiras Project*’s capes, is also highlighted through a burel factory, where some of the members of the community work.

This interaction between fiction and reality has benefited both parties. On the one hand, the soap opera, the television channels, and the producer gain from filming on set in a place of such rich landscapes and traditions, adding dynamism to the story and expanding the possibilities of unfolding the plot. On the other hand, the products and the tourism in the region gain more visibility while the soap opera is exhibited. It is a win-win situation.

In this case, the audiovisual field of the creative industries is represented through television. According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and United Nations Development Programme (2010):

audiovisuals are one of the most complex, politically sensitive and underestimated subgroups among the creative industries, as well as one of the engines of the creative economy (...). Television is among the most popular creative industries, in a phase of technological shifts from the analogue to the digital system and from terrestrial to satellite and cable stations cable stations. (pp. 149–151)

On July 9, 2021, to celebrate the occasion of the 100th episode of the soap opera *A Serra*, SIC television show *Casa Feliz* (Happy House), presented by Diana Chaves and João Baião, decided to broadcast what best characterizes Serra da Estrela and its communities:

shepherds, cooks and some of the women cheesemakers from the *Queijeiras Project* were invited, among others the executive secretary of Adiram and coordinator of *Mountain Villages*, Célia Gonçalves and three cheesemakers, Graciete Marques, Célia Silva, and Paula Lameiras participated in the program to publicize the innovative project, as well as the capes in honor of the women cheesemakers. At the end of the program, the presenter Diana Chaves was invited to be one of the project's ambassadors.

On August 22, 2021, on the TVI program *Somos Portugal* (We Are Portugal), filmed in Oliveira do Hospital, the *Queijeiras Project* was also on show. The cheesemakers Paula Lameiras, Judite Pinto and Vera Moura, and the presenters Mónica Jardim (another of the project's ambassadors) and João Montez presented the project and the magnificent burel capes.

This visibility created by the audiovisual field of the creative industries, in this specific case by television, works as an extraordinary means of disseminating the project. In this way, it builds new possibilities to expand the project by calling the attention of a larger audience.

4.1.3. PERPETUATING HISTORY AND TRADITIONS: THE CREATION OF *AS GUARDIÃS DA MONTANHA*

The book *As Histórias das Guardiãs da Montanha* (The Stories of the Guardians of the Mountain) was created to perpetuate the women cheesemakers' history and traditions. That is also a powerful way to preserve the project and the testimony, history, traditions, and knowledge of these women, so the future generations never forget their know-how.

Once more, creative industries are employed here, in this case through a book and the use of storytelling. It is about recognition but also empowerment. Through the book, it will be possible to value that art and perpetuate centuries of know-how materialized in a product no one will remain indifferent (Queijeiras, n.d.-c).

Before the book's launch, it was important to find a way to know these extraordinary women. Thus, a simple way to start was by creating a questionnaire that they could fill in with their personal information. It was very helpful to get more information about them before the book's authors could interview women cheesemakers through a questionnaire to find out information about them and their work.

We understand that these women live simple lives and love what they do through the questionnaire answers. However, they acknowledge that their work has not received proper recognition. It is also noticeable that so many women cheesemakers have already accepted the challenge of participating in the project because they feel that it will help to empower not only their work but also themselves as women.

The goal of offering a mentoring course to the women involved in the project is an extraordinary way of personally and professionally empowering these women. As the project's website states:

a course like this is a precious lever for these women to become aware of their enormous personal and professional power and value. As guardians of ancestral wisdom, they will be able to incorporate into their daily lives more creativity, innovation, and the ability to make their dreams and ambitions come true. (Queijeiras, n.d.-b, para. 2)

The opportunity to acquire new leadership and management skills is fundamental to empowering these women. There is no doubt that this is a dynamic project that links knowledge and flavors to design, fashion, and female empowerment (Rolo, 2021).

4.2. COWORKING SPACES TO EMPOWER COMMUNITIES AND ATTRACT DIGITAL NOMADS

The narrative of rural telework, or the idea “that information technology makes it possible to live and work in a healthier and quiet environment, rather than in busy and overpriced cities”, was revitalized by the COVID-19 crisis (Clark, 2000, as cited in Berbegal-Mirabent, 2021, p. 2).

During the past decade, the businesses and individuals’ adoption of green practices led to more sustainable living and work. Within this context, there was an increase in the creation of shared office space worldwide. Such spaces are generally mentioned as coworking spaces. As Berbegal-Mirabent (2021) points out, “these are collaborative environments which are found to feed innovation and creativity” (p. 1). Spinuzzi (2012) calls this new trend “working alone together”.

Coworking spaces belong to the wide category of “third place”, as makerspaces or libraries, digital public access points, small exhibitions, art performance venues, cafés, and restaurants, especially in single-household buildings with larger indoor space (Oldenburg, 1989). Besides, these spaces allow the performance of a broad spectrum of activities that include receiving workers to do telework or business meetings and several cultural activities, such as creative school activities, artist residencies, art exhibitions, live music performances. Although the main goal of coworking spaces is to attract digital nomads, the activities mentioned above meet the expectations of local authorities who also regard those spaces as creative, economic, and social development hubs.

4.2.1. THE EFFECTS OF COVID-19: NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR COWORKING SPACES

The COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown measures, first implemented in spring 2020, led to an outburst of digital services and remote working (or telework), which indirectly increased the attractiveness of the countryside. Workers worldwide were obliged to work from home and all public venues closed. The future for coworking spaces was not that bright at this time. However, when the world began to adapt to the global pandemic situation, new opportunities for rural coworking spaces emerged.

Nowadays, the trend of coworking spaces includes their widespread diffusion to rural communities and small cities, thus, changing the long-time perception that they were an urban phenomenon (Moriset, 2014).

This shift resulted mainly from the pandemic situation we live in and the easiness of connecting through the internet in the professional world. Physical space is no longer a constraint. For this reason, more and more people who are currently forced to do remote online work are looking for a better quality of life that involves moving away from large urban centers, in search of greater contact with nature (Associação de Desenvolvimento Integrado da Rede das Aldeias de Montanha, 2020).

Tomaz et al. (2021) point out that:

remote work is also predictable to remain at a fairly high level, as several workers experienced the benefits of working away from large urban areas during the COVID-19 period, and many companies are rethinking work arrangements to cut real estate costs. (p. 12)

Consequently, it is important to continue implementing coworking spaces since the number of digital nomads is also expected to grow in the coming years (Tomaz et al., 2021).

4.2.2. COOPERATIVE SPACES-COWORKS @MOUNTAIN VILLAGES PROJECT

Cooperative Spaces-Coworks @Mountain Villages are an innovative way of creating a dynamic offer, thus activating the experience of the village where they are situated.

The project established the creation of several coworking spaces in the territories of the Mountain Villages. Currently, eight coworking spaces have been designated in the Mountain Villages: Alvoco das Várzeas, Videmonte, Alpedrinha, Lapa dos Dinheiros, Cortes do Meio, Folgoso, Rapa, Algodres. Some have already been approved and are now open, and others are still undergoing procedures, execution proceedings, or waiting to be approved.

As the document *Aldeias de Montanha-Cowork* from Adiram (Associação de Desenvolvimento Integrado da Rede das Aldeias de Montanha, 2020) points out:

using regional resources, such as the artisan's labor, or the piece of handi-craft produced in the region, or re-using end-of-life objects, recycling them, or restoring them, makes this a Project with a strong ecological component, importing concepts such as eco-design and circular economy. These are spaces that have their own identity. They are creative spaces for enterprising and creative people looking for a better life, a quieter life, without losing productivity and relationships with other peers, with whom they can exchange ideas and experiences. It is a space for cooperation and interaction. (p. 2)

In this description, the local with the global interact through the creative industries. There is a full architectural and landscaping use of coworking spaces. The room design

and elements are taken from the local community's culture. There is a shift from cultural practices to a broader perspective of technology and globalization.

The first step is to renew previously abandoned or unused local culture houses. They are decorated with traditional products characteristic of the local culture.

This traditional decoration is combined with all the conveniences of globalization, for instance, internet access, printing facilities, among others, thus calling on other economic areas. That creates a link between local and global, which is intensified by disseminating these spaces on websites and social networks, making it possible to attract people from all over the world.

The project enhances the concept of cooperation and collaboration in a common and shared space that allows interaction and exchange of ideas and experiences. In other words, it seeks to offer its users the opportunity to work in an innovative, inspiring, and unusual space.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In contexts of social change like the one we live in caused by the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, it is important to create practices that allow us to adapt to new situations that may arise. In order to make transitions and build new possibilities to reinterpret the new realities, it is important to develop projects like the ones described in this article. The *Queijeiras Project* and *Cooperative Spaces-Coworks @Mountain Villages* project create new links to empower the communities of Mountain Villages in a time when more than ever, the inequalities of the most marginalized populations must be tackled so that this part of the population is not forgotten in the globalized world. Thus, such projects lead local communities from local to global without forcing them to abandon their historical legacy. Thus, they lead to the preservation of traditions, their reinterpretation, and show the importance of turning them into a history of the future. As a consequence, listening to each of its cultural territories is important when looking for ways to develop a region. Most of the time, we end up discovering that they have a very rich cultural, social, and economic heritage to offer.

In this specific case, the territories of Mountain Villages, located in Serra da Estrela and Serra da Gardunha, are cultural territories with an enormously creative and cultural potential present in their history and traditions. Adiram, with the *Mountain Villages* project, has leveraged this potential and has developed several projects to empower these communities, including the social innovation projects analyzed in this article: *Queijeiras Project* and *Cooperative Spaces-Coworks @Mountain Villages*.

In the case of the *Queijeiras Project*, the summoning of the creative industries leads to the empowerment of women cheesemakers through the appreciation of traditional practices, namely the making of cheese. Besides, the design of a burel cape and writing a book generate opportunities to pay tribute to these amazing women and their

precious work that creates such an important and traditional product in the region, the Serra da Estrela cheese.

In the case of coworking spaces, the creative industries are summoned through architecture and decoration based on the local identity and culture, which translates into the attraction of digital nomads and, consequently, a new form of tourism. The local and the global come together and establish something new, something subversive that can leave a positive mark in the territories of the Mountain Villages.

In order to empower the local communities established in the Mountain Villages, as well as others in the interior of Portugal, it is increasingly necessary to continue to support ideas and projects like the ones mentioned above. In this way, it will be possible to change the perspectives regarding the future of these communities and give them the ability to recognize their true value and raise their interest to look for new ways to develop their cultural territories. Likewise, this can help decrease the rural exodus in these interior regions and stimulate their communities' social and economic development.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Ana Margarida Cruz Silva was responsible for conceptualization, funding acquisition, data curation, formal analysis, investigation, methodology, project administration, resources, validation, visualization, writing – original draft and writing – review and editing. Clara Maria Laranjeira Sarmento e Santos was responsible for the supervision.

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