

## ADVENTURES IN SMALL TOURISM: STUDIES AND STORIES

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# The Role of Cultural Associations in the Promotion of Small Tourism and Social Inclusion in the Neighbourhood of Bonfim, Oporto: The Case of Casa Bô

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## Introduction

In 2017 the city of Oporto, Portugal, was voted by tourists from 174 countries the best European destination (European Best Destinations 2017). This is the third time that Oporto has received this award, with the first two taking place in 2012 and 2014. The presence of low-cost airlines and local accommodation platforms has aided the increase in tourism; there is now a need for the city to absorb this trend.

Even amid an active pandemic, Portugal shows positive signs of the resumption of tourism, with the nomination of the city of Braga, neighboring Porto, as the best European tourist destination in 2021.

The recognition of cities and territories as ideal tourist destinations serves as an indicator for tourists hoping to choose holiday destinations. Travel destinations also attract professional, academic, and cultural events, such as themed fairs and congresses. Money is of course another factor influencing tourists, with the choice of destination being linked to “pricing issues and economic exchange rates” (Pearce 2007, 104). In this sense, the city of Oporto is attractive for visitors because it offers lower costs than, say, Lisbon. The travel website European Best Destinations mentions that travellers from countries like the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Denmark,

South Africa, South Korea, Ireland, and Canada voted Oporto as the first choice of destination in 2017.

The city of Oporto has fifteen parishes. The parish of Bonfim is the fourth most populous, with 24,265 inhabitants (or 7,956 per square kilometres). Moreover, about 65 per cent of the population is over sixty years of age. This perhaps explains another striking feature of this parish, which is the provincial character of the residents of Bonfim.

However, tourism has been changing the way cities and territories are seen; in the context of small tourism, what are otherwise endogenous traditions in a place like Bonfim can become a site of visitor engagement (Cooper and Hall 2008, 112). In this way, the perception of a place as a tourist destination is evaluated by “how relatively accessible it is and therefore its potential market for visitors” (113). Tourists who are interested in local culture arising from the traditions of a specific place gain new appreciation of the unique differences characterizing different neighbourhoods. This insight into the more subtle expressions of a particular place is an outcome of small tourism, as is the slow disengagement of local provincialism.

Tourism in Oporto has brought about economic and social change even in the city’s less-visited parishes. Real estate speculation has transformed residential areas with the emergence of local hostels and lodgings, attracting tourists who seek local experiences in the city’s parishes. For the local community of Bonfim, the increase in people circulating in the parish and patronizing the local markets and restaurants stimulates the local economy. Accompanying this activity is a demand for art and culture, which supports and sustains such entities as cultural associations. Small tourism can be mutually beneficial for residents, place, and visitors, combining all their experiences in a sense of social inclusion. Small tourism is the right size of tourism for parishes or other urban neighbourhoods.

Considering the significant recent increase in tourism in Oporto, the case study described in this chapter sought to examine if the Casa Bô cultural association could take the lead in establishing a new tourist option outside the central, historical, and touristic zone of the city, and, taking advantage of its small scale, offer creative tourism opportunities for tourists seeking accommodation in local lodgings, either because of the price, or because they wish to search out authentic experiences similar to the everyday life of local residents.

## Case Study Setting

This case study about Casa Bô focuses on the interactions of tourists with the local community of Bonfim through the cultural association; the engagement of visitors and residents was found to produce mutual benefits, thereby promoting social cohesion and inclusion.

The Casa Bô cultural association plays a role in the Oporto parish of Bonfim that sees it embrace three social pillars: culture, environment, and social solidarity.

Casa Bô also interacts with other cultural associations in the city of Oporto, creating synergies and providing mutual help in joint cultural and social solidarity activities. Some of these institutions are Rés-da-Rua, Espaço Compasso, and Casa da Horta.

These synergies stem from the volunteering activities offered both inside and outside of these associations. In cultural associations, volunteering takes place with the help of structural reforms and improvements to associations' headquarters and human resources at events, among other activities. In external activities, volunteering takes place, for example, with such cultural activities as music classes in institutions for people with physical disabilities, or recreational activities in nursing homes. There is also participation in the cultural festivities of the city of Oporto, with typical food stalls at parties such as the Feast of St. John (or São João for the Portuguese), the biggest festivity in the city.

Other interactions between cultural associations occur with the involvement of artists travelling through the Oporto, who ask for space to perform in one of the cultural associations, and who usually end up performing in other locations due to the synergy between various groups and venues in the city. In the same way, members of the public, which often includes tourists, who attend a cultural event at a cultural association usually learn about other associative spaces.

Some of the tourists and touring artists who seek accommodation in cultural associations refer each other, so that these people have a greater opportunity to stay in these spaces, and this hospitality is often compensated by way of voluntary actions on the part of guests, which usually take the form of providing maintenance of these spaces.

The data collection revealed two striking and distinct characteristics in the parish: a cultural resistance among locals against mixing with people of



**Figure 5.1:** Map of Portugal.

Source: Maps Portugal, <https://maps-portugal.com/maps-portugal-cities/porto-portugal-map> (accessed 10 April 2023).



**Figure 5.2:** Location of Casa Bô in the city of Oporto.

Source: Idealista, <https://www.idealista.pt/en/comprar-casas/porto/mapa> (accessed 10 April 2023).

other parishes, or against attending cultural events in Bonfim that are not considered part of the local traditions or festivities, and a demographic pattern showing that about 65 per cent of the population is aged sixty or over.

Another noticeable characteristic in Bonfim is the number of vacant houses. Portugal has the second-highest number of vacant houses in Europe, just behind Spain, at around 730,000, which corresponds to around 14 per cent of the total number of houses in the country. Of the 25,000 empty houses in Oporto, approximately 2,000 are in Bonfim. This reality negatively influences social cohesion and inclusion in the neighbourhood, transforming parts of the parish into deserted places and leading to isolation, social exclusion, and an absence of adequate local small business and social infrastructure.



**Figure 5.3:** Aerial view of Casa Bô and neighborhood.

Source: Google Maps (fair use policy).

### *About Casa Bô*

The Casa Bô cultural association resides in a century-old three-storey building that was once one of the parish's large stock of abandoned buildings. Based on an agreement with the owner of the property, a symbolic ten-year lease was concluded for the use of the space; in exchange, the cultural association committed to working toward the rehabilitation of the building over the same period. Since Casa Bô was founded in 2015, an internal revitalization of the building has been completed, and more recently, structural work has begun on the rear facade, carried out by members and volunteers.

The association's activities can be divided into three pillars (Principe 2016, 45). The first pillar is culture, and the association schedules concerts, literary events such as weekly poetry nights, dances, and creative workshops, among others.

The second pillar is environment, with the association supporting environmental awareness through initiatives involving permaculture and

vegetarian food. Casa Bô has a vertical vegetable garden in the backyard of the building containing crops that are used in the vegetarian social dinners offered before nighttime cultural events.

The third pillar, social solidarity, is expressed through voluntary activities and initiatives both inside and outside of the association. Some of these regular initiatives include volunteer visits to nursing homes and music education projects at institutions such as the ACAPO, or the Associação dos Cegos e Amblíopes de Portugal (Association of the Blind and the Amblyopia of Portugal).<sup>1</sup>

### *Economic Sustainability and Management*

As a non-profit organization, Casa Bô follows a management model focused on its sustainability; it also employs a horizontal organizational structure with no decision-making hierarchy in its volunteer governing body.

Non-profits or third-sector organizations are entities focused on generating the social economy. That they do not have profit as their primary objective presupposes the use of an economic surplus for the purpose of sustainability. Instead of seeking profit, the social economy reuses economic surpluses mainly by reinvesting in growth for scale or making investments in new social projects, with a view to fostering greater social intervention (Azevedo, Franco, and Meneses 2010, 19). The mission of cultural associations, as well as foundations, mutual societies, and co-operatives, is to meet demands that are otherwise not satisfactorily met by the public sector (Ramos 2005). In this sense, cultural associations can often compensate for creative and cultural shortfalls in peripheral and non-touristic residential areas.

Casa Bô has low fixed expenses (leasing, water, and electricity) and has a high number of members and volunteers. Having begun in 2015 with 6 volunteers, it currently has more than 200 (15 of whom participate in the direction of the association); these volunteers contribute and take turns in the activities of the organization, including in such areas as event management, social dinners, cleaning, and maintenance (Principe 2016, 71). This economic model allows the association to adopt the practice of conscious donation in order to meet its financial needs and thereby sustain its activities. The conscious donation consists in suggesting a value for both social dinners and cultural events, so as not to influence public participation through advance or door ticket sales, thereby removing any financial barriers. Those wishing to attend are asked to provide the event's suggested fee to the best of their



financial ability. However, this model can only function well in a small context. The association retains 30 per cent of the revenue, with 70 per cent going to the event's artists. The social dinners feature a small variation, with the association retaining 40 per cent and the volunteer who has provided the meal receiving 60 per cent (Principe 2016, 119–32).

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, experiments have been conducted in relation to financial contributions for participation in events. One of these was the creation of three price ranges, with each person attending being free to choose the price that they deem best suited to their financial reality. The idea is to maintain ease of access while also maximizing financial return.

Records of cultural events in our observation diary show that the average attendance was eighteen people at cultural events and nine at social dinners (Principe 2016, 128). In addition, about 75 per cent of the participants contributed the suggested donation. The fact that 25 per cent of participants can engage with the association's activities for free without jeopardizing the economic sustainability of Casa Bô attests to its ability to make good on its commitment to social inclusion and solidarity.

Of the 174 cultural events held during the period of analysis—October of 2015 to August of 2016 (Principe 2016, 36)—it is estimated that 3,155 people attended the evening events, and that at least half of this audience (1,566 people) also participated in the social dinners. Given that 25 per cent of the attendees did not pay, we can see that about 788 people benefited from the practice of conscious donation, with about half of this number also enjoying social dinners without barriers to entry.

The Casa Bô community comprises members and volunteers of the association, residents of the local community of Bonfim parish, residents of other parishes of Oporto, students, and a solid representation of national and international tourists. In addition to the cultural events it offers the community of Bonfim, Casa Bô promotes events directed especially to certain tourist niches. One of these initiatives consists of weekly meetings for participants in the digital hosting platform Couchsurfing, which attracts travellers who are looking for local experiences and free accommodation.

The research methodology was primarily qualitative, supported by some quantitative research, providing material for an empirical analysis of both the organization and its users in their different social roles. The quantitative research collected events from nine cultural facilities all over Oporto in order

to classify cultural events by type, especially those in the so-called creative industries. Casa Bô does, in fact, represent an emerging cultural focus for creative tourism in Oporto: the study shows that more than 65 per cent of its events are linked to activities considered to be within the creative industries. It is a place where residents and artists have developed activities with the effective participation of tourists attending cultural events. Creative tourism offers visitors an immersive and authentic experience on a small scale, with the possibility of a participative cultural learning experience. This is seen to be an effective strategy for expressing the special character of a place, connecting visitors and locals in a living cultural heritage experience (UNESCO 2006, 3).

The study concludes with some suggestions as to the potential of the cultural association to operate as a pole of attraction and a method of diffusion for creative tourism initiatives; it could also contribute to the growth of tourism in Oporto through such initiatives, as well as assist in building social inclusion and cohesion in the parish.

The pandemic has clearly underlined numerous uncertainties as regards the activities of cultural associations. The abrupt drop in tourism beginning in the spring of 2020, the stricter and more restrictive rules for the use of closed spaces, and the economic loss already accumulated in the period since the beginning COVID-19 can render the sustainability of these spaces unfeasible, even forcing their closure in extreme cases. In this sense, an even more creative strategy is needed to readjust the business model employed by these associations, so that they can continue to have a positive impact on their communities and fulfill their potential as creative and sustainable small tourism options.

## Methodology

The purpose of this study is to identify creative small tourism initiatives in cultural associations, and to explore how these initiatives could possibly contribute to social inclusion and cohesion within the local community, with the added benefit of developing sustainable tourism options.

This chapter is based on a master's thesis in innovation economics management, successfully defended before the University of Oporto's Faculty of Economics under the title "Cultural Associativism and Creativity: Innovation, Social Cohesion and Sustainable Change—a Case Study on Casa Bô" (Principe 2016). A case study was chosen for the research, once it was

established that the particular example was significant and representative, in order to justify a generalization for similar situations (Severino 2007, 121). The approach was qualitative, as the research addresses various subject areas at the intersection of sociology, management, and economics. Indeed, qualitative research is particularly suitable for cross-disciplinary studies (Denzin and Lincoln 2006, 16). Data collection took place in the period from June to September 2016. The qualitative research techniques included document analysis, interviews, and an observation log, providing a sound strategy for the cross-checking and interpretation of data (Denzin and Lincoln 2006, 17).

Seven documents were collected and analyzed, among them Casa Bô's social statute, as well as other documents requested or mentioned in the interviews and in the field during the observation phase. Nineteen semi-structured interviews (Bauer and Gaskell 2015) were conducted, producing approximately seven hours of recorded and transcribed interviews. These interviews were conducted with agents representing different social roles involved in all areas, within and without the cultural association. The interviewees represent eight nationalities and were members of Casa Bô, temporary guests of the cultural association, public, local, and foreign artists, volunteers at the association's cultural events, and employees of the local Council of Bonfim. Five of the nineteen interviews were conducted by email. In order to document and analyze data collection in the field, an observation log was created. Each event observed was assigned an entry consisting of three fields: a header that categorized basic facts such as the classification of the event or its funding; a lengthy description of the observations; and the observer's contextual reflections. For the initial classification of events, a thesaurus was used to create a standardized and controlled vocabulary. Harpring describes a thesaurus as "a controlled vocabulary arranged in a specific order . . . to promote consistency in the indexing of content and to facilitate searching and browsing" (2013, 236).

There was a total of 21 records in the observation journal (Principe 2016, 182–289), of which 10 were related to internal events at Casa Bô, such as cultural events and social dinners, and 11 to external ones, which were activities directly involving the participation of Casa Bô at, for example, a cultural festival in the city of Amarante, located approximately sixty kilometers away from Oporto, and a volunteer mission in the rural areas of Aboadela, Sanche, and Várzea, in the district of Amarante.

Two more external events involved one artist who had performed at Casa Bô; these events were observed outside the context of activities directly related to the association. One of them was a concert put on by another cultural association called Rés-da-Rua, in Oporto, and another held at Rua das Flores, a tourist destination also in Oporto known for its outdoor cultural and artistic activities.

The quantitative research comprised an analysis of the number of cultural events in Oporto so as to understand how many of these events could be linked to creative industries. Data was collected using event schedules from nine cultural facilities in the city, five of them established cultural venues (Casa da Música, Fundação Serralves Foundation, Maus Hábitos, Hard Club, and Coliseu do Porto) and four cultural associations (Rés-da-Rua, Espaço Compasso, Casa da Horta, and Casa Bô) (Principe 2016, 35).

Analysis of the cultural events agenda took place from October 2015 to August 2016. The data collection process consisted in the use of a computer script to export event calendars from the website Viral Agenda Cultural<sup>2</sup> to Microsoft Excel. This website aggregates information on cultural events and distributes it through Facebook. It captures the information and organizes it graphically in its platform through the use of APIs (application programming interfaces). A total of 5,155 entries were collected, providing the total number of events offered by the nine cultural organizations. Of this total, 1,128 events (21.88 per cent) were offered by the cultural associations, and 4,027 (78.12 per cent) by the established venues (Principe 2016, 35).

For the classification of events, the table of creative industries included in the creative economy report of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD 2012, 8) was used as a reference. This classification divides the creative industries into four groups and nine categories, as follows:

- Heritage groups: (1) cultural sites and (2) traditional cultural expressions
- Arts groups: (3) performing arts and (4) visual arts
- Media groups: (5) audiovisuals and (6) publishing and printed media
- Functional creations groups: (7) new media, (8) creative services, and (9) design

The cultural events included in this analysis found correspondences in the first six creative industry categories. The classification of the samples was carried out manually, with interpretation and use of keywords, whenever it was possible to make the proper correlation (Principe 2016, 159).

Comparative and percentage analyses of the total number of events were performed from this quantitative data, forming the basis of three comparative tables. The first table encompasses the nine cultural facilities together; the second considers only the four selected cultural associations; the third compares the events in the five traditional cultural facilities to those put on by Casa Bô. The tables identified fourteen categories of events as related to the creative industries. From this starting point, information in the tables was analyzed (Principe 2016, 80–9), facilitating an understanding of the relevance and role of the cultural associations in terms of cultural production and diffusion in Oporto, and particularly in Bonfim. Together, these mixed research methods provide the basis for the following discussion.

## Results

The research revealed six opportunities for and initiatives in small-scale tourism carried out by Casa Bô, which in turn promoted greater social inclusion in the local community of Bonfim. In each case, a note is added on how each of the items has been affected by the fundamental paradigm shift COVID-19 has caused.

### *1. Attracting Creative People*

Casa Bô welcomes many visitors and artists who promote cultural events from different creative industries. It is a heterogeneous audience, formed by consumers and practitioners in the performing arts (musicians, actors, dancers), traditional cultural expressions (artisans, artists of local and regional cultural traditions), visual arts (painters, sculptors, photographers), media and literature (journalists, writers, poets, storytellers), and audiovisual arts (film and documentary producers), among others. Many of these people are active members in the leading categories of the creative industries. Casa Bô, then, acts as a meeting point where these practitioners can develop and disseminate their ideas and activities in a small venue.

According to Florida (2002), the ability of a territory to attract members of the creative class is a *sine qua non* for the development of the so-called creative economy; Florida plots this ability along three axes, named for the three

ts of the creative economy: talent, technology, and tolerance. Tolerance is a factor that is predominantly linked to the capacity of individuals to feel social inclusion in a community. One of the pillars of the Casa Bô is social solidarity, and within its social values, the association promotes the integration and participation of all people through voluntary initiatives and social solidarity actions. Art and cultural functions attract people, and the conscious donation strategy supports their integration without financial barriers. With these initiatives, the association both promotes social inclusion and operates as a tourist venue accessible to all types of visitors interested in the small cultural events offered by Casa Bô.

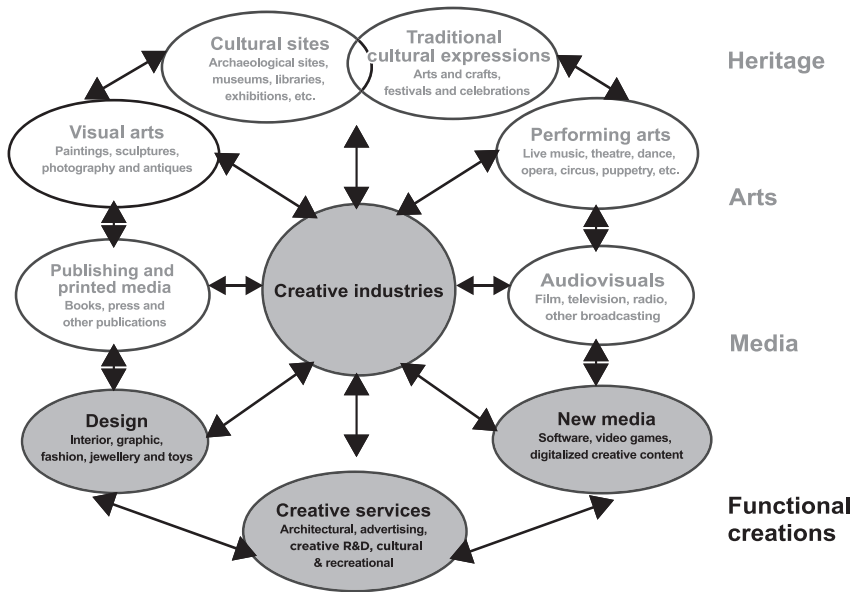
### **IMPACT OF COVID-19**

Since the pandemic, there has been an abrupt drop in creatives seeking space for presentations, resulting in part from the lack of audiences, the crippling impact on tourism, and also the fact that creatives themselves cannot be as mobile as they were pre-pandemic. Currently, they are simply not passing through the city in high numbers. To address this situation, Casa Bô transformed the use of its usual space for cultural events into artistic residencies, necessitating much less mobility. During the peak of the pandemic, there were about fifteen residents, all of whom were paid a small monthly stipend, likely not enough to cover all their expenses while living in Oporto, but enough to contribute to their stay at Casa Bô and to help keep the association sustainable.

Since late 2021 and early 2022, the cultural and tourist sector has resumed its activities with greater intensity thanks to the reduction of pandemic-related health restrictions. Casa Bô followed the trend toward normality with the increase in audience-oriented cultural activities.

## *2. Producing Cultural and Creative Events*

Cultural events play an important role in social inclusion, as they allow integration and collective participation in a community. Creativity is an inherent element of art and culture, and as such plays a strategic role in the cultural landscape of a community or city. Greffe (2011, 200) argues that a landscape comprises the visible features of an area; when it is shaped by human activity, a landscape becomes a cultural landscape. In this sense, cultural events are a collective and participative manifestation of this landscape in a certain place. Greffe advocates for the importance of listing and displaying the elements



**Figure 5.4:** Classification of creative industries. In grey text are the areas attracted by Casa Bô (highlighted by the author).

Source: UNCTAD.

that can make the cultural landscape more amenable to the implementation of creative cities. Cultural associations can contribute can make a significant contribution to such work.

The cultural events put on by Casa Bô were classified within the creative industries in three of the four existing groups (heritage, arts, and media), and in six of the nine categories (audiovisual, performing arts, traditional cultural expressions, visual arts, and publishing and printed media) within UNCTAD’s creative industries classification cited earlier. In percentage terms, the 178 cultural events held by Casa Bô fell into 14 of the 21 types of cultural events, and about 67 per cent were classified in at least one of the categories of the creative industries. This shows the same level of creative engagement as Casa da Música in Oporto, which recorded 1,516 events in the same period, of which 71 per cent were categorized as creative. Small still works.

A good example of an intimate creative event at Casa Bô is its poetry night. This weekly event is part of the association's cultural agenda. The event consists of readings of poetry, whether or not it is authored by the particular participant performing the reading. Usually there is always at least one guest musician, and whenever possible, other musicians are invited to participate in an improvised way. In other cases, dramatizations or dance performances are also held. This integration of various art forms, as well as the spirit of improvisation, stimulates the creative character of the event.

Music concerts provide another example. At Casa Bô, concerts are often scheduled on short notice, depending on the availability of the association, of the resident artist, or of musicians passing through Oporto looking for a space to present their work. It is common to see artists adjusting their set lists a few hours before the start of the concert, after checking the physical conditions of the venue, the audience present on a given day, and the time available for presentation. There have already been cases where there was only one scheduled concert, and since there was additional time available, and an audience present, two other groups eventually performed on the same night—a plus for all stakeholders, since each event is a unique and exclusive experience. Smallness allows for such flexibility.

### **IMPACT OF COVID-19**

From 2020 to 2021, artistic interactions continued in the association, mainly between residents and active members of Casa Bô, but with limitations on capacity. There were naturally a reduced number of cultural and public events.

Since the beginning of 2022, with the improvement of the events agenda and the resumption of tourism, the schedule of performances has resumed as usual.

### *3. Connecting Social Agents*

Casa Bô is an open space for the whole community. The interactions between social agents (members of the association, artists, and the public) are dynamic and easy as most of the spaces are intended for common and collective use. Greater social interaction takes place most prominently at the vegetarian dinners that occur before evening cultural events. Event artists, members of Casa Bô, and the audience share a long table with seating for about sixteen people, or other tables around the kitchen and library room. During dinner, everyone



sits at a table with no marked places, and usually the members of Casa Bô sit and interact with visitors so that there is more interaction and contact between all. This initiative allows for the beginning of new friendships between residents, tourists, artists, and volunteers of the cultural association.

In these gathering, an exchange of synergies happens spontaneously, and this is what sets the Casa Bô experience apart from the experience that a tourist might have at a conventional cultural event, such as a concert at Casa da Música in Oporto. In this case, the tourist will have a very different perception and experience in terms of social interactions, since traditional cultural venues are larger, formatted spaces, with a more rigid agenda, and a less intimate space (Principe 2016, 108). The focus is less alternative and more commercial or touristic; there is very little interaction among people in this more formalized space. Cultural associations can break this paradigm with their events, using their small size, ability to accommodate changes, and intimate character to their advantage.

Another initiative that favours social interactions in the Casa Bô cultural association is the practice of workshops, usually focusing on craft making or other types of endogenous knowledge. The workshops normally take place in small groups. Both members of the cultural association and people passing through Oporto hold these events; similarly, the attendees are both residents and tourists. At one of the workshops observed (Principe 2016, 210), a volunteer member of Casa Bô instructed those present in sewing techniques for cushion covers. Among the attendees, there was a Hungarian tourist who had never run a sewing machine. The interaction of this Hungarian tourist with members of the cultural association resulted in that person staying a few nights in the space in return for help with the daily activities of Casa Bô. As the Hungarian tourist was travelling with little money, they took the opportunity to strengthen ties with the members of the association and to interact in a more direct way with the local culture of Oporto.

### **IMPACT OF COVID-19**

During the peak of the pandemic, even amid a tentative resumption of cultural activities, the decrease in the regular public and the limitation of the association's cultural events schedule reduced social interactions, and this was aggravated by the need for social distance, use of masks, and limitations on things like opening hours.

The workshop activities, as well as the musical concerts, etc., started again in 2022 with the resumption of tourism and other cultural events.

#### *4. Promotion of Tourist-Themed Events*

The cultural association has already promoted thematic events aimed at a portion of tourists in the city of Oporto. This event is the weekly Couchsurfing meeting. The Couchsurfing organization forbids payments for stays—the concept is to bring together people of different cultures within homes, thus providing an experience of everyday life in the destination community. One of the hosts of Couchsurfing in Oporto chose Casa Bô as a weekly meeting place, with the result of bringing together local residents of Oporto and tourists of different nationalities. The Couchsurfing meetings occur before the evening cultural events, so part of the Couchsurfing audience takes the opportunity to stay for the social dinners and subsequent events.

#### **IMPACT OF COVID-19**

Thematic events linked to tourism have basically halted since the pandemic began.

This specific type of event has not yet returned to normality due to the consequences of the pandemic and out of public health concerns related to social proximity.

#### *5. Positioning Casa Bô as a Local, Alternative, and Authentic Tourist Spot in Oporto*

With the ascendancy of mass tourism in Portugal, and the increase in tourists in Oporto, there has been a significant increase in local accommodation offerings in the city. Digital platforms like Booking.com and Airbnb have empowered private citizens by giving them the opportunity to transform apartments and townhouses into alternative forms of tourist accommodation. According to data from RNAL (Registo Nacional de Alojamento Local), the number of households offering accommodation in the parish of Bonfim grew from only 1 in 2010 to 210 in 2016. While in Oporto there are 3,761 rooms with a capacity of 9,630 tourists, the parish of Bonfim supplies 436 rooms with a capacity of 1,094 tourists, or about 11 per cent of Oporto's capacity.

This migration of a portion of tourists from the traditional hotel chains to local guest houses in the parishes has created an opportunity and a demand for cultural and leisure options in parishes that can absorb this new flow of

tourists staying farther from urban centres. The empirical analysis demonstrated that Casa Bô engaged with tourists hosted in the parish of Bonfim, and that the tourists had chosen to connect with the local association not only because of proximity, but also for the opportunity the association gave them to experience a cultural event like a local resident. Small tourism activities that take place in small places will almost always provide a more personal, authentic experience for all stakeholders.

#### **IMPACT OF COVID-19**

Casa Bô and other cultural associations lost their status as local references and tourist alternatives, as they suffered more intensely from the lack of effervescence in the city as a result of the pandemic. On the other hand, people of artistic and creative natures travelling in Portugal started to think of Casa Bô as a medium- or long-term refuge since the transformation of the space into an artistic residence.

With the effects of the pandemic diminishing and tourism resuming, Casa Bô intends to once again assume its role as a tourist alternative in the city of Porto.

### *6. Linking Casa Bô Outside the Parish*

In addition to cultural events within the Casa Bô association, volunteer members hold external cultural and volunteer events. One of these events is the association's participation in the Feast of St. John celebrations on the night of 23 June. St. John is the most revered saint of Oporto, of pagan origin and associated with the celebration of the summer solstice. Celebrations include dancing, eating, and fireworks. Casa Bô set up a bannered food tent where it sold delicacies made by its members to festival goers, including a significant number of tourists, who participated in the celebrations in the streets of Oporto. In addition to the typical food stall, volunteer members also played traditional songs to celebrate the date (Principe 2016, 67).

Another external initiative observed during the data collection was the Bô Festival (Principe 2016, 70), a multicultural event that took place in the city of Amarante in August 2016, with the participation of 11 organizations, including other cultural associations in Oporto, with about 170 volunteers, more than 60 cultural activities such as concerts, workshops, seminars, lectures, etc., and the offer of about 16 services such as massage and therapy sessions, food trucks, traditional crafts, etc. The festival raised funds for the

urban rehabilitation of Casa Bô and was attended by an estimated 700 people, including residents of Amarante and Oporto, domestic tourists, and tourists from different countries such as Germany, Australia, Spain, and France, among others.

### **IMPACT OF COVID-19**

With the sudden reduction in the movement of visitors, combined with capacity restrictions and stricter rules for holding cultural events, no external events were held from the beginning of the pandemic until the end of 2021.

The festivities of São João and other external events were celebrated again starting in 2022.

## **Discussion**

### *Cultural Associations and Small Tourism*

Cultural associations can be locations of emergent creativity; in larger cities, they are small clusters and creative spots that provide unique conditions endogenous to their own place. They can attract highly creative people who are in search of space to present their art and vocation, or who wish to join or create networks. Because they do not aim for profit, cultural associations enjoy autonomy and openness, engendering a more propitious space for creative expression, individual engagement, and resident-visitor collaboration. Generally operating with a very flexible agenda, few rules and formalities, a no-blame culture, and few entry restrictions, cultural associations become cultural laboratories, functioning as talent incubators and spaces for experimentation on the part of both creatives and visitors, spaces where synergies and knowledge sharing occur in workshops, in cultural events featuring the active participation of visitors, and in the social activities like the social dinners that take place before nocturnal events. In this way, cultural associations like Casa Bô contribute particularly to social and cultural sustainability and social inclusion, while offering a consummate local small tourism adventure in a small place.

### *Casa Bô and COVID-19: Challenges and Initiatives*

Since the beginning of the pandemic, Casa Bô has struggled to survive. Without events, no revenue flowed into the association, even though fixed expenses such as rent, water, and electricity continued. New solutions, such as the artistic residency once the lockdown was lifted, allowed Casa Bô sufficient

income to cover its expenses. During the lockdown period, community building continued on its social networks. Crowdfunding was also used to raise funds for a structural renovation of the house's skylight, with incentives to offer members' crafts for donations of certain amounts. However, the in-person cultural events agenda has been almost completely paralyzed since the beginning of the pandemic.

Until there is a normalization of tourist and cultural activities in Portugal, the challenges facing Casa Bô are directly linked to its own economic sustainability.

The cultural and tourist sectors were among the most affected by the pandemic. In response to COVID-19, in order to compensate for losses, many countries have implemented public investment initiatives to support actors in these sectors. In Portugal, the government adopted grants and subsidies for cultural sectors, offered compensation for losses, and initiated investment initiatives (OECD 2020).

## Conclusions

Cultural associations have an important role to play in the preservation and development of small local cultures, as well as in the ability of these cultures to attract visitors and multicultural creatives to the local communities that exist in larger cities.

They are a meeting point for artists and artisans, and a venue for the diffusion of art and culture. Local associations meet a need for accessible cultural dissemination in communities that are not in the major tourist zones of larger cities. They also create collaborative social networks involving other associations and other organizations, offering new inclusive initiatives and social cohesion. According to Bridge, Murtagh, and O'Neill (2009, 186), social networks facilitate innovation and the development of skills and knowledge, as well as providing for their dissemination.

Before the pandemic, with the increasing tourist demand in Oporto, a change of behaviour regarding the migration of tourists to more residential parishes of the city was perceived as a beneficial alternative to the standard offer of hotels located in more central and touristic areas. This behaviour is motivated by tourism trends such as short-term holidays, low-cost flights, empowerment of a new wave of low-income tourists in search of low-cost local accommodation options, and a growing demand for small tourism, in which visitors seek not only to gaze on official tourist attractions, but also

to immerse themselves in local experiences, to feel like they are temporary residents. Local associations can play a prominent role in this quest. Within the tourism value chain proposed by the Confederação do Turismo Português (2005, 850), accommodation, transportation, catering, events, local cultural events, and public services are vital components in the tourism industry. Casa Bô contributes to this value chain mainly by both supporting and providing local events as its core business. Catering can also be considered in the form of the vegetarian social dinners, as a complementary service within this value chain.

The attraction of tourists to more residential neighbourhoods contributes to the social inclusion of the local community in that it generates economic opportunity for local commerce, favouring local producers, residents with small family businesses such as cafés, taverns, grocery stores, small shops, and day-to-day services such as hairdressers, shoemakers, seamstresses, and other local businesses present in the more residential parishes. If Casa Bô can help to bring in the right number of tourists to support—and who are interested in—small tourism, it can establish social interactions and integration of these tourists with the local community. According to Zanoni and Janssens (2009), increasing cultural diversity in cities can be an important way to stimulate creativity and innovation as an alternative form of economic sustainability.

For the social integration between tourists and the local community, cultural associations such as Casa Bô, because of their intimacy, openness, and flexible agenda, can offer a unique and local tourist option, facilitating synergies and exchanges of experiences between the local community and the emerging trend of a tourism that is increasingly interested in not only checking items off a list of touristic sites and taking the requisite selfies, but also in engaging in the routine and habits of residents.

Right now, it is difficult to predict whether Casa Bô and other cultural associations like it will maintain the role they played pre-pandemic. Will we ever return to life as we knew it before 2020? What can be said is that even in the face of this adverse scenario, Casa Bô found a way to reinvent, transform, and sustain itself—even if in reduced circumstances—and it continues to add social capacity for its small community. Hopefully, it will return to its small tourism initiatives.

## NOTES

- 1 <https://www.acapo.pt/>.
- 2 <https://www.viralagenda.com/>.

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