

The rise and fall of the rural creative class: The case of Alaçatı

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ABSTRACT

The rural creative class contributes to the cultural life and local economic growth in small towns. Although creative based development mitigates various negative externalities of tourism development, small towns have started to suffer from the vicious circle of creative tourism which often entails the displacement of the rural creative class and locals. In this article, we examine the rise and fall of the rural creative class to better understand the vicious circle perspective of creative-based development in small towns. The study focuses on the growth and transformation process of the creative district in Alaçatı, which is a small town in İzmir (Turkey). The study applies mixed method approaches including longitudinal observations and in-depth interviews in three stages: in 2013, 2016 and 2019. The results reveal that creative tourism can be used as a potential development tool in small town settings. However, the lack of comprehensive creative-based tourism development strategies can result in the fall of the rural creative class.

1. Introduction

Creative tourism, which leads to economic development and the growth of communities based on knowledge exchange, comes into prominence as a development path for many destinations (Florida, 2002; Richards, 2009). The majority of existing research on the subject focuses on creative tourism within the context of metropolitan cities with large networks, strong labor markets and agglomeration economies (Durmaz et al., 2010; Cruz, 2013; Zimmerman, 2008). However, the rise of digital media and networks provided opportunities for small-scale towns to open up for creative-based tourism development (Knox and Mayer, 2009).

Small towns which benefit from looser creative clusters demonstrate a successful model of creative tourism and provide opportunities for healthy development (Selada et al., 2011; 2012; Waitt and Gibson, 2009; Lewis and Donald, 2010; Munoz and O'Toole, 2010). The development of creative tourism has many benefits linked to the economic, physical, and social development process of those settlements. In the economic sense, it provides job creation, market expansion, and can transcend the narrow seasonality of tourism (McGranahan and Wojan, 2007b). In the social sense, it strengthens cultural values, local identities, and social cohesion. In the physical sense, creative tourism develops attractive places and rejuvenates structures and streetscapes (Richards, 2020). Ultimately, creative tourism, which increases the competitiveness and

attractiveness of destinations, stimulates the processes of local growth of small towns.

However, there is a growing critique which underlines the potential dangers of creative tourism such as the commodification of every-day life, gentrification and the displacement of communities (Korstanje et al., 2018; Yang et al., 2019; Zimmerman, 2008; Curran, 2007; Strange, 2016). Critiques along similar lines are particularly valid in the studies of amenity migration or lifestyle migration to rural areas (Sigler and Washmuth, 2020), which function as 'creative class magnets' due to their natural and cultural amenities (McGranahan and Wojan, 2007b p:19). Hence, alongside the benefits of the creative tourism concept, it is important to remain critical and 'not to treat it as a cure-all' (Richards, 2020 p: 2).

For this study, the growth and transformation process of creative tourism in small towns will be examined in order to clarify the reason behind the rise and fall of the rural creative class. Understanding the challenges of creative tourism over a long period of time will give some dimensions and variables that need to be considered when developing creative-based development strategies in small town settings. The results of this investigation demonstrate the importance of such strategies, which rely on good governance and institutional arrangements, quality of life, entrepreneurship, territorial embeddedness, and networks for stimulating sustainable creative development (Selada et al., 2011; Richards, 2020). Hence, the paper concludes with a discussion of the

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need of creative-based tourism development strategies in order to prevent the vicious circle of the ‘boom and bust’ of creative tourism in small town settings.

2. Theoretical arguments

2.1. Creative tourism

Creative tourism comes into the approach as an extension of the cultural tourism in the 2000s by Richards and Raymond. They define creative tourism as ‘‘tourism which offers visitors the opportunity to develop their creative potential through active participation in courses and learning experiences which are characteristic of the holiday destination where they are undertaken’’ (Richards and Raymond, 2000, p. 18). In addition to this definition, UNESCO (2006) defines creative tourism as ‘‘travel directed toward an engaged and authentic experience, with participative learning in the arts, heritage, or special character of a place, and it provides a connection with those who reside in this place and create this living culture’’ (UNESCO, 2006, p. 3). In this context, authentic experience based on ‘‘experiencing’’, ‘‘participating’’ and ‘‘learning’’ comes out as a major characteristic of creative tourism. (Ohridska-Olson and Ivanov, 2010; Pine and Gilmore, 1999). The following figure (Fig. 1) demonstrates the model of creative tourism. Consequently, creative tourism alters the traditional definition of tourism through offering creative activities which engage creative people, tourists and locals.

Creative tourism has a number of advantages compared to other forms of tourism. According to Richards (2014), it creates equitable participation between locals and visitors as members of the local population gain the role of teacher instead of service provider. In addition to a participative learning process, creative tourism also reinforces local identity through using existing resources and rejuvenates places (Richards, 2011). For instance, Obidos, which is a small town in Portugal, provides flexible spaces to work and live by regenerating historical disabled buildings in a project called ‘‘the creative housing’’ (Selada et al., 2011). Furthermore, Richards and Wilson (2006) identify the potential advantages of creative tourism as follows: (1) creativity brings more value based on the scarcity of creative people; (2) innovation of new products creates competitive advantage over other locations; (3) creative resources are more sustainable and renewable than cultural tourism products; (4) creativity can be produced anywhere without infrastructure (such as art performances and artworks); (5) creativity

involves the rapid generation of new values. In this scope, they put emphasis on the advantages of creative consumption and production in an economic sense. In addition to Richards and Wilson (2006), Ohridska-Olson and Ivanov (2010) point to the tangible benefits of creative tourism on market expansion, innovation, cultural heritage preservation, brand visibility, job creation and exports. They also clarify the intangible benefits of creative tourism including strengthening local identity and uniqueness, preservation of cultural values, providing global human interaction and cultural exchange, and raising local cultural diversification for contributing to the development of the destination. Therefore, creative tourism, which promotes interactive participation among creative individuals, visitors and locals, comes into prominence as a fundamental tool for protecting and fostering tangible and intangible assets through creative activities. Above all, creative tourism brings positive impacts on the social, physical and economic structure of many destinations in terms of sustainable tourism development.

There is growing research on the development of creative tourism in small towns and rural places (Souca, 2020; Xiong et al., 2020; McGranahan et al., 2011; Selada et al., 2011; McGranahan and Wojan, 2007a, 2007b; Ström and Nelson, 2010). Rural characteristics such as cultural and natural amenities, the landscape, the climate, outdoor amenities and the high level of social and cultural interaction with rural communities attract the creative class (McGranahan and Wojan, 2007a). Furthermore, the presence of the creative class in rural areas generates socio-economic development (Souca, 2020; McGranahan and Wojan, 2007a; Richards, 2020; Xiong et al., 2020). For instance, Xiong et al. (2020) analyzed two rural towns of Huanglongxi, which is famous for its traditional folk houses and its traditional folk culture programs, and Luodai, which is known for its well-preserved Hakka culture. They demonstrated how the rural creative class contributed the sustainable development of rural tourism. However, the limitation of the study is in its lack of longitudinal data to understand the long run dynamic process in rural areas.

Recent studies also demonstrate the significance of developing strategies for sustaining creative tourism in rural environments (Richards, 2020; Souca, 2020; Verdini, 2020). Richards (2020) discusses the development of various creative programs in rural areas and small towns including in rural villages of Thailand, in which creative tourism is developed by focusing on local crafts and Thai culture. Lastly, he presents the importance of having both bottom-up and top-down approaches for developing creative programmes, which helps to avoid the

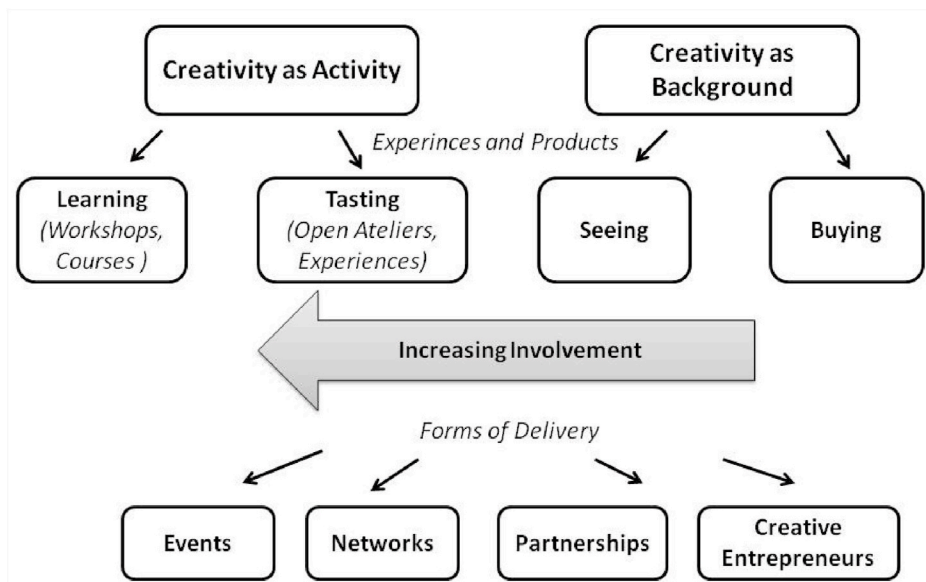


Fig. 1. The model of creative tourism (Richards, 2011).

challenges of gentrification and commercialisation in creative development (Peck as cited in Richards, 2020). Additionally, Souza, 2020 points out the importance of the involvement of the local community in the long-term tourism planning process for developing sustainable creative tourism. Hence, the recent studies about rural creative tourism underline the advantages of this development and the importance of developing strategies in terms of governance to foster the creativity in rural areas and small towns.

2.2. The “vicious circle” of creative tourism

In tourism development, the dispersion of human capital and economic resources can potentially damage the viability of local life (Bra-mezza, 1996). Against this threat, many scholars adopt the life-cycle scheme in order to understand and control the dynamics of tourism development in an evolutionary context (Da Conceição Gonçalves and Roque Águas, 1997; Russo, 2000, pp. 1–22). According to the life-cycle scheme, an unguided expansion of tourism development results in a decline due to high private and collective costs and the spatial-economic disruption of the city. However, less attention is given to how to prevent such a decline in this cycle. In this scope, focusing on ‘the vicious circle’ helps to determine the critical points and causative relations, and provides a useful reference to better understand the perceived decline of a neighbourhood (Russo, 2000, pp. 1–22). Currently, several models of creative tourism have started to suffer from the vicious circle of tourism development due to the arising conflict between its cost and benefits (Richards, 2009). In the Creative Tourism New Zealand programme, Raymond (2003) conceptualizes the development of creative tourism through saying: (1) ‘I hear and I forget’, (2) ‘I see and I remember’, (3) ‘I do and I understand’. Considering these statements, the vicious circle of creative tourism emerges, when the visitors start to reach a minimal level of information and experience in creative destinations, by saying: ‘I see and I remember’ instead of ‘I do and I understand’. In this process,

the characteristics of the tourist market and also the characteristics of the visitors change, due to the non-local actors who start to dominate the production of tourist goods (Debbage, 1990; Ioannides, 1992). Consequently, in the last stage of the vicious circle, the visitors use only the statement of ‘I hear and I forget’. In this stage, the process results in the decline of the local tourist industry, and this decline transforms culturally diverse destinations into monocultures (Holder, 1991; Van der Borg, 1991). Richards identifies the vicious circle of creative tourism through the process of the commodification of everyday life, leading to the emergence of mass cultural tourism (Richards, 2010). Minton (2004) explains this process of creative tourism in the context of a “buzz to bland” cycle that describes the fallout associated with high rents and land values and the displacement of independent traders and local residents. In this context, creative destinations start to be dominated by themed pubs, expensive restaurants, and mock loft apartments that decrease the distinctive quality and attractiveness of the place. Ultimately, the vicious circle of creative tourism brings homogenisation instead of successful regeneration (Minton, 2004) (see Fig. 2.).

The presence of the creative class in rural areas stimulates the processes of local growth, however, in order to sustain the creative environment in small towns, a particular form of governance is needed which focuses on creative programmes to avoid the pitfalls of creative tourism. However, a lack of a well-designed creative programme which engages with different bottom-up and top-down strategies may lead to the vicious circle of creative tourism. In this paper, we analyse ‘spontaneous’ unregulated creative tourism development processes in small town settings to understand the challenges at the destinations and discuss the importance of creative programmes to prevent the vicious circle.

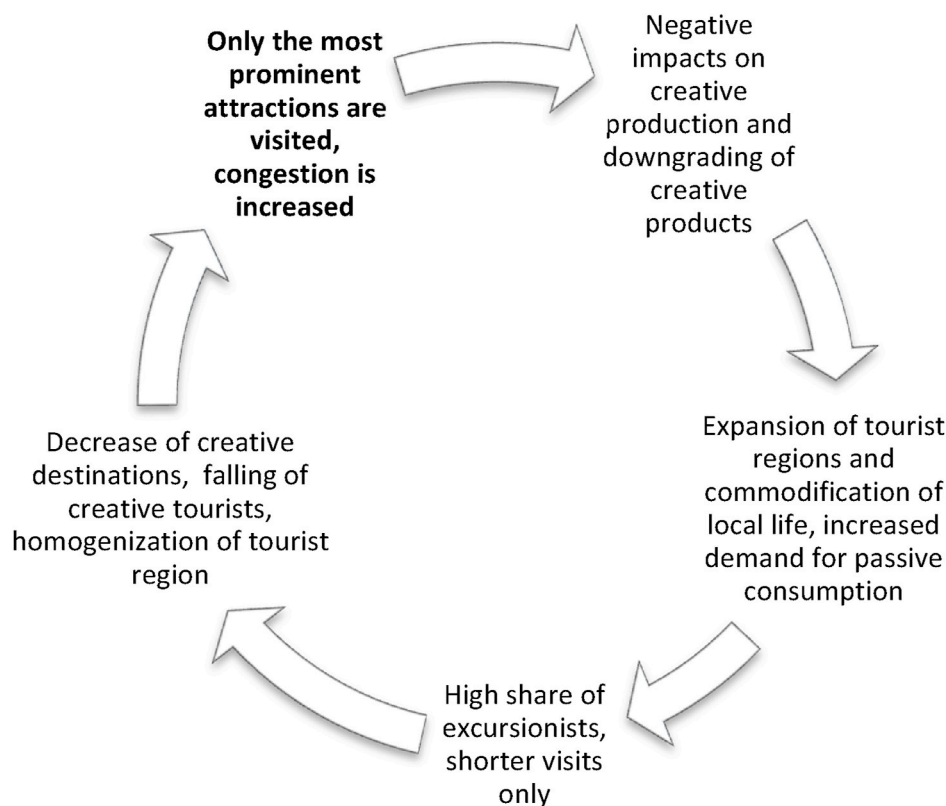


Fig. 2. The “vicious circle” of creative tourism (Richards, 2010; Russo, 2002).

3. The case study

3.1. Material and methods

This study applies mixed-method research techniques in the case study area. By utilizing the case study approach, this study aims to investigate the growth and transformation of the process of creative-based tourism development in the creative district of Alaçatı, a small town in the city of İzmir, Turkey. To do so, the study is carried out in three stages within the years of 2013, 2016 and 2019 through using longitudinal observations and in-depth interviews in the case study area. Linked to the longitudinal observational study, the method of mapping creative clusters is used, to present updatable data based on the location and classification of creative industries in each stage. This analysis illustrates the detailed land use map of the creative industries of Alaçatı, including art galleries, antique shops, fashion, design and ceramic studios. The interviews are conducted to understand creative individuals' location choices and their likes and dislikes in relation to the creative environment. The interviews were also a means to understand the location pattern of creative individuals prior to the start of the study. In total, twenty-two interviews were conducted by adopting the snowball technique. Eighteen were conducted with creative individuals including the pioneers in 2013. Four of the remaining pioneers were re-interviewed in the following two stages of the study. Due to their diminishing numbers, three were conducted in 2016 and one was conducted in 2019.

In 2013, the first stage was carried out for understanding creative-based development in the small-scale town. The creative environment and the creative clustering process of the district are analyzed in terms of creative tourism. In 2016, the second stage was carried out to examine the rise of the rural creative class in the district. The emerging challenges and constraints of creative tourism in the district are discussed in this stage by interviewing the pioneers about the challenges and constraints of making a creative livelihood in the district. In 2019, the last stage of the study was conducted to analyse the transformation process of the creative district linked to the fall of the rural creative class in Alaçatı. Hence, the study articulates the development process of creative based tourism and its vicious circle of decline.

3.2. Creative city-making in İzmir

The city of İzmir, where the small town of Alaçatı is located, is the third-largest city of Turkey with a population of 4.320.512 (ABPRS-Address based Population Results, 2018- <http://www.turkstat.gov.tr>). The creative industries of İzmir, including advertising, architecture, graphic design, fashion, cultural education, software, etc. are mainly located in the center of the metropolitan area (Konak district), which

includes 60% of all the cultural facilities (museums, art galleries, theater, cinemas, cultural centers, libraries) (İzmir Metropolitan Municipality, 2007) (see Fig. 3). Furthermore, based on the findings of "İzmir Knowledge Society-based Development Strategy Report (2012)", the employment creation capacity of the İzmir creative industries per workplace is calculated as 4,3 (the average number of people), which is below Turkey's average (4,6) and the other big cities in Turkey such as Istanbul (5,7) and Ankara (6,1) (IZKA, 2012). Within this context, in order to enhance İzmir's capacity as a creative city, the İzmir Metropolitan Municipality aimed to designate İzmir as a 'design city' in 2009 at national and international levels. To do so, the municipality took actions such as organizing Design Forums (2009, 2011), establishing the Mediterranean Academy (2012) to support the city's vision of creativity, conducting the İzmir Coastline Design Project (2011) for enhancing the city's identity in terms design. Despite the number of ongoing projects, the creative city-making process of İzmir remained limited because of a lack of adequate city branding or any effective communication strategy (Dereci, 2017). On the other hand, in recent years, the number of creative entrepreneur-led initiatives based on art and design, which attracts the urban creative class, has increased and has developed organically in İzmir. However, the number of these initiatives do not meet the creative-development goals in the metropolitan city scale (Mengi et al., 2017). While, the city of İzmir underperforms for the creative-city making, the western part of İzmir called 'İzmir Peninsula' has unique opportunities to combine both ecological and creative tourism in a more synergistic way. Within that picture, Alaçatı, which is one of the rural towns located in the 'İzmir Peninsula', has demonstrated a successful creative clustering process and development in terms of creative tourism.

4. Results

4.1. The rise of the rural creative class in Alaçatı

Alaçatı with a population of 10.060, located 79 km from the center of İzmir, has become one of the most famous tourist destinations due to its authentic architecture, seashores, vineyards, climate, natural beauties and coastal facilities and activities such as surfing (ABPRS-Address based Population Results, 2018- <http://www.turkstat.gov.tr>) (See Fig. 3). Due to its wealth of cultural, rural, and outdoor amenities, Alaçatı's tourist industry has experienced a significant transformation over the last thirty years. Accordingly, **Alaçatı, Hacı Memiş District**, which is known as a "yet untouched" district of Alaçatı has experienced creative-based tourism development since the beginning of the 2010s (See Fig. 4). In terms of the creative clustering process, in the early 2000s, creative individuals such as photographers, designers, and ceramist have been drawn to the Hacı Memiş District (Alaçatı) from their



Fig. 3. The map of distribution of cultural places in İzmir, which indicates the location of the center of İzmir and the small town of Alaçatı (IZKA, 2012).



Fig. 4. The evolution and location pattern of the creative individuals (Ince, 2013).

previous metropolitan locations of Ankara, Istanbul and the center of Izmir, due to the desirable characteristics of small towns. The findings of the interviews and site observations demonstrate that the characteristics of the town including accessibility, the natural environment, outdoor activities, community lifestyle, historical heritage which clearly connect with the creative environment, come out as important factors in the location choice for creative individuals in the Hacı Memiş District. For instance, one of the pioneers of the creative people, who moved to the district to produce ceramic arts in 2003, stated that her initial reason for coming to the Hacı Memiş district are the natural characteristics and the rural lifestyle of the town. After 2009, the creative clustering process of the district that stimulates creative tourism started in the Hacı Memiş District. According to the interviews, the emergence of creative tourism in the Hacı Memiş District can be described in the three phases illustrated below.

In the first phase, an antique bazaar, which opened in the Hacı Memiş District in 2001 by a group of antiquarians, became one of the main pull factors of creative tourism. The antique bazaar of the town was held every weekend for eight years. In 2009, the antique bazaar was closed by the Municipality. In that year, many antiquaries of the antique bazaar started to open antique shops in the Hacı Memiş District. Creative

industries including art and antiques markets, crafts, fashion and design studios emerged over the following four years. In the second phase, in the early 2010s, ceramists, designers and owners of art galleries moved to Alaçatı, attracted by the cultural, physical and natural characteristics of the small town. In that year, the district became a popular destination for tourists due in part to the artisanal community. In the third phase, in 2012, young creative individuals especially fashion designers started to move to the district to reach out to the community and exchange their ideas with other creative individuals. In 2013, the Hacı Memiş District became a creative hub of İzmir for both tourists and creative individuals. Up until 2013, the district had been regenerated in the physical, social and environmental sense: shop-fronts and interiors had been redesigned to make spaces for workshops, festivals and exhibitions which had become hubs of creative activities (see Fig. 5). After 2013, the growth pattern of the town changed due to the uncontrolled and rapid development of creative tourism.

In 2013, with the rise of the rural creative class, the process of creative-based tourism development provided positive impacts on the district such as supporting the community, supporting economic vitality, connecting locals, improving the quality of public spaces and constituting vibrant spaces. In this respect, the key benefits of creative tourism



Fig. 5. Views from the art ateliers and galleries of the Hacı Memiş district in 2013.

came into the approach in an economic, social and physical sense. Firstly, in the social sense, creative tourism fosters connections among both locals and visitors in regard to knowledge-based activities including art workshops, festivals, and exhibitions. In the Hacı Memiş District, creative individuals organized festivals to stimulate cultural values and socialize with locals. Creative individuals also strove to maintain the artistic identity of the district through knowledge-based activities. Secondly, in the physical sense, creative individuals strengthened the identity of the town and added value to the physical quality of the town by enhancing the vibrancy of street life. They organized weekly meetings in order to discuss place management strategies, which are a significant tool to avoid disturbing the locals and maintain the cluster life. For instance, one of the respondents (male, musician, collector and designer, owner of an antique shop in the district) stated that:

“Street management is significant to not disturb the locals and to maintain the cluster life. We (the creative individuals) gather among ourselves and discuss how we can avoid the deterioration of street pattern, keeping the noise at a certain level. We gather for our street. Generally, we gather at the Dutlu Kahve (the local coffee house)”

Moreover, the creative individuals, who use the historical buildings as workplaces, keep the district alive in terms of preserving and protecting the infrastructure. Lastly, in the economic sense, creative tourism supports small creative businesses and leads to job creation for locals based on art and craft production. Hence, the creative tourism practiced in Alaçatı contributed to the healthy development of this small town in a physical, economic and social sense. Today, however these positive impacts have been offset as a result of the uncontrolled aspects of creative tourism development in the district.

4.2. The vicious circle of creative tourism and the fall of the rural creative class in Alaçatı

Until 2013, the challenges and constraints of creative tourism

development such as the undermining of local traditions and ways of life, the commodification and cheapening of culture and traditions and the over-use of cultural resources in the Hacı Memiş District were offset by creative individuals and locals. In the following years, the district became more crowded due to the rapid development of tourism. Moreover, the increasing living costs such as the price of goods, rents, as well as habitat losses, increasing noise levels, pollution and gentrification came out as the negative externalities of uncontrolled tourism development which threaten the creative environment of the district. In order to understand the challenges and constraints of creative tourism, the creative cluster mapping held in 2013, 2016 and 2019 were used in the Hacı Memiş District (see Fig. 7). In this scope, based on the findings of the creative cluster mapping analyses and in-depth interviews, the changing structure of the creative cluster are discussed as follows:

- i. Linked to the displacement, some earlier settlers (creative individuals) moved out of the district due to the increasing rents and change of land use directives. For instance, in 2016, one of the art studios called “Art & Steak House”, which opened purely as an art studio six years ago, had to change its concept through combining their art studio with a restaurant in order to maintain the upkeep of the gallery. As another example, in 2013, when the vicious circle of creative tourism started to emerge, one of the pioneers in the creative district (Glass Artist, Male) stated that *“From time to time, I want to leave because of the crowds and the high rental costs. We prefer a quiet place”*. In 2019, the creative clusters mapping demonstrated that the glass artist closed his shop and also his workplace in the district, which started to be used as a themed cafe in 2019 (See Fig. 6). While some of the creative individuals left the district completely, some of them changed their location in the district. In addition to the displacement of the creative individuals, in 2013, many local shops in the district (such as local markets, coffee houses, etc.), which stimulated the everyday life and cultural values in the district, started to close.



Fig. 6. Views from the workplace of the glass artist (2013–2016) and its new view in 2019.

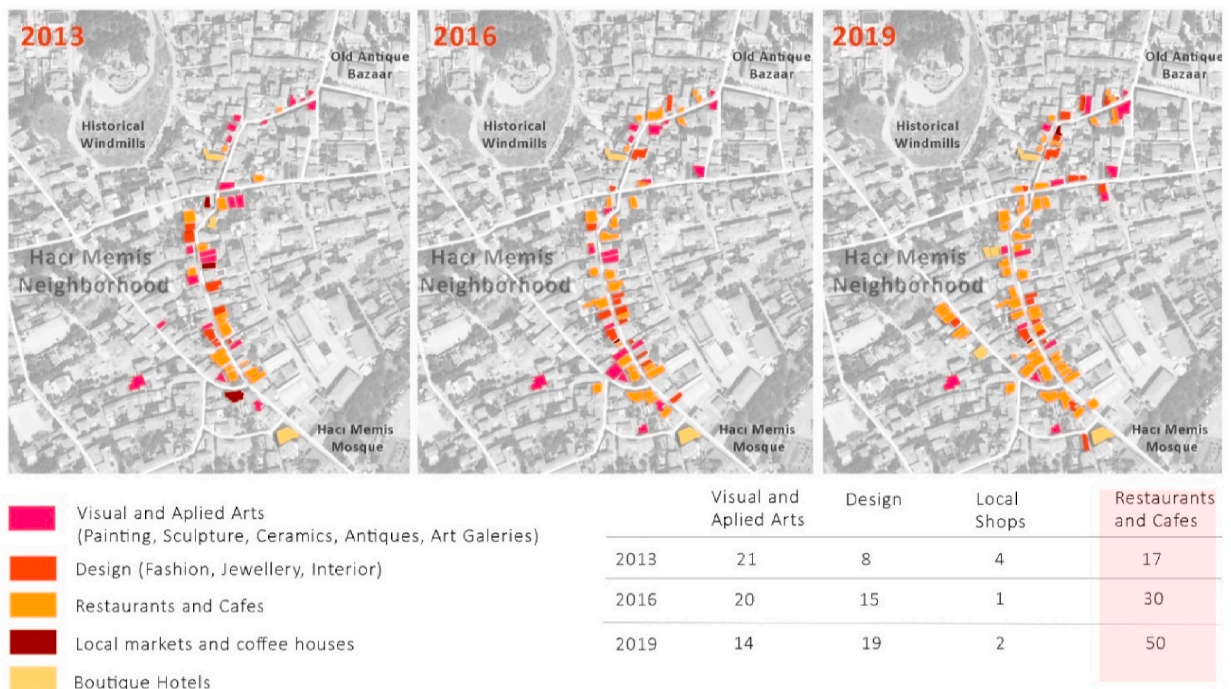


Figure 7. The creative cluster mapping of the Hacı Memiş District in Alaçatı.

More specifically, the local coffee houses, which created opportunities for interaction between the locals and the creative individuals in terms of sustainable tourism development, disappeared after 2016. Hence, between 2013 and 2019, the number of creative shops especially owned by the early settlers and the old local shops started to relocate within the district or to leave the district completely.

- ii. Concerning the issue of commodification and commercialisation, the creative industries started to be replaced with bars, restaurants and cafes. Between 2013 and 2016, while the number of creative industries including visual and applied arts and design remain stable, the number of restaurants and cafes nearly doubled. Between 2016 and 2019, the number of restaurants and cafes increased drastically, and the noise and crime associated with the night economy emerged in connection with the increasing numbers of cafes, restaurants and bars. For instance, in 2019, the noise level of bars, restaurants and cafes reached the volume of 130–135 dB, which is above the safety level of 85 dB and can damage hearing (Şendil, 2019). Furthermore, the uncontrolled tourism development commercialised the district as a popular leisure resource and decreased the local quality of life in the district.
- iii. In the matter of homogenisation, the district started to lose its attractiveness due to the changing structure of the creative cluster. Up to 2016, the visual and applied arts (antiques, paintings, and sculpture and art galleries), strengthened the identity of the district with its workplaces, facade design and small craft activities (see Fig. 5), had managed to maintain their activity. After 2016 however, creative spots related to the visual and applied arts started to decrease. Consequently, the pioneers of the visual and applied arts, who arranged workshops of glass craft making, painting or sculpture, started to leave the district. On the other hand, new creative industries especially fashion and jewellery shops, started to increase and become more visible. Today, the district has become increasingly homogenised due to the increasing numbers of restaurants, bars, cafes, fashion and jewellery shops, as a result of the demands of passive consumption.

All in all, the challenges and constraints of creative tourism such as the commodification, commercialisation, homogenisation and displacement brought about a wave of movement of creative enterprise away from the district. Accordingly, the balance between production and consumption in terms of creative tourism changed to passive consumption which lead to a phase of mass cultural tourism. To overcome the negative externalities of tourism development, various bottom-up governance measures were taken by private initiatives emerging from the willingness of the local people. In 2019, civil society organizations such as Alaçatı Tourism Association and Alaçatı Awareness Association started to work on place management strategies to foster the recovery of the creative district. These strategies have helped to maintain the noise at the desired level (75 dB), prevent pollution, avoid the deterioration of street pattern through removing the benches, umbrellas, awnings with logos and signage outside the buildings, and improve the infrastructure. Although their goal was to bring back the high quality of local life to Alaçatı, the number of creative destinations decreased in the district. Due to a decrease in the knowledge-based activities, the creative tourists' experiences of Alaçatı could be summarized with the phrases 'I hear and I forget' or 'I see and I remember' instead of 'I do and I understand' (Raymond, 2003). Ultimately, the Hacı Memiş District has fallen into the vicious circle phase of creative tourism as a result of the challenges of commodification, commercialisation, homogenisation and displacement, and this process ended with the fall of the rural creative class in the area.

5. Discussions and conclusions

The study discussed creative-based tourism development in small town settings by focusing on the rise and fall of the rural creative class. Within this context, the study analyzed the creative clustering process and the transformation process of the district based on three phases within the years of 2013, 2016 and 2019. Furthermore, the study documents the rise and fall of the creative class in the district over a period of 18 years. The first phase held in 2013 aimed to analyse the creative clustering process of the district, which first started in 2001. According to the findings, the rural creative class, which emerged as a control mechanism to eliminate the negative impacts of tourism development, started to rise after 2009 in the district. The second (2016) and third phase (2019) demonstrate the vicious circle of creative tourism linked to the fall of the rural creative class. The findings demonstrate that creative tourism can be used as a potential development tool in small towns. However, the uncontrolled development of creative tourism builds unsustainable tendencies in small town settings which threaten their vulnerable characteristics.

While the study focused on creative based development in a small-town setting, it also aims to reveal the position of the creative district of Alaçatı in the metropolitan city context. In the city of İzmir, there is an ongoing creative city making process within the municipality in order to enhance the creative identity of the city. However, despite a large number of ongoing projects, the creative city-making process of İzmir, especially in the metropolitan center, remained limited. In contrast, the small town of Alaçatı developed into a creative hub spontaneously without having any top-down policies for creative tourism. While the small town demonstrated success in terms of creative-based development and positioned itself as a creative town in the region, the vicious circle of creative tourism weakened the creative capital of the town. Hence, the study posits that creative place making is not purely a metropolitan phenomenon, as art-based communities can also thrive in rural areas. Attracted by the cultural and natural amenities, these communities integrate in the very fabric of the existing settlements.

Hence, small towns have potential advantages in terms of creative tourism based on their community cohesion, tangible and intangible assets and traditional ways of life. In the growth process of creative tourism, creative individuals can offset the negative impacts of tourism development (such as the over-use of cultural resources and commodification of culture) through knowledge-based activities. Furthermore, they organize micro-scale projects, organizations and festivals in the field of creative tourism for the locals and visitors, which add value to the physical quality of the town by enhancing the vibrancy of the street life. However, due to the limited number of workplaces and the sensitive characteristics of small towns, the uncontrolled development of creative tourism resulted in the decline of the creative industries. The knowledge-based activities associated with active participation and learning experiences lost their prominence amongst the increase of service-based tourism. When the negative externalities of mass tourism damaged the quality of life in the district, various bottom-up initiatives in Alaçatı developed place management strategies with an aim to foster the recovery of the creative district. However, these initiatives remained limited and could not break the vicious circle of creative tourism that causes commercialisation, homogenisation and displacement.

Research suggests that some of the pitfalls inherent within creative development that cause the vicious circle can be averted by developing sensitive creative-based strategies. In these strategies, various dimensions such as governance, amenities, territorial embeddedness linked to networks and accessibility, etc. need to be considered to achieve long-term sustainability of the creative environment in small towns (Selada et al., 2012). Regarding governance, the engagement of bottom-up and top-down dynamics in the development models have demonstrated success in fostering creativity (Lidegaard et al., 2018). Furthermore, amenities which demonstrate the unique characteristics of areas should be a consideration in the development of creative-based

strategies for strengthening local quality of life and distinctiveness (Selada et al., 2011). In addition, focusing on the dimensions of network and accessibility can enhance the territorial position of the small towns. Consideration of these dimensions within the development process of the creative based strategies can enhance the growth of creative tourism through balancing the costs and benefits of creative tourism. On the whole, the process of creative-based tourism development contributes to the healthy environment of small towns, by providing opportunities to grow sustainably while protecting the local quality of life, however this process faces many challenges due to the uncontrolled and rapid tourism development.

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Declaration of competing interest

None.

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