

2012

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Marques, L.

Marques, L. (2012) 'Boosting potential creative tourism resources: The case of Siby (Mali)',

Journal of Tourism Consumption and Practice, 4(2), p.111-128

<http://hdl.handle.net/10026.1/11696>

Journal of Tourism Consumption and Practice

University of Plymouth

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Boosting potential creative tourism resources:

The case of Siby (Mali)

Lénia Marques

Abstract

This paper further develops the conceptual framework for creative tourism, discussing the co-creation of experiences and the identification of potential resources for creative tourism development. The case of the village of Siby, in Mali, West Africa, illustrates the development of tourism and creativity in a non-western, rural environment, where creative tourism experiences can emerge spontaneously. The impacts of creative tourism are analysed and the need for more specific policies is highlighted, particularly in view of the inherent risks in creative tourism development.

Keywords: co-creation, creative resources, tourism strategies, experiences, creative tourism development, West Africa

Introduction

The concept of creative tourism has been widely discussed in recent years and is considered an emerging field within cultural tourism (Richards and Wilson, 2008; Richards, 2011). As Richards and Wilson (2008) point out in their analysis of the development of cultural tourism into forms of creative tourism, creative tourism experiences existed prior to the concept itself. Creative tourism is in fact another aspect of the renewed interest in creativity. Beyond the artistic field, creativity began to conquer new ground in the social sciences, where creativity gained added value in a range of different fields (economic, social, political and cultural). These changes constitute the 'creative turn' (Richards and Wilson, 2006: 1215), a phenomenon in which creativity has become embedded in many fields, ranging from innovation to urban regeneration and tourism development (Richards, 2011). The literature is now replete with studies of the development, planning and effects of creativity, including creative cities, creative communities, creative economy or creative industries (Florida, 2002; Garnham, 2005; Landry, 2000; Pratt, 2008; UNCTAD, 2010; Waitt and Gibson, 2009).

With the emergence of creativity as a trendy subject, there has been a tendency to use 'culture' and 'creativity' as interchangeable terms (Richards and Wilson, 2007: 276). Although these two concepts are intimately linked, they are distinct and have different implications. In the field of tourism both the connections between culture and creativity and the nuances between them have been discussed, particularly through the apparent evolutionary path from cultural to creative tourism and the shift towards tourism experiences based on intangible culture (Richards and Wilson, 2006). The concept of creative tourism

therefore arguably arose from a need to categorise contemporary forms of tourism increasingly dealing with intangible values, meanings and experiences.

UNESCO argues that 'creative tourism is 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). Despite the use of polemic terms such as 'authentic', this definition follows the broad line of the original definition by Richards and Raymond, who defined creative tourism as a form of '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' (2000: 18).

In this framework, the tag 'creative tourism' reflects a trend that some researchers have been observing in the cultural tourism research field and which has been the object of academic, political and business attention. Thus, it seems that the development of the creative tourism concept is at least partly related to the need to have both operational and conceptual understandings of the phenomenon, in order to keep up with the evolution of the tourism sector. As creative tourism grows, however, it becomes imperative to analyse the extent to which creative tourism in fact generates new and different insights, experiences and outcomes, or whether it is just a 'buzz' word being used as a convenient and attractive label that suits policy makers and marketeers (Richards, 2011). This need for further research is also stimulated by the current rapid transformations of the political, social and economic contexts of the tourism sector. For this reason, we need to continually update our understanding of this evolution as well as developing effective tools for planning creative tourism development.

Although creative tourism seems to be a world-wide trend, the relationship between tourism and creativity is most commonly linked to specific western urban environments. Forms of creative tourism development in other historical and cultural contexts are generally lacking. Regarding developing countries in the African continent, the increasingly strong presence of creative industries has been underlined (Miettinen, 2008; Rogerson, 2007) as well as the growing role that creativity plays in the economies of developing countries (UNCTAC, 2010). However, the connection between creativity and tourism has only just started to be analysed in Africa (Rogerson, 2007) and there are significant lacunas in data and studies on creative tourism development in African countries.

When considering the definitions of creative tourism, the importance of participation and personal involvement of the visitor stands out, in particular when observed in relation to the vast field of cultural tourism (Richards and Wilson, 2006; Wurzbürger et al., 2010). These increasingly participant visitors also have access to vast amounts of information (and the Internet is a significant factor of information and therefore of change of paradigms, as Donaire, 2008 states). As a consequence, the visitor is becoming increasingly demanding and critical (Prentice and Andersen, 2007; Trauer, 2006). In this sense, a significant number of cultural tourists reject ready-made products and demand customised experiences (Pine and Gilmore, 1999; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004; Schmitt, 1999, 2003). Hence creative tourism is a form of tourism based on experiences and the focus of touristic activity is on the experience itself more than on the service provider or the tourists themselves. By analysing the reciprocal relationships between participation and experience in creative tourism we can identify creative tourism resources and strive to highlight ways in which they can be structured, enhanced and optimised as products.

This paper firstly examines the inherent dynamics in the process of co-creation; which leads to an identification of potential resources for creative tourism. It then analyses the development of creative tourism in a non-western country, using the case study of Siby, in Mali, West Africa. Even though the country has been suffering from political instability and war scenarios since early 2012, the case study can still be interesting in illustrating how potential resources can be developed into creative products, or more exactly, into experiences.

The interstitial spaces of co-creation

The information age marks a major change in the dynamics and paradigms of societies across the globe (Castells, 1996). People are becoming more informed, more demanding and also more participative. The developed countries in the 21st century are characterised by a 'network society' (Castells, 1996). Information flows and participation allow people to construct their identities in different ways, oscillating between the net (and networked communities) and the self (Castells, 1997). In a society marked by a massive amount of available information, participation is developing in a horizontal rather than in a vertical direction. Communication is less hierarchical and increasingly bi- or multi-lateral, and products are the subject of co-creation rather than unilateral production (Rowley et al. 2007). In a postmodern age tourism is also characterised by the de-differentiation between leisure and work and between tourism and everyday life. The boundaries between producers and consumers, between supply and demand have also become much more vague than in the previous Fordist era.

This (con)fusion between production and consumption is one of the central features of creative tourism, since tourists also play the role of producers of the product they consume, becoming then co-creators together with providers, or simply 'prosumers' (Richards and Wilson, 2007). The increasing participation and involvement of visitors might occur to different degrees, from attending a festival to creating artefacts that will become her/his souvenirs (Pine and Gilmore, 1999; Richards and Wilson, 2006; Wurzburger et al., 2010). The need for creation and participation is also a feature of modern western society, and tourists also become more demanding. As previous studies have indicated (Pappalepore et al. 2010; Richards and Wilson, 2007, 2008), touristic products can no longer sustain patterns or respond to old paradigms. The co-created tourism product should evolve in order to respond to the new needs of the consumer and should be reframed in terms of change-based paradigms. Spaces for creative tourism experiences, both in urban and rural locations can benefit from these structural creative dynamics. However, researchers have been trying to address the current lack of knowledge in the field, in order to fully understand to what extent these experiences are subject to homogenisation and commodification or whether they can add new value and contribute to the co-creation of 'new lived spaces' (Richards, 2011: 1244).

One of the major issues in the development of new creative spaces for tourism is the relationship between the quest for authenticity (MacCannell, 1973) and the operation of the co-creation process (Richards, 2011). In common with most cultural tourists, the creative tourist seeks *authenticity* – a polysemic and polemic word, which is difficult to define (Cohen, 1988; Hughes, 1995; MacCannell, 1973; Wang, 1999), but which is frequently used in marketing tourist destinations (e.g. 'Autentica Cuba', 'Le Mali, une Afrique authentique', 'Afrique et Guyane authentique', 'Autentica Argentina', 'The Authentic Belgian Ardennes!', 'Le Pays Basque authentique'). The visitor wishes to know about, to learn from and to participate in the 'authentic' daily life of a community. Learning a skill or living an experience increases cultural capital, improves creativity and can lead to self-enrichment and self-valorisation (Richards and Wilson, 2007). To some extent, creative tourism is about living in and experiencing cultures different from the home culture of the visitor.

The search for authenticity and difference makes it essential that places differentiate themselves (Turok, 2009). In seeking to differentiate themselves, however, many adopt similar strategies, which in the medium to long term may eventually result in a certain degree of uniformity (Edensor, 2001; Richards, 2011; Richards and Wilson, 2006). In the case of creative tourism it can be argued that the grounding of creativity in individual experience reduces the risk of 'serial reproduction' and adds to the sense of authenticity. Creative

tourism experiences arguably offer a 'conceptual authenticity (that) is arguably negotiated in situ by the host and the tourist, each playing a role as the originator of the experience' (Richards, 2011: 1245). The co-created experience becomes personalised and unique. Because it is based on involvement and the successive reinvention of *authentic* and *unique* experiences, a co-created experience is strongly related to identity (Castells, 1997).

Identity relies on distinctiveness, in what makes each one unique within a group. However, to be a part of a group, some characteristics must be shared (Tajfel and Turner, 1986). Therefore, tourists look for what is different from their usual daily lives and cultures, while seeking to appropriate local *savoir-faire* and become a part of this 'other' culture, or simply part of the community. It is also in this framework that the boundaries between tourism and everyday life are becoming blurred (Maitland, 2010). In the act of experiencing cultures, social bonds are extremely important. The need for belonging draws human beings into groups. From a supply point of view, this need could explain why the visitor is seeking integration into a community, namely through learning, participation and interaction (which also form the basis of different forms of tourism, such as solidarity tourism, volunteer tourism or creative tourism). These activities generate social recognition within groups, firstly, in the visited community; and secondly, within the home community of the visitors, with family, friends and colleagues. This feeling of belonging is an important aspect of the tourist experience and becoming part of the group stimulates social learning and engagement in social interaction.

These social and collective aspects of tourism also reflect the fact that consumer choices are often more emotional than rational or logical (Swarbrooke and Horner, 1999). In marketing research this is conceptualised as 'Marketing 3.0' (Kotler et al., 2010). This new paradigm moves beyond the social into the symbolic and the spiritual realms (Donaire, 2008; Kotler et al., 2010), and it is now beginning to be explored in the tourism field. In marketing, these ideas have for some time been linked to the experience economy or experiential marketing. However, we can now see that the Marketing 3.0 paradigm is also having an influence on the framework of creative tourism, particularly in the emphasis on emotional, symbolic and spiritual meanings of experiences.

The experiences in creative tourism are in fact a consequence of the attachment of a certain segment of tourists to the values and principles they support, which in turn form part of a complete 'lifestyle' for groups of people. In fact, similar lifestyles may be common both to tourists (whom are seeking experiences) and experience facilitators (Boswijk et al., 2007; Pine and Gilmore, 1999; Prentice, 2004; Richards, 2011). For the experience facilitators,

their attitudes, choices, principles and values sometimes become more important than economic motivations, so that they can be considered 'lifestyle entrepreneurs' (Altejevic and Doorne, 2000). However, since in creative tourism co-creation, collaboration and participation blur the boundaries between production and consumption, the characteristics of the lifestyle entrepreneur are transferable between the tourist and the experience provider.

The two major dimensions of creative tourism are therefore on the one hand experience and participation; and on the other hand integration and community belonging. This has consequences for both tourists and local providers, particularly in terms of identity construction. Because if the tourists need and use these experiences to reinvent themselves and to become recognised as individuals in a globalised society, it is also important to underline that these experiences (tourism products) can also make a fundamental contribution to the identity and self-esteem of the communities they visit. This can have significant implications for local (sustainable) development (Gibson et al. 2012; Richards and Wilson, 2007).

Resources for co-creating experiences

In order to offer experiences to tourists, communities and local experience providers must not only possess resources, but also identify and develop them as experiences. The first step is then to know what resources are available in a specific place, well-defined in terms of geographical, social and symbolic limits. There are many resources that could form the basis of touristic products. But resources also have to be managed according to tourism policies and strategies. Often tourism development problems begin with a lack of strategy or a well-defined tourism policy, leading to a disorganized offer and inefficient resource management. Nonetheless, in the field of creative tourism, there is the risk that policies and well-structured strategies work may have a negative effect. With clear-cut rules and well defined spaces of action, creativity tends to weaken and creative flows or creative synergies based on cross-fertilisation may be reduced (Evans, 2007). This underlines the need to adopt a flexible approach to creative tourism development.

The scope of existing resources is broad and can have many different characteristics from tangible to intangible; from natural to cultural, passing through the spaces in-between. Resources are linked to heritage and can assume many forms, such as landscapes, buildings, knowledge or skills. Each territory has its own resources and they are often quite diverse. Besides, place distinctiveness often draws upon the uniqueness of certain resources, which can be as different as a forest with a lake or a savannah with waterfalls; stories, masks or ritual ceremonies; knowledge about medicinal plants; dance and

instrument performances; craftworks or a certain use of artefacts, just to give some examples (Daniel, 1996; Richards, 2005). There are also significant additional difficulties involved when dealing with intangible heritage, as creative tourism often does. Intangible resources are connected to people, feelings, emotions, attitudes, *savoir faire*, meanings and symbolic connections and are therefore harder and more complex to work with than tangible resources (Donaire, 2008; Richards and Wilson, 2006, 2007).

It is in relation to these resources that tourists are involved in participatory action. Participation might be at different levels depending on the depth of the engagement of the visitor, from simply attending a ceremony or festival as a member of the audience to being cultural makers themselves (Pine and Gilmore, 1999). In fact, creativity, creative power and creative dynamics are also elements that can be used as resources, for instance, in the promotion of performances or encounters between artists, amongst others (Howkins, 2001; Landry, 2000; Richards and Wilson, 2006).

To become accessible to tourists, creative resources have to be identified and structured in experiences. However, the further we get from tangible products, the harder it becomes to structure a product, to know the market segment(s), to promote an experience or even position it. Since this diversity of resources, products and meanings operates at an emotional and spiritual level, it is harder to understand the dynamics and processes involved. Bearing these difficulties in mind, the analysis of creative tourism development in Siby appears as an interesting case, since it is situated exactly in the area of the 'greater' challenges pointed out by Prentice and Andersen 'namely putting a mediating structure in place and fully operationalizing it' (2007: 106).

Methodology

The methodology of the research presented in this paper is mainly qualitative, based on a case study approach. The development of cultural tourism in Mali, in particular, in the southern part of country, has been the subject of analysis since April 2010, in the context of a project promoted by IBERTUR and the University of Barcelona (Marques, 2010).

Secondary data, such as national statistics, internal reports and promotional material (brochures, posters, etc.) were gathered in this first field study. This phase was preceded by a literature review on cultural tourism. The first field work period was also involved in-depth interviews with several key actors in organisations such as the Office Malien du Tourisme et de l'Hôtellerie (OMATHO) and the Ministère de l'Artisanat et du Tourisme of Mali (MAT). On the basis of this initial research, it was decided to take Siby as case study. The second field period was also preceded by a literature review on creative tourism, which constituted

the basis for the conceptual framework of this paper. The second visit to Siby involved the collection of specific data about creative resources, the products, the service providers and their strategies. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with the service providers and important actors. The research therefore involved the triangulation of a range of different methods, including in-depth interviews, field observation, document analysis (reports, brochures, website, among others) and secondary sources (national and regional data, statistics in particular).

As a new field of study in a country undergoing significant change, an understanding of these dynamics must include the analysis of the resources, strategies, products and limitations of service providers which include, consciously or not, co-creation in their activities. The largely qualitative research approach was appropriate for understanding an emergent and evolving phenomenon in a developing country.

However, it has to be recognised that the research has several limitations. The first is that it only focuses on the service providers' perspective. Therefore, in future work, it would be advisable to look into the visitor's motivations and their impressions of the whole cultural / creative tourism experience. In addition, the existing secondary data are not completely reliable, as they do not cover all visitors and data treatment is sometimes deficient. The interviews, although in-depth, were quite informal. This is directly related to the cultural and social context, and this has influenced the research methodology. At the same time, one great advantage of qualitative over quantitative research methods is their flexibility, which allows better adaptation to the local culture. The lack of a stronger comparison with other initiatives in Mali (especially Timbuktu or even Ségou) is directly related to the security problems that the Northern part of the country experienced in 2010 (instability situation exacerbated at the beginning of 2012).

Creative tourism experiences and the village of Siby itself are experiencing rapid and far-reaching change. Therefore, the results presented here can serve as a milestone in the analysis of creative tourism evolution in Mali.¹

Siby, the case study

Mali is a landlocked West African country extending over 1,241,000 km², having frontiers with seven countries (Algeria, Mauritania, Senegal, Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso, Guinea and Niger). Considered one of the poorest countries in the world, it has 14,517,176 inhabitants

¹ This research however does not take into account the economical, geo-political and social consequences of the changes that the country felt since 2012.

(INSTAT, 2009) and 166,914 visitors in 2009 (MAT/OMATHO, 2010). Tourist arrivals in the country increased between 2006 and 2008. In 2009, the arrival of tourists through Bamako airport decreased substantially due to security issues and the international crisis. In recent years, the country has seen some important development, most noticeably in the capital city, Bamako, which received almost two thirds of total visitors in 2009 (MAT/OMATHO, 2010). Business and congress tourism seem to be the main motivation to travel in Mali (34,9% in 2009). In the statistics produced by the OMATHO, the motivations data are clearly contradictory to the information obtained in the interviews and in some official reports. In fact, according to the OMATHO data, culture together with research represent 3,5% of tourist motivations (MAT/OMATHO, 2010). Cultural motivations are combined with research in the survey, while 'holiday and leisure' (which represents 23,4%) might well also include many visitors with a cultural motivation. There have been no other studies that can throw further light on the specific motivations of tourists.

Natural and cultural resources are plentiful in Mali. The municipality of Siby (26,633 inhabitants, INSTAT, 2009), situated in the rural Koulikoro region, has a striking landscape, between fields of mango and shea trees, granitic mountains and hidden waterfalls. The traditional construction of the village is another important aspect of the cultural landscape. Geographically, the village is not far from the capital (about 50 km). Since 2006, Siby has been connected to the capital city, Bamako by a good paved road. This connection has benefited the village in many ways, particularly in the development of the tourism sector in recent years. According to the 2009-2011 Strategy for Tourism Development in Mali, other than continuing to develop the Mopti region tourism (marked by several UNESCO world heritage sites), it also envisages reinforcing tourist circuits within 1.5 hours of Bamako (MAT/DAA, 2009: 14). This would include the Mandé country where Siby is located.

In Siby, there three important nuclei of cultural activities: the Cooperative of Women Maison du Karité, Siby's Cooperative of Rock-Climbing Monitors and the Centre Bougou Saba. The Maison du Karité, even though its primary scope is not touristic, it works as an attraction. This is a fair-trade cooperative that produces and sells shea based products. The whole manufacturing process is open to view during working hours. There we can see women working in different phases of production, and one can informally ask them about the cooperative and the manufacturing processes. There is also a small shop where they keep a simple record of visits.² This place is like a living museum, in the sense that visitors get in

² The numbers of visitors registered has been increasing at least in the last three years. In 2010 it about 480 visitors, according to the data available.

touch with local people, watch the production process and can buy the finished product, but visitors don't currently participate in any way.

Figure 1: Centre Bougou Saba, Siby



Source: Author photo

Siby has three 'touristic camping sites' (something between a hotel and camping site), which allow the village to attract and accommodate a significant number of visitors (around 160 beds in total). Some of the 'houses' are traditionally-built, following traditional architectural designs, with local materials, well adapted to the climate. In the biggest tourist camping site, the Hôtel Kamadjan, we can find the Coopérative des Moniteurs d'Escalade de Siby (Siby's Cooperative of Rock-Climbing Monitors). The cooperative was promoted by the Karamba Touré's Association to provide training for young people. The initial educational project had the main goal of increasing scientific awareness, contributing to the basic knowledge of the local population (mostly of the young people) and helping them to improve their living conditions (health, water, agriculture, etc.). The project was such a success that it was developed further. With the support of young people, the Association sought to develop projects that would help to keep the younger generation in the countryside.. The question was: what could these young people do in a rural place like Siby?

Figure 2: Kamadjan arch, Siby



Source: Author photo

In 2002 some of these young people started looking around for opportunities. The landscape is marked by numerous granitic mountains and the imposing and mythical Kamadjan arch. After some years of exchanges with experts and training, it is now possible to do rock-climbing, free riding or a botanic trekking visit in this impressive landscape. Besides these outdoor activities, the cooperative (based on the work of ten people) has several local products for sale (dried mango, mango jam, etc.) and works together with local partners in

Figure 3: Maison du Karité, Siby



Source: Author photo

order to offer a complete experience of the Mandé country. Therefore, in parallel with the activities more directly connected to adventure tourism, the Cooperative also offers a trekking experience with the objective of sharing knowledge about medicinal plants. Visitors are encouraged to do a herbarium throughout the walk. Hence the visitor is invited to learn secular knowledge and can take home their own souvenir, an object that is the result of their learning, of their personal experience and is simultaneously an object of memory. Some of these activities can therefore be included in the creative tourism field. However, it is only the Centre Bougou Saba, created in 2006, that is directly related to creativity and arts.

This Centre mainly functions as an artistic residence and it has its own local artistic group, the Mandé Koulou. Moreover, it is also prepared to receive visitors as a touristic camping site. Built in the traditional architectural style, the centre is integrated into the village, investing in and enhancing local culture, particularly dance and music. This institution organises and promotes encounters and performances, and receives artists from Mali, from the neighbouring countries and from Europe (mostly Switzerland, France and Spain).³ It is a platform for training, improvement, workshops and also for artists on tour. In 2009, the Centre inaugurated a project with local and regional schools.

Figure 4: Centre Acte Sept de Bamako, Mali



Source: Author photo

³ The number of visitors of each country depends deeply on the projects of the centre with other institutions. Visitors come in groups of 4 / 5 people, and sometimes 20, more rarely exceeds 30. This framework changes whenever there are locally organized events (meetings of local artists and the organization of itinerant shows)

Because it is a cultural centre with artistic and social goals, the centre strongly depends on external funding. However, it employs three people and allows local artists to live on their artistic skills. Other kinds of creative activities happen quite often at the centre on an informal basis: making instruments for the artistic residence; people coming to learn djembe; projects with the pupils of the local school which involve international visitors; workshops in theatre, dance and music, etc. These activities are the result of a series of circumstances and direct interaction with local providers and local population.

Conclusions

Looking at Siby in particular, and Mali in general, and taking into consideration the changes and evolution in the tourism sector, it is important to underline that even though it is a developing country and so circumstances are quite different from those we know in the Western world today, creative tourism exists and surely has opportunities and resources to develop (UNCTAD, 2010). As we have noted, resource management in this sector is highly imperative and depends deeply on tourism policies and strategies. The lack of strong policies has several negative consequences. If tourism is to contribute to poverty alleviation in developing countries, Swarbrooke argues, 'the problem revolves around the weakness of public sector policy, and short term economic goals' (1999: 207). In Mali, despite the tourism strategy for 2009-2011 (MAT, 2009), the existing policy measures are mostly focussed on the Bamako district and in the 'golden triangle' (Pays Dongon, Timbuktu and Djenné). Many other regions do not have any planning in the tourism sector (Marques, 2010).

Despite the general lack of planning, especially at a local and regional level, Mali has seen a growth in the number of festivals in recent years. The most well-known festivals are the Festival in the Desert (in Essakane / Timbuktu) and the Festival on the Niger (in Ségou).⁴ [footnote 4](#) These events have significant impacts on the community. Even if they are not as big as many of the festivals held in Europe, the number of visitors, the income, and also the demand for resources (such as food or water), are significant in the small communities where they take place. In fact, there are many locals involved as service providers, especially in the cultural events. These are mostly staged with the authorisation and connivance of the elder and the head of the village. Although there is little effective planning, events have to be discussed and approved by the local community leaders. This is a social

⁴ The Festival in the Desert, initially in the Sahara desert, in the Essakane oasis, about 60 km from Timbuktu, has seen its recent sessions in the city of Timbuktu, due to security reasons. The issues with security in the country have significant harmful effects on the events, on the number of visitors and, as a consequence, on the hotels, guides, tourism operators, amongst others. In Ségou, the same problem started to be felt in 2010, although in a smaller scale (I do not have access to data for the following years).

and political practice that also has as an impact on resource management. Although sustainable policies are not always being adopted, at least the community is involved in the process. Economic and traditional values are therefore important. In the Dogon country, water management is the preeminent example: there is a great lack of water that has to be brought from kilometres away, but most visitors are not aware of this and are not educated to respect this valuable resource. In this sense, the social welfare of the community suffers through the influence of visitors and this can affect the relationship between visitor and host in a negative way.

Mali is known worldwide for its music, which is one of the country's most valuable resources, not only in terms of cultural and creative industries, but also in terms of creative tourism. Many people visit the country to listen to the music, but also to learn to play instruments (the djembe and the kora are the most popular). Some visitors even make their own instrument, though it is rarer. Visitors can also learn how to dance and sometimes they can participate in local festivities and ceremonies (depending on the beliefs related to them). In recent years, some of these ceremonies have been altered for tourist consumption. There are now staged cultural events that are presented as local and authentic (Chhabra et al., 2003; Cohen, 1988; Daniel, 1996; MacCannel, 1973; Wang, 1999). At the same time it is hard to find a school of African dance or a similar activity in Mali. Visitors go to Mali, join the population and dance with the host community; or simply learn with a local.

While analysing what is happening in Siby, besides listening to the stories related to the Kamadjan arch and of the sacred serpent mountain nearby,⁵ it is possible to learn about medicinal plants, to see historic places, to watch and listen to the hunters dance or simply to live with the locals, sharing their customs (which is, to the Western visitor, sometimes a great challenge). Other than the festivals, the artistic residence or the botanical trekking path, it is in fact possible to enrich the experience. However, this enrichment is mostly informal and unplanned. Visitors arrive, ask if an activity is possible to do (or sometimes they do not even have to ask), and experiences indeed appear; they just might happen. In Mali, there are some organised experiences, such as fabric traditional dyeing in Ségou: visitors are taught

⁵ One important obstacle in terms of cultural tourism development is related to the fact that Malian people tell the stories from elder to younger, and they are kept in an oral way. In Siby, the most current language is Bambara and most inhabitants do not speak French (the official national language) nor English. The linguistic gaps represent a fundamental barrier for the narrative construction in the tourist imaginary.

dying techniques; they try them out and take the resulting fabric home.⁶ Despite these organised service providers, most experiences are informal and associated with other forms of tourism (such as adventure, nature or discovery). These 'might happen' experiences are quite an integrative part of African culture, and in particular, of Malian culture itself.

It is important to underline that there are some initiatives in creative tourism and they are not limited either to developed countries or to urban spaces. In rural areas in developing countries, creative tourism can be a vital element in social and cultural sustainable development. It creates jobs, the young local population is more attracted to stay, economic development is stimulated and basic living conditions are improved. The Cooperative of Rock Climbing Monitors is a good example of what can be achieved, using local creativity. In developing countries in particular, the framework of sustainable cultural tourism should be enhanced, since, as Swarbrooke argues, 'tourism, by giving natural and cultural resources a value, may also play a role in preserving them and developing them' (1999: 203).

Creative tourism, as a smaller segment of the cultural tourism market, can enhance tourist experiences in the framework of a sustainable resource management. The community is already quite involved and can play a fundamental role in successful experiences. Creative tourism is a privileged form of collective identity construction and intercultural dialogue. At the same time, the enormous potential of this type of tourism also relies in the fact that is based on common values and principles, which tend to involve emotional bonds and spiritual meanings (Richards, 2011). In this sense, the development here is not focusing on mass markets, but rather on small scale businesses, led by lifestyle entrepreneurs. They already exist and they have the possibility of being further developed. In Mali, obviously as in many other places, resources abound. It is evident many other obstacles exist, but with the community involvement and several partnerships, it is possible to boost creative tourism experiences, managing resources, structuring products and creating meaningful experiences.

Acknowledgements

This research was in part funded within an ongoing project of IBERTUR (Red de Patrimonio, Turismo y Desarrollo Sostenible) and the University of Barcelona for the potential development of cultural tourism in Mali.

I am grateful to Jordi Tresserras, Oumar Mohamed Sy; Germain Angéli and the Centre Bougou Saba; the Maison du Karité; the Coopérative des Moniteurs d'Escalade de Siby; the OMATHO (Office Malien du Tourisme et de l'Hôtellerie); the Ministère de l'Artisanat et du Tourisme; the Centre Acte Sept de Bamako; the Association Karamba Touré for their

⁶ It was not possible to visit and see the organization of the experience in the field, since at the time of this field research, this region was under security measures. The importance of textile as a traditional resource for cultural tourism in western cultures has been analysed by Richards (2005).

support and collaboration; and Maria Sofia Pimentel Biscaia for her critical reading of an early version of this paper.

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