Review

The attributes of heritage, cultural, and creative tourism in the context of sustainability before and after the COVID-19 pandemic: A comprehensive review

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Abstract: The activities and characteristics of heritage, cultural, and creative tourism are notably distinct despite the fact that they are frequently confused and misunderstood. Moreover, these types of tourism have been significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. This review article aims to explore the characteristics of three types of tourism, both pre- and post-pandemic, and seeks to propose sustainable solutions with new opportunities for the tourism industry. The article adopts a PRISMA flow diagram and VOSviewer to perform a systematic literature review, ultimately selecting 179 articles from the Scopus, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar databases and grouping them into five clusters: 1) heritage, cultural, and creative tourism; 2) co-creation; 3) creative city; 4) sustainability; and 5) technology and innovation. Consequently, this review article proposes a final framework presenting five related clusters suggesting sustainable solutions for creative tourism. It may aid the tourism industries in their transition to creative tourism, which is more sustainable and broadly focused while ensuring safety and enhancing income for local communities in the post-pandemic period.

Keywords: creative tourism; COVID-19; pandemic; cultural tourism; heritage tourism; sustainability

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic profoundly impacted all tourism industries between 2019 and 2021 due to the implementation of "lockdown" policies (Ahmad et al., 2021; Buckley and Westaway, 2020; Corbisiero and Monaco, 2021; Fletcher et al., 2020; Wallace et al., 2023). Information from the World Tourism Organization indicates that international tourism dropped 73% worldwide in 2020 and 76% in 2021. Moreover, in northern Europe, the rate dropped by 69% in 2020 and 86% in 2021; in southern Europe, it dropped by 60%. As a result of COVID-19, the most recent report from the World Travel and Tourism Council estimates that up to 75 million workers were immediately at risk of losing their jobs. Existing research indicates that the worldwide travel and tourism industry may have suffered a potential gross domestic product loss of $2.1 trillion in 2020 (Karagoz et al., 2023; Skare et al., 2021).

All forms of tourism and hospitality were severely affected as governments imposed restrictions on international and domestic travel (de Rooij et al., 2022; Singh, 2021; Wallace et al., 2023). Hospitality sectors, including hotels and restaurants, were compelled to lay off their staff. Even as COVID-19 restrictions eased, new policies and hygiene measures were implemented for cleaning rooms, requiring staff and visitors to test positive for COVID-19 (Akhtar et al., 2021; Gretzel et al., 2020; Tfaily, 2018). Consequently, these measures incurred significant costs for the tourism and

hospitality industries (Crespi-Cladera et al., 2021; de Rooij et al., 2022). Furthermore, post-pandemic, travelers remained anxious about aspects such as travel, interpersonal contact, public spaces, flights, and hygiene standards at locations. These anxieties have influenced the emerging trends and behaviors in various types of tourism (Piccinelli et al., 2021; Qiu et al., 2020).

Specifically, heritage, cultural, and creative tourism were significantly affected by the pandemic due to their often indoor and city-centric nature (e.g., museums, castles, festivals). Consequently, several heritage, cultural, and creative tourism sites and events faced restrictions, experiencing reduced visitor numbers and income loss for the industry (Corbisiero and Monaco, 2021; Remoaldo et al., 2020; Sigala, 2020). Furthermore, as highlighted by Duxbury et al. (2020), post-pandemic trends in creative tourism, aligning with heritage, cultural tourism, and sustainability, are emerging, such as creative cultural sustainability. This trend aims to improve the quality of life for local communities, presenting an alternative sustainable form of tourism in the post-COVID-19 era (Duxbury, 2021). Additionally, it aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UN, 2020), particularly goals 11 and 12, focusing on inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable cities, and ensuring sustainable consumption and production (Dalei et al., 2021; Isik et al., 2018).

While heritage, cultural, and creative tourism in cities declined during the pandemic, rural areas gained popularity as isolated locations, leading to the concept of localism and sustainability (Brouder, 2020; Dalei et al., 2021; Koscak et al., 2023). The concept of sustainable tourism addresses the needs of and relationships between visitors, the industry, the environment, host communities, and all relevant stakeholders. This trend can reduce the usage of transport vehicles, the development of resorts and restaurants, and countries' energy consumption and CO_2 emissions, as well as prevent tourists' anxiety about hygiene standards in public locations, and support renewable energy consumption and technology for sustainable economic growth (Isik et al., 2017, 2020; Koscak et al., 2023; Paudel and Dhakal, 2023).

However, a significant distinction between the activities and characteristics of heritage, cultural, and creative tourism exists, albeit often perceived as closely linked, confusing, and unclear (Richards and Wilson, 2006). Creative tourism primarily emphasizes intangible aspects (e.g., culture, lifestyle), contrasting with heritage tourism, which revolves around tangible heritage sites. Furthermore, creative tourism involves tourists' self-expression and skill development through co-creation with locals (Al-Ababneh, 2020; Richards and Wilson, 2006). In contrast, heritage and cultural tourism often cater to a niche group of serious tourists, resulting in less interaction between locals and foreign tourists (Kasemsarn and Nickpour, 2016; Kasemsarn et al., 2023a; Vergori and Arima, 2020).

Although closely related, the definitions, characteristics, and activities of these tourism forms can be confusing. Additionally, various studies indicate uncertainty within tourism industries on how to transition from heritage and cultural tourism, appealing to a motivated cultural audience, to a more broadly targeted and sustainable creative tourism (Baixinho et al., 2020; Richards and Wilson, 2006; Richards, 2016). Based on the aforementioned information, this article highlights two primary research problems:

1) The original characteristics and activities of heritage, cultural, and creative tourism are confusing.
2) The continued anxiety among tourists post-pandemic, along with restrictions on heritage, cultural, and creative tourism, led to reduced industry income and impacted local communities.

Consequently, this review article aims to explore the characteristics of three types of tourism, both pre- and post-pandemic, and seeks to propose sustainable solutions and new opportunities for the tourism industry. Traditional heritage, cultural, and creative tourism can adopt these recommendations to target a broader tourist base while ensuring safety and enhancing income for local communities in the post-pandemic period. This article is organized as follows: Section 2 explains how to adopt a systematic literature review methodology. Section 3 constitutes keyword analysis, summarizing it with a diagram. The next section, Section 4, is a literature review highlighting the history and evolution of creative tourism and what distinguishes it from other types of tourism. The following part is Section 5, a content analysis presenting five clusters in detail. The last section summarizes the five clusters with practical implications and makes further study recommendations.

2. Materials and methods

This research employs a systematic literature review methodology following O'Brien and Guckin (2016), as well as the PRISMA (Liberati et al., 2009) flow diagram. This diagram, recommended by organizations and journals, is an evidence-based framework comprising four phases. It would enable replication of review methods and serve to illustrate the quality of the review. The process encompassed three key elements of research methodology as illustrated in **Figure 1**.
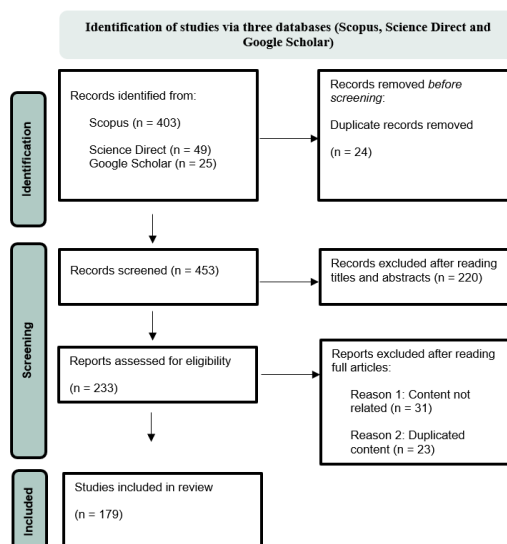

Figure 1. PRISMA (Liberati et al., 2009) flow diagram from this review article.

2.1. Inclusion and exclusion

The inclusion and exclusion criteria were designed with the objective of identifying and comparing the differences, similarities, and relationships between cultural tourism and creative tourism, as illustrated in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Criteria for inclusion and exclusion.

Inclusion	Exclusion
Studies in English	Non-English
Publication in the 2010–2023 period (Scopus, ScienceDirect), 1990–2023 (Google Scholar)	Publications outside the timeframe were not selected
Journals, conference proceedings	Working papers and conference abstracts, textbooks, book chapters, and organization websites
Categories: Arts and Humanities; Social Sciences; Business Management and Accounting	Categories: Computers and Composition; Computers in Human Behavior; Design Studies; Engineering; Agriculture; Economics; Econometrics and Finance

2.2. Searching in different databases

At this stage, this review article used two primary databases, Scopus and ScienceDirect, with Google Scholar used as a secondary database. The Web of Science was not taken into account because the analysis primarily concentrated on domains within the social sciences, arts, and humanities; technological sectors, such as computers and engineering, were overlooked. The search keywords used in the main databases were "cultural tourism" and "creative tourism" from 2010 to 2023. Nevertheless, a scarcity of articles from both databases spans the years 2010 to 2023, primarily due to the narrow scope of certain subjects (e.g., case studies of creative tourism). As a result, the researcher investigated the specified time frame from 1990 to the present, utilizing Google Scholar as a gray area (searching for studies not indexed in primary databases but potentially relevant to the case studies). With the Google Scholar results, this research identified the top 200 articles by reviewing related titles and abstracts and selecting 25 relevant studies. Subsequently, the search terms were applied to titles, abstracts, and keywords within the databases.

2.3. Importing into bibliographic software

The search results from all three databases were imported into EndNote 20. This was achieved by selecting "Import into duplicate library" from the menu to exclude duplicated articles. Consequently, 24 out of the 477 articles were removed, leaving a total of 453 remaining articles.

2.4. Relevant and irrelevant articles

This stage involved three primary steps: Reviewing all 453 titles and abstracts. Subsequently, 233 related articles were selected for a comprehensive reading. As a result, 179 articles were finalized for inclusion.

3. Keyword co-occurrence analysis

The systematic analysis of keywords from the total of 179 remaining articles, conducted using VOSviewer software, illustrates the trends and relationships, as depicted in **Figure 2**. Initially, all 179 articles were imported into the program, and keywords were set up to recognize a frequency of more than five appearances by the program. This screening resulted in 82 qualified keywords, outlined in **Table 2**, and depicted in **Figures 2** and **3** below.
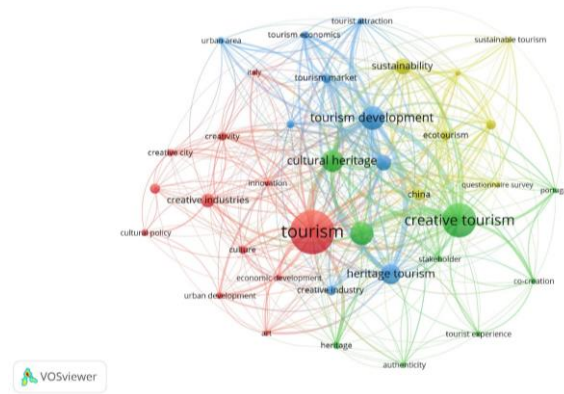
Figure 2. Keyword co-occurrence based on keywords "cultural tourism" and "creative tourism".

Table 2. Top 10 keywords from 179 articles.

Keywords	Occurrences	Total link strength
Tourism	88	164
Creative tourism	68	148
Tourism development	47	190
Cultural tourism	46	84
Creative industry	46	146
Cultural heritage	44	121
Heritage tourism	40	125
Sustainability	32	95
Tourist destination	31	108
Ecotourism	19	80
Sustainable development	19	65

Through the co-occurrence analysis of all keywords from the 179 articles from **Table 2** using VOSviewer software, it becomes evident that, apart from the main keywords such as "creative tourism" and "cultural tourism," the most frequently occurring terms in this domain revolve around "tourism development" (47 occurrences), which appeared most frequently. This was followed by "creative industry" (46 occurrences), "cultural heritage" (44 occurrences), "heritage tourism," "sustainability," "tourist destination," "ecotourism," and "sustainable development,". Regarding **Figure 2**, from VOSviewer software, it represents four groups of related keywords (with four main colors) with the link strength that researcher could adopt into content analysis in the next section.

4. Literature review

4.1. Creative tourism

Initially, the focus of creative tourism was predominantly on learning experiences within traditional cultures involving locals and communities. Presently, it has evolved to integrate with creative industries, engaging not only locals and tourists but also productions, institutions, and organizations, leading to the overarching goal of

fostering a creative economy. Consequently, it generates creative content using technologies (e.g., mobile applications, high-tech installation arts, simulations), new business models, and marketing strategies targeting broader demographics as presented in **Table 3** (Baixinho et al., 2020; Duxbury and Richards, 2019; Richards, 2019; Richards, 2016; Smith, 2009).

Table 3. Evolution of creative tourism (Baixinho et al., 2020; Duxbury and Richards, 2019; Richards, 2019; Richards, 2016; Smith, 2009).

Stage of creative tourism	Forms	Main focus
Creative tourism 1.0 (2000)	Learning activities and workshops	Production-focused
Creative tourism 2.0 (2005)	Destination-based creative experiences	Macro consumption-related perspective
	Community-based tourism	Community-development thinking
Creative tourism 3.0 (2010)	Links to creative economy	More passive forms of creative consumption
Creative tourism 4.0 (2015)	Relational networks and co-creation of experiences	Micro consumption-related perspective blending into prosumption

Richards (2016) notes workshops involving locals have been added to enhance and add value to tourists' experiences. Several studies indicate that the definition of creative tourism has amalgamated with creative industries (Smith, 2016; Marques and Borba, 2017). Smith (2016) suggests incorporating the scope of creative tourism into three areas: 1) craft products or activities engaging with locals; 2) creative activities and locations; and 3) creative industries (e.g., film, design, architecture).

Creative tourism presents a shift from cultural and heritage tourism, which is passive, involving visits to heritage or cultural locations and events. In contrast, creative tourism fosters interaction among locals, tourists, communities, and locations. It emerges as an evolution of heritage and cultural tourism as the next-generation form (Richards, 2013; Smith, 2016).

4.2. Creative tourism, cultural tourism, and heritage tourism

Baixinho et al. (2020) and Remoaldo et al. (2020) suggest that creative tourism intersects with various tourism domains, including sustainable tourism and heritage and cultural tourism, enhancing experiences with other visitors, locals, and communities. Additionally, creative tourists contribute to heritage locations and cultural tourism by understanding and valuing the destination's cultural differences through local community involvement. However, creative tourism fosters a deeper connection between tourists and hosts compared to general tourism (Baixinho et al., 2020; Richards, 2016).

Virginija (2016) states that creative tourism aims to develop creative activities, communities, and industries, contributing to increased local economics. In contrast, heritage and cultural tourism are oriented toward events, festivals, heritage sites, and cultural preservation, focusing on tangible heritage. Creative tourism is more about intangible values, such as gaining experience and learning. Creative tourists are not solely focused on historical buildings or cultural festivals; they explore cities and engage in social creativity (Kasemsarn, 2022; Remoaldo et al., 2020).

In terms of income, heritage and cultural tourism generate profits through tickets, souvenirs, fees, and taxes. However, creative tourism directly supports local

communities, with creative tourists paying for services directly to locals, thus improving communities directly. Regarding tourists' aims, heritage and cultural tourists aim to visit famous historical and cultural places and events, while creative tourists aim to learn, communicate with locals, and participate in creative activities as presented in **Table 4** (Baixinho et al., 2020; Kasemsarn and Nickpour, 2017).

Table 4. Comparison characteristics between creative and cultural and heritage tourism (Baixinho et al, 2020; Kasemsarn et al., 2023b; Virginija, 2016; Richards and Wilson, 2006, p.258).

	Creative tourism	**Cultural tourism**	**Heritage tourism**
Timescale	Past, present, and future	Past and present	Past only
Cultural context	Creative process	High culture	-
Mode of consumption	Experience, co-creation	Product, process, and cultural locations	Products and heritage locations
Learning orientation	Active skill development	Passive	Passive
Intervention	Realizing creative potential and sustainable development (environmental, cultural, social, and economic)	Economic and cultural development	Economic and heritage site development
Orientations	Development of creativity in cities, preservation of tradition, learning	Sightseeing, events, and preservation	Sightseeing and heritage preservation
Benefits	Improved local economics through financial support for communities	Improved local economics through taxes received, tickets sold, souvenirs	Improved local economics through taxes received, tickets sold, souvenirs
Tourist's aim	Learning and gaining experience	Sightseeing and cultural events	Historical and heritage attractions

5. Content analysis

The VOSviewer software organizes all keywords and their related links into four clusters with four colors, presented in **Figure 2**. Subsequently, all 179 studies underwent content analysis. To ensure reliability, three external researchers in the related areas (tourism, creative city, and design) read and grouped together similar issues and themes. Next, the researchers agreed to separate the keyword "innovation" (red color group) from "creative city" due to its details constituting another main category. Next, **Figure 3** was created and presented as an initial framework illustrating five related clusters of sustainable creative tourism. It is completed and presented as the final framework in the conclusion.

- Cluster 1: Heritage and cultural tourism;
- Cluster 2: Co-creation;
- Cluster 3: Creative city;
- Cluster 4: Sustainability;
- Cluster 5: Technology, innovation.

Figure 3. Initial framework presenting five related clusters from keywords "cultural tourism" and "creative tourism".

5.1. Cluster 1: Characteristics between heritage, cultural and creative tourism

5.1.1. From heritage and cultural tourism to creative tourism

Al-Ababneh (2020) and D'Auria (2009) propose that heritage and cultural tourism evolved into creative tourism due to tourists seeking authentic and unique experiences. Jelincic (2009) and Fernandez (2010) suggest that creative tourism initially diverged from cultural tourism due to changes in tourists' preferences for more creative activities and different experiences.

By the early 21st century, creative tourism became popular, attracting not only cultural tourists but also younger generations uninterested in heritage or cultures. It enhances the quality of tourist experiences and appeals to a broader target group than heritage and cultural tourism (Richards, 2016). Moreover, it supports heritage sites through investments, renovations, and maintenance, catering to general tourists and incorporating creative activities such as exhibitions, shows, and films to benefit local communities (Kasemsarn et al., 2024; Richards and Wilson, 2006; Richards, 2013). In conclusion, this section aims to discuss the evolution of creative tourism from its origins in heritage and cultural tourism, proposing it as a new trend targeting a broader spectrum of tourists.

Virginija (2016) proposes two methods to integrate creativity into tourism: 1) using creativity in activities, and 2) using creativity as a background for tourism. Additionally, Wurzburger et al. (2009) outline various activity types related to tourists' experiences, as presented in **Table 5**.

Table 5. Types of activities and experiences in creative tourism (Wurzburger et al., 2009; Virginija, 2016, p.144).

Activities	Types of activities and experiences
Learning	Workshops—attending specific courses and exchanging experiences
Tasting	Experiences open workshops
Observation	Routes, trip notes
Shopping	Galleries, shops

5.1.2. Heritage, cultural and creative tourism in the post COVID-19 pandemic era

During and post the pandemic, open-air events and exhibitions gained popularity, becoming new trends. Wallace et al. (2023) advocated considering landscapes, nature, and outdoor activities as part of a new form of heritage or cultural tourism. Stastna et al. (2023) noted tourists' inclination to avoid large-city events, fairs, or conferences. All forms of tourism were affected by the pandemic, resulting in a surge in outdoor tourism. For instance, hotels in Prague experienced a 27% decline during COVID-19, while mountain hotels saw a 104% increase (Stastna et al., 2023).

Research from various countries indicated a shift from urban to rural and individual tourism, avoiding public transportation. This trend promoted the creation of new attractions, trails, events, or festivals in rural or outdoor settings (Stastna et al., 2023; Wallace et al., 2023). Studies also support that neglected areas (e.g., rural or unseen locations) could be promoted as new heritage and cultural tourism spots, necessitating financial support and infrastructure development. However, facilities and services in rural areas require improvement, a challenge that historical city buildings (e.g., castles, museums) do not face. Moreover, research suggests that offering online pre-booking, limiting daily visitors, or presenting online versions (e.g., virtual tours, online museums) were proposed for heritage sites (Cvijanović et al., 2021; Stastna et al., 2023; Vaishar and Stastna, 2022).

Studies recommend adopting sustainable tourism practices as a matter of priority in order to mitigate environmental harm and aid in the enduring conservation of cultural and heritage sites, including waste reduction, community engagement, and environmentally friendly transportation (Buckley and Westaway, 2020; Dalei et al., 2021; Duxbury et al., 2020; Tsironis et al., 2022). In the area of digital innovation and virtual experiences, digital technology enables the provision of online tours and virtual experiences for individuals who are unable or unwilling to travel. This is achieved through the utilization of augmented reality encounters, multimedia exhibits, and virtual exhibits that strengthen visitors' connections to cultural and historical sites (Gretzel et al., 2020; Kaczmarek et al., 2021; Tfaily, 2018).

Table 6. Trends and recommendations for heritage, cultrual and creative tourism in the post-pandemic era.

Trends for heritage, cultrual and creative tourism	Reference
Shifting events, exhibitions, and festivals from city centers to rural areas	Stastna et al. (2023); Naramski et al. (2022); Wallace et al. (2023)
Outdoor activities	Lee et al. (2024); Stastna et al. (2023); Wallace et al. (2023)
Offering online versions/ booking	Cvijanović et al. (2021); Naramski et al. (2022); Stastna et al. (2023); Vaishar and Stastna (2022)
Seeking neglected/ unseen areas and promote as new attractions	Cvijanović et al. (2021); Lenggogeni (2023); Singh (2021); Stastna et al. (2023); Vaishar and Stastna (2022)
Limiting daily visitors	Cvijanović et al. (2021); Lee et al. (2024); Stastna et al. (2023); Vaishar and Stastna (2022)
Sustainable practices	Buckley and Westaway (2020); Duxbury et al. (2020); Tsironis et al. (2022)

In summary, heritage and cultural tourism should shift events, exhibitions, and festivals from city centers to rural areas, as tourists prefer outdoor activities for safety.

Additionally, heritage sites should offer online experiences leveraging innovation and technology to attract tourists as presented in **Table 6**.

5.2. Cluster 2: Co-creation

5.2.1. Tourist's experience concept

Carvalho et al. (2019) explain that in the late nineties, industries attempted to sell products and services cheaply, resulting in a "race to the bottom". However, the term "experience economy" emerged as customer consumption patterns changed, prompting industries to adopt new strategic marketing approaches to satisfy customers (Ali et al., 2016; Binkhorst, 2007; Richards, 2016).

The concept of the tourist experience has been influenced by service marketing, rooted in the co-creation process in three ways: offering features and benefits for co-created experiences, value in use co-created during the customer's experience, and inter-subjectivity value (Campos et al., 2018; Richards, 2016; Rihova, 2013). Subsequently, a shift occurred towards real experiences and co-creation with locals and communities, introducing concepts like "living like a local" (Richards, 2016), "tourist participation" (Richards, 2013), and "experience evaluation" (Binkhorst, 2007). In conclusion, co-creation and the tourist experience have become fundamental processes in creative tourism, allowing tourists to become a part of communities and have authentic experiences similar to locals.

5.2.2. Co-creation concept

Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) first coined the term "co-creation," signifying the interaction between customers and companies. It offers customers the opportunity to provide feedback and participate in designing products and services and involves collaboration between customers and companies for product and service development. (Chathoth et al., 2013; Tongsubanan and Kasemsarn, 2023). The co-creation process contributes to the experience economy, where customers value the overall experience (Pine and Gilmore, 1998).

5.2.3. Co-creation adopted in creative tourism

Co-creation was initially introduced to tourism by Binkhorst (2006). He suggested that tourists, as value partners, are overlooked in every tourism process (e.g., designing, reporting, evaluating). Through adopting the co-creation process in tourism, tourists are placed at the center to develop experiences (Tongsubanan and Kasemsarn, 2024; Zizka et al., 2018). In the tourism realm, co-creation is defined as "the tourist's interest in mental and physical participation in an activity and its role in tourist experiences" (Prebensen et al., 2016, p.1). In the tourism industry, co-creation is significant since tourism predominantly focuses on services and experiences rather than products. Additionally, it aligns with the nature of tourism, where tourists seek experiences over functionality (Tussyadiah and Zach, 2013). This concept is summarized in **Table 7**, which presents involvement, engagement, and participation in tourism co-creation (Mohammadi et al., 2021; Oertzen et al., 2018; Oyner and Korelina, 2016).

Table 7. Three types of co-creation in tourism industry (Mohammadi et al, 2021; Oertzen et al, 2018; Oyner and Korelina, 2016).

Degree	Stages	Forms	Explanation	Examples
Low	Involvement	Feedback	Identifying and including tourists and stakeholders as the first step, putting tourists at the center of experience creation and feedback.	Reviewing tourist's idea, suggestion, sharing, opinions, comments.
Medium	Engagement	Co-design	Involving tourism industry and agency engagement to determine the level of tourist engagement.	Developing workshops or testing with tourists using a co-design process to enhance tourist experiences.
High	Participation	Co-production	Identify any active participation, such as involvement within communities, engagement with locals, social interaction, interactions between tourists and hosts before, during, and after travel.	Not only designing but also producing or customizing services and products.

5.2.4. Co-creation in the post COVID-19 pandemic

Traditionally, most heritage, cultural, and creative tourism activities were centered in city locations or indoor settings involving crowds or interactions with people. Consequently, several studies propose that properly and creatively redesigning co-creation is imperative for creative tourism during and after the pandemic (Costa, 2021; Schmidt, 2019).

Given the major challenges and restrictions during COVID-19—tourist constraints, lockdowns, hygiene policies, and limited visitor numbers—co-creation from the tourism industry's perspective could address these issues. Primarily, it is advisable to focus on outdoor or environmental activities, with engagement with local communities remaining a core aspect of creative tourism to support community income and tourist participation. However, the creative tourism industry should seek and propose new local communities to alleviate tourist overcrowding (Dastgerdi and de Luca, 2022; Seabra and Bhatt, 2022)

From the government's standpoint, directing efforts toward domestic tourism could aid in the recovery of the national tourism industry during and after the pandemic. Creative activities should align with government and local tourism strategies, engaging local businesses, tourism entities, and domestic tourists in co-creating products and services (Dastgerdi and de Luca, 2022; Gowreesunkar et al., 2023). Furthermore, the government should support all forms of heritage, cultural, or creative tourism, such as historical sites and festivals, which suffered losses during the pandemic (Dastgerdi and de Luca, 2022; Gowreesunkar et al., 2023; Nasr et al., 2020; Schmidt, 2019).

From a tourist's perspective and lifestyle, the post-pandemic trend in creative tourism might witness a rise in individual tourists who avoid crowded areas. Consequently, the tourism industry needs to design and plan activities for this new group. Additionally, as many people work from home using online technology, research suggests that creative tourism should establish activities and collaborations with locals online to avoid crowded situations—a potential future trend. Tourist behavior must shift toward responsible ethics (e.g., hygiene, rules, restrictions) while staying or visiting places to promote sustainable consumption in creative tourism (Corbisiero and Monaco, 2021; Koh, 2020).

In conclusion, the responsibility for advancing this agenda lies not only with the heritage, cultural, or creative tourism industry but also with tourists' behaviors, university lecturers encouraging creative thinking, public institutions, management, government bodies, and private tourism firms—all of whom need to design and plan new management strategies or activities for creative tourism as illustrated in **Table 8**.

Table 8. Trends and recommendations for co-creation policy in the post-pandemic era.

Trends for co-creation	Reference
Redesigning and planning new management strategies	de Rooij et al. (2022); Gowreesunkar et al. (2023); Naramski et al. (2022); Rather (2021); Nasr et al. (2020); Singh (2021)
Tourists avoid crowded areas	Corbisiero and Monaco (2021); de Rooij et al. (2022); Koh (2020); Lenggogeni (2023)
Collaborations and meetings with locals online	Corbisiero and Monaco (2021); Naramski et al. (2022); Seabra and Bhatt (2022); Schmidt (2019)
Supporting from the governments	Dastgerdi and de Luca (2022); Rather (2021)
Seeking new local communities to alleviate tourist overcrowding	Dastgerdi and de Luca (2022); Costa (2021)

5.3. Cluster 3: Creative city

5.3.1. Creative tourism leading to creative city

In recent years, numerous countries and cities have positioned themselves as "creative cities," attracting residents, workers, and visitors (Batista et al., 2023; OECD, 2014; Richards, 2020). UNESCO (2006) initiated the "UNESCO's Creative Cities Network (UCCN)", linking public and private sectors with cultures and creativity across seven sections: Design, Film, Literature, Media Art, Crafts, Gastronomy, and Music. Arcos-Pumarola et al. (2023) assert that these sections are primarily integral to the creative city through unique cultural products and characteristics. Richards (2020) outlines the adaptation of creativity, design strategies, and tourism in diverse cities, categorizing them into rural areas, small cities, larger cities, and creative regions.

- Rural Areas: This exemplifies how locals can co-create experiences with tourists. This approach fosters local pride, self-sufficiency, sustainable development, economic growth, and supports local products (Batista et al., 2023; Richards, 2020; Wisansing and Vongvisitsin, 2019).
- Small Cities: Small cities can adopt the creative city concept by emphasizing personal interaction between the local population and tourists, creating new creative spaces, crafting the city's meaning and narratives, and establishing institutional creativity to develop creative events. (Fisker, 2019; Lorentzen and van Heur, 2012; Richards, 2019).
- Large Cities: Several city plans have been set up "playtown program" (Marques and Borba, 2017; Richards, 2020), "playable city" (Nijholt, 2017; Trinchini et al., 2019), or "hackathon city", engaging local stakeholders and creative development to create prototypes deployed in various public spaces. In conclusion, a creative city frequently uses the backdrop of old city and history, applying the "playable city" concept with a multitude of creative activities (Richards, 2020; Trinchini et al., 2019).

- Creative Regions: Richards (2020) cites a noteworthy example of an extensive creative region, namely The Nordrhein-Westfalen region in Germany in 2017, employing music, fashion, literature, art, media art, and gamification events to transform the former industrial region into a hub for creative events across multiple areas in western Germany.

5.3.2. Creative city policy in the post COVID-19 pandemic era

During and after COVID-19, numerous countries promoted domestic tourism. Wallace et al. (2023) highlighted that domestic tourists extended their stays during the pandemic. For instance, in Hungary and Slovenia, the governments prioritized attracting domestic tourists by focusing on history and fostering national pride. Slovenia even opened a museum solely catering to national tourists about the country's independence. In the Netherlands, the launch of the slogan "You Should Be Here" introduced alternative tourism options for domestic tourists, such as river cruises or photography courses. Romania adopted the slogan "Tourist in My Country." Germany witnessed a 40% increase in domestic tourism, while Poland's government offered 500 PLN for traveling within the country.

The lockdown restrictions compelled the tourism industry to rethink management strategies, innovate, and design new systems for creative cities. Some highly touristic areas considered managing tourist flows to prioritize quality over quantity (Bresciani et al., 2021; Wallace et al., 2023).

After the relaxation of lockdowns in 2020, international travel remained limited, leading to the emergence of "staycations" within cities. Furthermore, there was a 300% increase in domestic travelers in the UK post-lockdown, indicating a shift toward exploring local attractions even in the absence of international travel (Corbisiero and Monaco, 2021). Governments in various countries supported and encouraged safe tourism among domestic travelers, highlighting local attractions and stories (Bresciani et al., 2021).

Tourists tend to avoid urban areas in favor of outdoor spaces. Additionally, stringent rules regarding aspects like air pollution and hygiene are expected to be further enforced (Koh, 2020). As safety, affordability, and accessibility become evident, an increase in domestic tourism is anticipated.

Corbisiero and Monaco (2021) suggested that, post-pandemic, long-distance tours might not be suitable for many tourists. Instead, they opt for staying away from urban areas, using public transportation less, choosing accommodations closer to their destinations, and traveling in small family groups. However, Remoaldo et al. (2020) and Corbisiero and Monaco (2021) also noted that this presents an opportunity for local or small businesses, particularly in creative tourism. Tourists show interest in visiting creative activities, rural areas, or small towns. Moving toward rural areas could engage local communities in their history and foster a distinct local identity.

Wallace et al. (2023) further recommended that the tourism industry establish a "unique selling potential" to attract travelers seeking experiences beyond travel and accommodation, like Barcelona offering medical and healthcare tourism (e.g., gym facilities). Sigala (2020) supported Airbnb's success during and after COVID-19 due to its provision of remote accommodations in rural areas, catering to tourists wanting to work from locations other than their homes.

This shift indicates a new trend in creative tourism associated with creative cities, moving toward low-density areas, emphasizing outdoor experiences, maintaining social distance, focusing on domestic tourists, storytelling about local culture, and opening avenues for local businesses as summarized in **Table 9**.

Table 9. Trends and recommendations for creative city policy in the post-pandemic era.

Trends for creative city	Reference
Low-density areas	Lenggogeni (2023); Wallace et al. (2023)
Outdoor experiences	Koh (2020); Naramski et al. (2022)
Social distance	Corbisiero and Monaco (2021)
Focusing on domestic tourists	Lenggogeni (2023); Bresciani et al. (2021); Singh, (2021)
Opportunity for local or small businesses	Corbisiero and Monaco (2021); Remoaldo et al. (2020); Sigala (2020)
Designing unique selling point	Lee et al. (2024); Wallace et al. (2023)

5.4. Cluster 4: Sustainability

5.4.1. Sustainability and sustainable tourism

To achieve sustainable tourism, heritage and cultural tourism, and local communities should be central in management processes, ensuring benefits for heritage assets and local people. European Union (UN, 2019) advocates for this trend in tourism to guarantee good conservation while supporting the local economy. They introduce new concepts such as "slow tourism," "authenticity," "storytelling," "well-being," and "contact with locals" (Duxbury et al., 2020, p.3).

Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, UNESCO (2020) aimed to reinforce new models and approaches in tourism. As the tourism industry halted due to COVID-19, UNESCO (2020) stressed the necessity of linking sustainable issues and recovery across various types of tourism to support local economies, communities, and job creation while preserving and protecting heritage sites post-COVID-19.

5.4.2. Ecotourism

Ecotourism emerged in the 1970s and 1980s in response to environmental concerns associated with mass tourism. Wearing and Neil (2009) credit Hector Ceballos-Lascurain for coining the term "ecotourism," emphasizing priority on experiencing and preserving the natural environment, conserving and sustaining natural areas and local communities. This concept underscores the idea that nature and biodiversity are crucial for human well-being, offering an alternative to mass tourism. Several countries endorse ecotourism as a means of conservation and development (Ei and Karamanis, 2017; Tamrin et al., 2024).

5.4.3. Sustainability in the post COVID-19 pandemic era

While heritage and cultural tourism in cities declined during the pandemic, rural areas gained popularity as isolated locations, leading to the concept of localism (Brouder, 2020). Many individuals began exploring their local environments and natural surroundings as a new form of tourism. In Europe, there was a notable increase in nature trails and hiking (Buckley and Westaway, 2020; Tsironis et al., 2022).

Wallace et al. (2023) suggest that restrictions are less stringent for outdoor activities, making travel outside—especially in nature and rural areas—safer. In India, the tourism industry introduced hiking and safari parks for domestic tourists.

Several academic studies propose sustainable solutions for heritage and cultural tourism. For instance, some research advocates for "green tourism" (Liu et al., 2021) and "nature tourism," promoting safe outdoor activities with social distancing (Buckley and Westaway, 2020). Wallace et al. (2023) propose that the tourism industry should focus on domestic tourists and localism, promoting nature tourism in rural areas, and prioritize digital tourism over physical tourism.

COVID-19 has directly and significantly impacted sustainability in both negative and positive ways. Echegaray (2021) notes that a reduction in tourists lessens the burden on nature and local communities, allowing them to return to normalcy. Some natural areas were previously overloaded but have seen recovery during and after the pandemic. Furthermore, reduced air pollution due to COVID-19 has contributed to global ecological balance. These factors present positive sustainability aspects (Buckley and Westaway, 2020; Echegaray, 2021; Wallace et al., 2023). Milano et al. (2019) affirm that over-tourism previously caused environmental, landscape, and community issues like noise, waste, and emissions. Fletcher et al. (2020) suggest that the pandemic and lockdowns could restore nature.

Several studies highlight that post-pandemic, the creative tourism industry aims to adopt sustainable practices. This not only benefits addressing COVID-19 but also contributes to climate change, responsibility, and awareness, especially for future generations (Corbisiero and Monaco, 2021; Costa, 2021; Silvestre and Ţîrcă, 2019; Tsironis et al., 2022). Additionally, research suggests that it is an opportune moment to revitalize heritage, cultural, and creative tourism for sustainability. This involves developing overlooked areas, managing over-tourism, investing in environmental responsibility, connecting creative tourists with new local communities, and introducing new local products (Cabeca, 2022; Corbisiero and Monaco, 2021; Costa, 2021; Tsironis et al., 2022).

In summary, the concept of creative tourism has always been linked with sustainable policies. However, post-pandemic, creative tourism should further emphasize sustainability by organizing activities in natural or rural areas, reducing pollution impact on local communities, and educating tourists about eco-concepts as presented in **Table 10**.

Table 10. Trends and recommendations for sustainability in the post-pandemic era.

Trends for sustainability	Reference
Organizing activities in natural or rural areas	Buckley and Westaway (2020); Fletcher et al. (2020); Lee et al. (2024); Tsironis et al. (2022); Wallace et al. (2023)
Reducing pollution impact on local communities	Echegaray (2021); Fletcher et al. (2020); Milano et al. (2019)
Educating tourists about eco-concepts	Cabeca (2022); Corbisiero and Monaco (2021); Costa (2021)
Green tourism and nature tourism	Buckley and Westaway (2020); Liu et al. (2021); Corbisiero and Monaco, 2021; Costa (2021); Silvestre and Ţîrcă (2019)
Focus on domestic tourists and localism	Wallace et al. (2023)

5.5. Cluster 5: Technology, innovation

5.5.1. Innovation and technology changing tourism

The link between technology and the tourism industry dates back to the early development of computers and the Internet (Gössling, 2020; Ukpabi and Karjaluoto, 2017). These changes are not solely due to technological advancements but also significantly influence how tourists travel, their cultures, preferences, and identities. The evolution of the tourism industry is tied to innovation and technology (Gössling, 2020; Kasemsarn et al., 2024; Xiang and Gretzel, 2010).

In the realm of mobile phone applications, they have become integral to the tourism industry. From the restaurant's perspective, applications can showcase menus, dietary details, create content, build imagery, and advertise through platforms like Google and TripAdvisor (Gössling, 2020; Vila et al., 2020).

Vila et al. (2020) also suggest that technology has influenced customer behavior. This group of tourists aims to showcase their social identities, experiences, interests, leisure activities, and motivations. This trend is applicable across various tourism areas, especially in heritage, cultural and creative tourism, where tourists share and review their creative activities and attractions, thereby creating online viral content that attracts more tourists.

5.5.2. Four stages of technology in tourism

Gössling (2020) further delineates four stages of technology in tourism, spanning decades and outlining opportunities and highlights as presented in **Figure 4**. Stage 1, Opportunity (1985–1995), witnessed major advances in connectivity (e.g., real-time reservation systems) and the advent of company websites for marketing. Stage 2, Disruption (1996–2006), saw the rise of the global platform economy with innovations such as Booking.com, offering ease of reservation, price comparisons, and trust via rating systems.

Stage 3, Immersion (2007–2015) marked the smartphone era, intertwining technology with users' lifestyles. The emergence of social media disrupted the tourism industry and business models, with social media data becoming valuable in predicting consumer behavior and integrating technology platforms.

Lastly, stage 4, Usurpation (2016–2020, ongoing), has seen social media technology reach a global scale. User information, including health, behavior, interests, preferences, and interactions, is leveraged to provide personalized content matching tourists' interests.
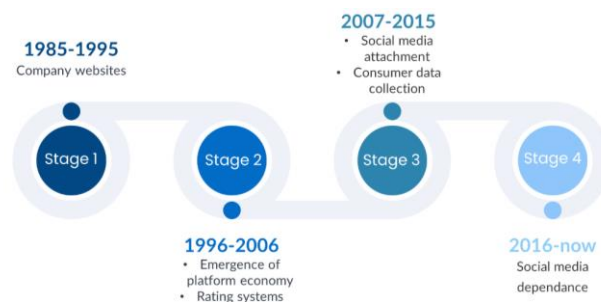

Figure 4. Four stages of technology in tourism (Gössling, 2020, p.743).

5.5.3. Technology in tourism in the post COVID-19 pandemic era

There have been ongoing discussions and debates regarding the substitution of digital tourism for physical tourism for a considerable period (David-Negre et al., 2018; Stastna et al., 2023). However, this pandemic has proven and addressed all technology-related questions and discussions with real-world tests. Formerly, global experts supported the notion that virtual tourism could not replace tourism itself, despite the advancements in digital technology. At that time, digitalization in tourism was primarily used for planning, evaluation, and pre-trip searches. Post-COVID-19, there is a growing inquiry into how to transition toward digital tourism using innovative media (Gretzel et al., 2020; Tfaily, 2018).

Kaczmarek et al. (2021) and Gretzel et al. (2020) emphasize that COVID-19 has accelerated technology adoption across all sectors, notably in tourism. It has given rise to digital tourism forms, such as virtual tours, online museums, and real-time online views of famous tourist attractions using cameras (Wen and Leung, 2021). This wave of digitalization not only impacts tourism but also drives the trend toward cashless payments, QR codes, and booking systems, minimizing physical contact. Hence, the tourism industry needs to integrate digitalization comprehensively.

Scotland proposed the slogan "Dream Now, Travel Later". Concerning heritage and cultural tourism, most cultural institutions, like museums and galleries, transitioned fully online, offering virtual tours. Furthermore, post-pandemic, tourists could pre-book online due to visitor limitations, displaying vaccination documents through QR codes.

Digitalization in tourism commences with digital advertising showcasing captivating information and images on social media and online museums. Subsequently, during information searches, tourists can access reviews and ratings for each heritage or cultural site or creative tourism activity. Finally, tourists can book hotels, restaurants, and services—all managed through smartphones. Hence, the tourism industry must design digital systems supporting tourists at every stage of their journey (e.g., websites, applications, or other systems) (Guerreiro et al., 2019; Stastna et al., 2023; Setiawan et al., 2018). Egger et al. (2020) suggest that being offline means being absent from tourism. Tourists now seek not just basic functions but also quality in innovation, technology, presentation, real-time updates, and feedback. Additionally, Generation Z, familiar with technology, represents the future heritage and cultural tourists as smart tourism. The heritage and cultural tourism industry must adapt and embrace technological trends to cater to them (Bussador et al., 2023; Egger et al., 2020; Setiawan et al., 2018; Stastna et al., 2023).

In summary, COVID-19 accelerated the trend of digitalization, prompting tourism attractions to launch virtual tourism projects and embrace online services on digital devices. However, this requires financial support and high-end technology for development. Therefore, the government or tourism industry should prioritize digitalization in heritage, cultural, and creative tourism as a necessity and establish this as a national strategy supported by government funds as presented in **Table 11**.

Table 11. Trends and recommendations for technology in the post-pandemic era.

Trends for technology	Reference
Launching virtual/ online tourism	Gretzel et al. (2020); Tfaily (2018); Kaczmarek et al. (2021); Gretzel et al. (2020); Wen and Leung (2021)
Requirement for financial support and high-end technology by government funds	Akhtar et al. (2021); Gretzel et al. (2020); Tfaily (2018)
Prioritizing digitalization in heritage, cultural, and creative tourism	Akhtar et al. (2021); Egger et al. (2020); Setiawan et al. (2018); Stastna et al. (2023).

6. Conclusion

This review article conducts a systematic literature review examining the characteristics of heritage, cultural, and creative tourism before and after the pandemic, culminating in suggested solutions and recommendations as the final goal. A total of 179 research articles sourced from Scopus, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar were assessed and categorized into five clusters before and after the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Cluster 1: Characteristics between heritage, cultural and creative tourism prior and post the pandemic.

The key distinctions among these types lie in their focuses: Heritage tourism concentrates on historical locations and the past; cultural tourism emphasizes both past and present cultural products and locations; and creative tourism encompasses past, present, and future experiences, emphasizing co-creation. However, after COVID-19, heritage and cultural tourism should organize events, exhibitions, and festivals in rural areas or outdoors and offer online versions or online booking to limit the number of tourists.

- Cluster 2: Co-creation, the first process of creative tourism prior and post the pandemic.

Creative tourism adopts the concept of the "experience economy" to distinguish its products and services through tourists' experiences. Later, it embraces "co-creation," emphasizing interaction between customers and companies to elevate the importance of experience. After the pandemic, all tourism stakeholders, from tourists, universities, public institutions, management, government, to private tourism firms, must co-create and plan new safe activities for creative tourism.

- Cluster 3: Creative city prior and post the pandemic.

The concept of a creative city is to attract residents and tourists alike. It spans four areas: rural areas, small cities, large cities, and creative regions. After the pandemic, the trends have shifted toward low-density areas, outdoors, social distancing, focusing on domestic tourists, telling stories about local areas, and opening opportunities for local businesses.

- Cluster 4: Sustainability prior and post the pandemic.

Creative tourism can align with sustainability trends, enhancing the quality of local communities and aligning with SDGs 11 and 12 (creating sustainable cities). However, after the pandemic, the concept of sustainability has not changed; it focuses on activities in nature or rural areas, reducing pollution to communities, and educating tourists with eco-concepts.

- Cluster 5: Technology prior and post the pandemic.

Innovation and technology significantly influence all types of tourism, shaping how tourists travel and establish preferences and identities. After the pandemic, all tourism industries have to adopt digitalization (e.g., virtual tourism, online service). Therefore, the government or tourism authority should support funding for digitalization in heritage, cultural, and creative tourism as mandatory.

This review article presents **Figure 5**, the final framework characterizing and suggesting solutions for creative tourism in the post-pandemic era. This framework could assist tourism industries in heritage and cultural tourism in transitioning toward creative tourism with sustainable concept after COVID-19, broadening their appeal to tourists, solving low-tourist problems, and enhancing income for local communities.

Figure 5. Final framework presenting five related clusters suggesting solutions for creative tourism with sustainable concept in the post-pandemic era.

Whatever trends emerge in heritage or cultural tourism after the pandemic, the most significant point is to have well-planned tourism management, supported by the government. Post-pandemic attention and support are required, such as infrastructure for rural areas or natural locations. Furthermore, collaboration between several tourism destinations as a package is necessary, along with a focus on new technology and innovation. However, this review's limitations include the exclusion of the Web of Sciences and a predominant focus on categories within the social sciences, arts, and humanities, omitting technological areas (e.g., computers, engineering). Future studies should encompass technological categories to glean additional insights and emerging trends.

6.1. Practical implication

This review article presents practical implications for the tourism industry in terms of facilitating the shift from heritage and cultural tourism to creative tourism, which is more sustainable and broadly focused. It also proposes new trends, recommendations, characteristics, distinctions, and remedies for the tourism sector in the aftermath of the pandemic by suggesting sustainable concepts (e.g., focusing on natural or rural areas, educating tourists about eco-concepts and green tourism, and supporting localism). Consequently, by implementing these sustainable concept suggestions, traditional heritage, cultural, and creative tourism can expand their appeal to a wider range of tourists, all while increasing community income and safety.

6.2. Further study recommendations

Further research can examine the ways in which heritage, cultural, and creative tourism can be transformed into more sustainable and innovative practices (e.g., through the application of new technologies, conservation techniques, and community engagement). Furthermore, cutting-edge digital technology can be used to generate greater interest and engagement among tourists across all forms of tourism through the provision of virtual experiences. Lastly, strategies for fostering community engagement in tourism and promoting sustainable development in local areas should be focused on effective communication and interaction.

Conflict of interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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