

Contributions of heritage education to the recognition of Ouro Preto, Minas Gerais, as a Creative City¹

Contribuições da educação patrimonial para a chancela de cidade criativa em Ouro Preto, Minas Gerais

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ABSTRACT

The article explores the contributions of heritage education to Ouro Preto, Minas Gerais, being recognized as a UNESCO Creative City, highlighting its cultural heritage, history, and traditions. The concept of a Creative City aims to transform cities into hubs of innovation and cultural development, reinforcing tourism and the local economy. The relationship between heritage education and tourism, based on Paulo Freire's theory, is explored as a way to strengthen the identity and social awareness of communities. Cultural tourism is

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highlighted as a tool to promote cultural heritage, generating resources for the preservation and maintenance of historical assets and sites. Traditional events such as the Congado, Carnival, Holy Week, and the Winter Festival, along with attractions in surrounding districts, illustrate the benefits of cultural tourism in valuing local traditions. The methodology is qualitative, based on bibliographic review and non-participant observation. The study is justified by the need for a comprehensive understanding of Ouro Preto and its tourist activities. The results indicate a significant relationship between heritage education, tourism, and heritage appreciation, reinforcing the discussion on the city's recognition as a creative city. The proposal to make Ouro Preto a creative city aligns with UNESCO's objectives, promoting sustainable and decentralized tourism that values culture and stimulates the regional economy.

Keywords: Creative City; Tourism; Heritage Education; Preservation; Local Economic Development.

INTRODUCTION

Collective discourses are seen as narratives, portraits of a story and testimony of events, configuring cultural identities (Brito, Silva, & Sousa, 2024). Collectives can be grouped at various scales, such as communities, municipalities and countries. In a dynamic process, these collectives undergo transformations, making urban spaces more than mere settings, but the epicenter of social relations, local culture and the habits of the population (Emmendoerfer & Fioravante, 2021). These elements grant distinct identities to each place and bring life to these collectives.

Collective organizations, such as cities, are products shaped by social relations, whose reflections can be observed through their physical-spatial, socioeconomic, and political context (Machado, Andrade, & Cotrim, 2021). Thus, urban territories are the portrait of man, who appropriates nature and transforms it (Monteiro, Ferreira, & Zuanon, 2021). These actions, as well as their results, can be measured based on cultural, social, and economic development and, mainly, on the sense of belonging (Ribeiro & Simão, 2016). Thus, understanding the logic of society is understanding the city and its contemporary dynamics, as a complex human artifact (Batista & Bastos, 2024).

In this context, the need for new models of urban organization emerged, along with innovation in the production of goods and services, driving



economic competitiveness. Thus, economies can be guided by knowledge, innovation, and increasingly, creativity (Scarpato, Ashton, & Schreiber, 2021). Creativity, according to the Brazilian Ministry of Tourism (MTUR, 2024, p. 3), "is a natural attribute that manifests in music, gastronomy, design, and the daily lives of people who use it as a means of expression, identity, economic and social development." Each city has its natural vocation that makes it a center of convergence for skills, innovations, and inspirations, focusing on creative talent rather than the city as a product.

Given the need for development in contemporary times, the debate on creative cities has gained prominence and interest worldwide, engaging policymakers, urban planners, sociologists, managers, economists, and others. This discussion establishes a connection with the concept of the creative economy as a strategy and a possibility for implementing public policies aimed at local growth and sustainable development (Vitória, Emmendoerfer, Cunha, Araujo, & Marques, 2021).

According to the Brazilian National Confederation of Municipalities (2019), the creative economy consists of businesses based on intellectual capital, culture, and creativity, generating economic value. At the municipal level, it is expressed through networks formed around cultural activities, driving economic development. In this new paradigm, culture serves as the foundation, and technology acts as the driving force (Gonçalves & Costa, 2023). It is acknowledged that innovation is directly linked to creativity, with the premise that the more creative the environment we live in, the more satisfied we will be, the more societal challenges will be overcome, and the more prosperous the economy will become (Emmendoerfer & Fioravante, 2021).

The concept of creative cities gained greater international prominence on the global development agenda starting with the initiative of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 2024, by creating the UNESCO Creative Cities Network. This initiative aims to promote cooperation among cities that recognize creativity as a vital element for



sustainable urban development. The formation of this network highlights the importance of the topic in achieving the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations 2030 Agenda, especially Goal 11, which addresses sustainable cities and communities (UNESCO, 2019).

The city of Ouro Preto, long before being recognized as a potential candidate for the title of creative city, already stood out for its representation in the spheres of culture and heritage, as well as its historical significance both nationally and internationally. Attracting visitors from all over the world, the city showcases a vibrant cultural scene and was awarded the title of World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1980.

The municipality hosts a variety of cultural agents that integrate into the local economy, creating an environment that is conducive to creative expression. These agents help attract people and facilitate connections between individuals and the spaces they occupy, promoting a network of interactions that strengthens the city's creative identity (Oliveira, Araújo & Silva, 2013). Based on the report estimating formal jobs in the creative economy (PMOP, 2023a), the City of Ouro Preto highlights cultural products as municipal potential, represented by artworks, musical performances, visual and literary productions, as well as folk art. The managing institution lists cultural expressions as representatives of its culture, subdivided into crafts, festivals, and celebrations; and cultural places, represented by archaeological sites, museums, libraries, and exhibitions. Therefore, it is clear that cultural heritage stands out as a potential attraction for visitors seeking authentic, creative, and memorable experiences at the destination (Gonçalves & Costa, 2023).

According to the State Secretariat of Culture and Tourism of Minas Gerais (SECULT-MG, 2024a), the state of Minas Gerais led tourism growth in Brazil in 2023, receiving 31 million tourists. This growth was driven by the decentralization promoted by the Mais Turistas program, an initiative by SECULT-MG aimed at strengthening the sector in various regions of the state. As a result, tourism generated 34 billion reais in 2023 and approximately 50,000 jobs, accounting



for 26% of the total jobs created in Minas Gerais by November of that year (SECULT-MG, 2024a). The interior of the state saw a notable increase in tourist attractions, benefiting from the incentives promoted by the Government of Minas Gerais. In this context, the municipality of Ouro Preto stands out as one of the main destinations boosted by these policies, consolidating itself as a reference in local tourism (SECULT-MG, 2024a).

The municipality of Ouro Preto offers alternative destinations that attract a diverse public, interested in its rich historical, cultural, ecological, and rural heritage. As a versatile tourist destination, the districts that make up the municipality of Ouro Preto (Figure 1) present multiple potentials and cultural characteristics, including: Ouro Preto (the headquarters), Amarantina, Antônio Pereira, Cachoeira do Campo, Engenheiro Correia, Glaura, Miguel Burnier, Rodrigo Silva, Santa Rita do Ouro Preto, Santo Antônio do Leite, Santo Antônio do Salto and São Bartolomeu.

Município de Ouro Preto

Área Area	Bioma Biome
1.246 Km ²	Mata Atlântica

Fonte: IBGE

Distrito District	Distância da Sede Distance from Main City
Amarantina	30 km
Antônio Pereira	25,5 km
Cachoeira do Campo	22,1 km
Engenheiro Correia	37,9 km
Glaura	31,2 km
Lavras Novas	18,9 km
Miguel Burnier	57,7 km
Santa Rita	29,3 km
Santo Antônio do Leite	28,6 km
Santo Antônio do Salto	32 km
São Bartolomeu	18,7 km
Rodrigo Silva	21,5 km



Figure 1: Map of the municipality of Ouro Preto (MG) and its respective districts.

Font: City Hall of Ouro Preto, 2024a. Retrieved from <https://www.ouropreto.mg.gov.br/turismo/dados-geograficos>

According to the PMOP (2023), based on data from the João Pinheiro Foundation, Minas Gerais represented 9.3% of Brazil's Gross Domestic Product

(GDP), reaching approximately 925 billion reais in 2022, with tourism as one of the key foreign exchange-generating activities. The percentage increase in tourism demand in Minas Gerais and its contribution to the GDP indicate a promising outlook for tourism in the state, especially in Ouro Preto. The rise in visitation, along with a growing variety of visitor profiles, not only reflects quantitative growth but also a diversification and strengthening of the tourism sector in the municipality (PMOP, 2023b). This phenomenon not only boosts the local economy but also contributes to the enhancement of the region's cultural heritage.

In 2023, aiming to further diversify the tourism offer, the Municipal Secretariat for Economic Development of Ouro Preto initiated a plan for the development of the city's creative economy. This plan is based on the recognition of Ouro Preto as a creative city by UNESCO, reinforcing the municipality's commitment to cultural enhancement and innovation in tourism (PMOP, 2023a).

Cultural tourism, according to Melo and Cardozo (2015), explores cultural heritage not only as a tourist product but also as an opportunity for promoting education. The coherence of heritage education actions linked to tourism facilitates interaction and understanding of the significance of the heritage being visited, contributing to the formation of a collective awareness and the understanding of the need for safeguarding policies.

To achieve these goals, Matos, Limberger, Arnhold Junior, and Krause (2024) emphasized the need for careful planning of tourism activities around heritage. Melo and Cardozo (2015) suggest the development of specific heritage education projects, highlighting the educational and cultural value of tourism and encouraging visitors to develop a deeper appreciation for the local heritage.

Thus, this article examines the creative potential to diversify and innovate the tourism offering in the city of Ouro Preto and its districts, investigating how these opportunities can contribute to the socioeconomic development of the



region. The analysis links the UNESCO creative cities proposal with the instrumentalization of heritage education.

As pointed out by Reis (2012), a creative city is one that is able to continuously adapt to its socioeconomic context, driven by the creativity of its inhabitants and its cultural and economic particularities. In this sense, the research is justified by the need for a broader understanding of Ouro Preto, including its cultural attractions and the promotion of tourism activities within the concept of a creative city. Among the objectives, the study emphasizes understanding the cultural products of the municipality as potential drivers for the development of a creative city, the role of heritage education as a tool for social awareness, and its relationship with tourism and local heritage. Next, we will discuss the concept of creative cities.

CREATIVE CITIES

Creative cities, according to Almeida and Emmendoerfer (2023), are those that, through their culture, foster innovation and co-production via social participation. The term "creative cities" was first used, according to Ashton, Tomazzoni, and Emmendoerfer (2014), by Landry and Bianchini in 1995, as a proposal for a more dynamic and interactive city, aimed at valuing the history and culture of a society. Reis (2012) understands creative cities as the result of economic competitiveness and regions dependent on innovation for their development. For the author, the creative economy represents a new economic cycle that arises as a response to persistent global problems (Reis, 2008).

As an economic model, the creative economy adds symbolic and commercial value to products and services based on the pillars of creativity, innovation, and culture (Roel, Chaves & Guimarães, 2023). Key characteristics include the organization of markets in networks, partnerships between social and economic agents, the predominance of intangible aspects of production, the use of new technologies in the production, distribution, and access to



goods and services, and the uniqueness of production, which is strongly influenced by local characteristics.

The concept of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network aims to promote culture and creativity as tools for sustainable development. Additionally, participation in this network helps enhance the image and branding of cities, giving them competitive advantages and associations that benefit the destination, attracting more attention and resources for its development (Matos, Limberger, Arnhold Junior & Krause, 2024).

Creative industries also have the ability to strengthen culture by preserving values and traditions that characterize a community or nation. In addition to promoting social cohesion and inclusion, this cultural strengthening can increase tourist appeal. This is how the creative economy connects with culture and tourism (Oliveira, Araujo, & Silva, 2013). The perspective of the creative economy can help explore this segmentation in a rational and sustainable way, contributing to the preservation of heritage, the environment, and the well-being of local communities (Oliveira, Araujo, & Silva, 2013).

According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD, 2018), culture and creativity are essential for sustainable urban development, diversifying the economy, generating jobs, and promoting quality of life by encouraging social and cultural participation. Creativity involves economic, sociocultural, and technological aspects, interacting with sectors such as tourism and education and enriching relationships in the urban environment. Furthermore, by encouraging cultural participation and revitalizing public spaces, creativity promotes inclusion and well-being.

Hanan and Hemanto (2020) state that the concept of creative cities emerged in the 1990s as a form of urban revitalization, promoting the regeneration of cities through local culture and creativity. One of the objectives of this approach is to encourage strategies for tourism development and the expansion of new markets. The concept was applied among



professionals, mainly concentrated in the Australia-United Kingdom-United States-Canada axis. This axis is also the birthplace of discussions on creative industries and, more broadly, the creative economy, as indicated by the British Council (Higgs, Cunningham, & Bakhshi, 2008). These discussions are rooted in knowledge from economics, architecture, urban planning, and sociology. The countries in this axis were pioneers in stimulating competitiveness by exploring the benefits that creativity can bring to cities.

As Cruz (2010) points out, the term creativity is associated with the ability to exist, create, invent, and approach problems creatively, even those that seem unsolvable. It is important to distinguish between the concepts of creativity and innovation, despite their frequent associations (Emmendoerfer & Fioravante, 2021).

Creativity can be defined as the generation of new and useful ideas by individuals or groups working together (Madjar, Oldham, & Pratt, 2002). Shin and Zhou (2007) expanded this definition, considering the production of innovative ideas about products, services, processes, and procedures within teams. As a social process, creativity is seen as a factor that enables organizations to innovate, survive, and thrive in a competitive and globalized market (Zhou & Shalley, 2010).

Regarding innovation, its first definition was proposed by Schumpeter in the late 1920s (Hansen & Wakonen, 1997). Although the author addressed innovation broadly in products, processes, and business models, various aspects continue to be discussed, such as its necessity and sufficiency (Pittaway, Robertson, Munir, Denyer, & Neely, 2004), intentionality, beneficial nature (Camison-Zornoza, Lapiedra-Alcami, Segarra-Cipres, & Boronat-Navarro, 2004), and success in implementation and diffusion (Hobday, 2005).

In other words, creativity is the starting point, the inventive process that promotes originality and problem-solving, while innovation is the result that materializes ideas into tangible impacts. Creativity, therefore, is a prerequisite



for innovation, serving as the foundation for it to occur effectively and generate concrete benefits.

Ashton's (2018) research highlights that large-scale changes, such as globalization, advances in information technology, urban growth, and sustainability, have created new demands for the implementation of creative cities. These demands include the acceleration of urban development, new models of organization, and the need to maintain economic competitiveness. Furthermore, there is an urgency to innovate in the production of goods and services to address these challenges.

Regarding the characteristics of a creative city, it is a liberating space where ideas are generated through learning and adaptations. It should be seen as an environment dedicated to facing challenges, and for this reason, it is in a constant process of both material and symbolic transformations (Howkins, 2013).

Gonçalves and Costa (2023) highlight the need to consider creativity as an essential factor in the construction and evolution of cities. Historically, cities have relied on creativity to establish themselves as centers of commerce, production, and markets, with a diversity of people, including entrepreneurs, artists, intellectuals, and power agents.

Thus, there is a clear direct connection between creativity/innovation and the concept of creative cities. Although innovation derives from creativity, both elements, while essential, are not sufficient on their own to promote the development of more creative urban environments (Landry & Bianchini, 1995). Next, we will examine the areas of tourism and heritage education, which are linked in this research as concepts to drive the proposal of Ouro Preto as a creative city.

TOURISM AND HERITAGE EDUCATION

According to Figueira (2007), in the current globalized context in which we live, tourism emerges as an important economic driver, standing out for the



appreciation of the various types of heritage present in each locality. Preserving and promoting heritage, educating about its importance, and fostering sustainable tourism not only benefit the economy but also preserve the culture, customs, local expressions, and identity of communities.

The Brazilian Service for Support of Micro and Small Enterprises (Sebrae, 2022) reports that cultural tourism is a sector that highlights the richness of local traditions, including museums, historical heritage, art, and cuisine, with the aim of boosting the regional economy. Indeed, culture not only accompanies but also constitutes the very essence of tourism experiences.

According to Peciar & Isaia (2015), cultural tourism can be defined as an activity that provides access to a community's cultural heritage, encompassing everything created by humans as well as their practices and customs, with the aim of promoting their preservation and conservation. According to the definition of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), cultural tourism refers to the pursuit of experiences related to studies, culture, performing arts, festivals, monuments, historical or archaeological sites, folk traditions, or pilgrimages (Barretto, 2000).

Cultural tourism offers a variety of benefits, including the preservation of cultural and artistic heritage, the strengthening of communities, and the promotion of cultural exchanges (Sebrae, 2022). This segmentation centered on visiting and understanding cultural heritage, plays an educational role by facilitating the socialization and appropriation of human elements present in tourist sites. Heritage education, by promoting contact, socialization, and the appropriation of heritage by tourists, contributes to individual development. Therefore, it is essential to plan both tourism activities and heritage education projects to foster this interaction (Melo & Cardozo, 2015).

Regarding the role of heritage education emphasized by Melo and Cardozo (2015), according to Paulo Freire (1967), the primary mission of education is to promote liberation. Freire highlights that teaching should primarily educate for freedom, aiming at an education for the human subject.



His concept of education is not based on social conditioning but rather on the pursuit of freedom and autonomy.

Castro (2006) states that heritage education is a pedagogical practice inspired by Paulo Freire's theory. Heritage education uses cultural heritage as a primary source of knowledge, strengthening issues such as identity, social awareness, and citizenship. In academia, several critiques point out the inconsistency of the term "heritage education," arguing that education and heritage are inseparable, making the term redundant (Tolentino & Braga, 2016). However, despite these critiques, the expression gained popularity and began to be discussed in public policies and preservation agendas. Contextualizing this idea, the International Council of Museums (ICOM) proposed the theme "Museums, Education, and Research" for the 22nd Museum Week, reinforcing Tolentino and Braga's (2016) argument.

The concept of heritage education often stems from centralized decisions without adequate societal participation in the processes of heritage-making. In reality, it should be conceived based on the notion of cultural references, socially shaped with the active participation of community members. This process fosters a democratic and inclusive dialogue, inspired by Freire's approach, valuing cultural diversity and the involvement of the producers and custodians of heritage as social and historical agents (Tolentino & Braga, 2016).

Following the ideas of Tolentino and Braga (2016), this research exemplifies how, in Ouro Preto, some initiatives to unite education, tourism, and heritage have been implemented over the past decades. Notably, the creation of the Graduate Program in Tourism and Heritage (PPGTURPATRI), hosted by the Federal University of Ouro Preto (UFOP) in 2020. Among the courses offered in the program is "Education, Tourism, and Heritage," which specifically aims to address the three pillars discussed in this section of the research. This integrative effort is also evident in the municipality through initiatives such as the projects "Ouro Preto, Meu Lugar!" and



"Comunidade+Arte." According to the Office of Extension and Culture (PROEX, 2024) at UFOP, the "Ouro Preto, Meu Lugar!" program is a collaboration between the Ouro Preto City Hall (PMOP) and UFOP. The program focuses on valuing cultural and human heritage through lectures, visits, and workshops, with the goal of strengthening the identity of municipal school students with their locality.

The "Comunidade+Arte" program, carried out by the Ouro Preto Art Foundation (FAOP) in partnership with state schools, offers artistic workshops such as "Styrofoam Engraving" and mural painting. This program fosters students' creativity while emphasizing the importance of local cultural heritage (SECULT-MG, 2013).

Another notable project, held in 2021, is titled "Patrimônio Invertido" (Reversed Heritage), which promoted an innovative approach to heritage education by encouraging participants to think "outside the heritage bubbles." Organized by a multidisciplinary team from UFOP, the event involved ongoing debates on different perspectives of heritage education, with the aim of exploring alternative practices and creating space for dialogue about cultural diversity. This initiative sought to broaden the understanding of heritage and value multiple viewpoints (Sentidos Urbanos, 2021).

Within the mentioned perspectives, the municipality has the "Sentidos Urbanos" project. In 2023, this project launched the initiative "Os Tesouros de Ouro Preto" (The Treasures of Ouro Preto), created as an alternative to the Exhibition Circuit of the House of the Baroness, emphasizing the inseparable connection between material and immaterial heritage. Recognizing people as an essential part of cultural heritage, the Sentidos Urbanos program presented, through an exhibition, narratives from local residents about the meaning of heritage in Ouro Preto. The initiative placed the inhabitants themselves at the center, highlighting them as the city's primary heritage, beyond just the stone and mortar buildings (Sentidos Urbanos, 2023).



From the initiatives presented, it is evident that they originated from educational institutions in the city. Ouro Preto is home to various courses that focus on cultural heritage. Among them are the Technology in Conservation and Restoration program at the Federal Institute of Minas Gerais (IFMG), the technical course in Conservation and Restoration at the Ouro Preto Art Foundation (FAOP), as well as bachelor's programs in Tourism, Museology, Architecture, History, and the Graduate Program in Tourism and Heritage at UFOP. Given this context, these programs could offer workshops and develop extension projects to raise awareness among the local community and visitors about the heritage dynamics in the municipality, with a focus on traditional knowledge. It is suggested that these initiatives include workshops on heritage interpretation, oral memory projects, exhibitions, lectures, and events. The goal would be to integrate the community, students, and tourists, promoting greater awareness of the value of cultural heritage.

It is important to highlight the need for valuing heritage within a context of decolonization, especially in Ouro Preto, where the urban dynamics and social relations still reflect practices from the Colonial period. In pursuit of actions that align with this perspective, the work developed by the Coletivo Palma Preta stands out. This collective proposes Afrotourism routes, guiding visitors through unusual paths and locations, outside the commonly known "Historic Center," that refer to the formation of Ouro Preto.

As a result of these educational actions, it is expected that both tourists and community members will gain knowledge and cultural appreciation, strengthening local identity and encouraging sustainable tourism. By educating visitors about the importance of heritage preservation, these activities contribute to more conscious and responsible engagement. This educational involvement not only supports the local economy but also reinforces the city's cultural identity, creating a positive and lasting impact.

These initiatives, both existing and suggested for implementation, demonstrate Ouro Preto's effort to integrate education and heritage in a



synergistic manner. By emphasizing the valorization of cultural and human heritage through education, these projects not only strengthen the connection between residents and tourists with the local history and identity, but also promote a more holistic approach to tourism. They encourage understanding and respect for cultural heritage while stimulating individuals' creative expression.

In this sense, the category of creative cities proposed by UNESCO (2004) aims to understand culture in conjunction with creativity, highlighting communities and emphasizing social planning and organization. This recognition covers seven areas defined by UNESCO: Handicrafts and Folk Art, Design, Cinema, Gastronomy, Literature, Media, and Music. In this context, Ouro Preto seeks recognition in the Handicrafts and Folk Art segment, aiming to add value to tourism experiences, strengthen the creative economy, and decentralize tourist flow to the districts of the region.

METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

This research is structured as a theoretical essay, with the aim of exploring the definitions and central characteristics of the concepts that help identify the municipality of Ouro Preto as a creative city. According to Meneghetti (2011), a theoretical essay seeks to stimulate critical debate on a subject by presenting different theories and viewpoints. Severino (2007) described the theoretical essay as a well-developed, formal, discursive, and conclusive study, through logical expositions that facilitate the reader's understanding. This research methodology allows the author freedom in both the approach to the selected topic and in adopting a more critical writing style, enabling them to defend a particular position. However, this methodology does not exempt the need for rigor and the supporting documentation and references that substantiate the arguments presented throughout the text.

Thus, to support the discussion, contemporary publications from authors such as Emmendoerfer and Fioravante (2021), Machado, Andrade, and



Cotrim (2021), Monteiro, Ferreira, and Zuanon (2021), Almeida and Emmendoerfer (2023), Matos, Limberger, Arnhold Junior, and Krause (2024), among others who address the theme of creative cities, were selected. Furthermore, theoretical support was sought from institutions such as UNESCO, the Tourism Secretariats of Ouro Preto and Minas Gerais, and the Municipal City Hall of Ouro Preto. It is noteworthy that the author Magnus Luiz Emmendoerfer, widely mentioned as a reference, is the general coordinator of the UNESCO Chair and an expert in governance and public policies, with a focus on tourism, creative economy, and innovation, being one of the leading figures in Brazilian creative economy.

To strengthen the theoretical foundation, the themes of tourism and heritage education were addressed, combining the bibliographic review with the analysis of practical initiatives that illustrate local actions for heritage valorization. The research also proposed workshops and interpretation programs to promote community interaction with cultural heritage.

The methodology adopted is qualitative, focusing on understanding the relationship between Education, Tourism, and Heritage, with a propositional approach to recognizing Ouro Preto as a creative city. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2006), qualitative research emphasizes the interpretation of phenomena in their natural context, while Vieira and Zouain (2005) highlight the importance of the discourses and meanings attributed by social actors.

Regarding the objectives, the research is exploratory, as stated by Gil (2002), aiming to provide greater familiarity with the subject and refine ideas. Severino (2007) emphasized that in exploratory research, information is gathered about a specific object to map out relevant data for the study. The literature review served as the theoretical foundation, structuring the conceptual framework of the research (Martins, 2018).

Finally, non-participant observation was applied in the research. According to Severino (2007), the researcher observes the phenomena but does not share the experiences of the subjects being studied and does not



interact with their actions. For Lakatos and Marconi (2017), in this type of observation, the researcher maintains distance from the community or group being studied, acting as an external observer. Although not actively participating, the observation is still conscious and directed toward a specific goal, carried out systematically. Thus, the following events in the municipality were considered: the Congado/Reinado, Carnival, Holy Week, and the Winter Festival of Ouro Preto. In the districts, religious festivals, the gastronomic festivals of Cachoeira do Campo, Glaura, and São Bartolomeu, the folkloric Cavallhada festival in Amarantina, and the traditions of the districts of Santo Antônio do Leite and Santa Rita were addressed.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The research highlighted the significant connection between the process of heritage education, tourism as a phenomenon, and the valorization of cultural heritage, considering the integration of Ouro Preto as a creative city. Through the analysis of the literature and applicable theories, it was possible to understand the role of awareness and appreciation of cultural heritage in society, as well as the function of cultural tourism and heritage education in this context.

The research identified that cultural tourism plays a key role in the promotion and preservation of Ouro Preto's heritage. The State Secretariat of Culture and Tourism of Minas Gerais (SECULT-MG, 2024b) emphasizes the importance of cultural tourism in Ouro Preto, highlighting events such as the International Festival of Tourism and Culture of Ouro Preto. In its fourth edition, held in June 2024, the event attracted around 4,000 visitors over three days. Another event promoted by SECULT-MG in partnership with FAOP and the municipal government, in April 2024, was the Semana da Inconfidência em Conexões (Inconfidência Week in Connections) (SECULT-MG, 2024c). During this week, free cultural activities were offered, including performances, artistic interventions, workshops, knowledge circles, and guided walks, reinforcing the



role of tourism, with culture as the main motivation, in promoting and preserving the city's cultural heritage. According to Knupp, Lescura, Navarro, and Condé (2021), cultural tourism is essential for the development of tourist destinations, providing cultural, social, and economic benefits.

In this context, some of the municipality's key festivities stand out, such as Carnival, the Winter Festival, the anniversary of Ouro Preto, the Jabuticaba Festival of Cachoeira do Campo, the Gastronomic Festival of Glaura, and the Cultural Goiaba Festival of São Bartolomeu, among others. During these events, it is possible to learn more about these places where history, art, and culture merge, offering innovative opportunities for cultural enjoyment for both residents and tourists. This interaction not only enriches the visitors' experience but also contributes to the conservation and appreciation of the cultural legacy, generating financial resources that can be directed toward maintaining cultural manifestations, historical sites, museums, and other heritage structures.

Regarding museums, Ouro Preto has seen an increase in visitation to these spaces (PMOP, 2023b). In 2022, the Museum of Inconfidência, located in the former Casa de Câmara e Cadeia of Vila Rica, welcomed 198,915 visitors, making it one of the most visited museums in Brazil. According to the *Jornal Itatiaia* (2024), the museum set a record with 50,106 visitors in July 2024, surpassing the average of 30,000. The free admission, offered since the resumption of activities after the pandemic in February 2023, contributed to the increase in visitation (PMOP, 2023b), as well as the museum's renewed exhibition design.

Ouro Preto is establishing itself as a growing destination, ranking among the eight trending national destinations for 2024, according to an analysis by the platform Booking.com (2023). This recognition reflects the increasing interest of Brazilian travelers in experiences that highlight the cultural aspects of cities, directing them to places with a rich heritage and authentic environment (Galilé, 2023).



Thus, Ouro Preto also benefits from its tourism potential surrounding the old gold and gemstone mines. The tours conducted by experienced and trained guides provide visitors with a detailed understanding of the evolution of mining in the region. These diverse attractions make Ouro Preto an ideal choice for those seeking not only leisure but also a connection with the history and culture of Minas Gerais, strengthening its appeal as a highly relevant tourist destination in the national landscape (Galilé, 2023).

By attracting visitors interested in exploring the history, traditions, and cultural expressions of a region, tourism facilitates a meaningful interaction between visitors and heritage. In this way, an environment is created that is conducive to heritage education, aiming for an appropriate understanding and appreciation of cultural heritage. Through educational programs and directed activities, heritage education allows visitors to develop a deeper connection with the heritage, recognizing its historical, cultural, and social importance. This process contributes to the physical preservation of the heritage and the transmission of cultural values and community identities to future generations.

The results highlight the need for planning focused on sustainability in cultural tourism, with an emphasis on reducing negative impacts on heritage and local communities. The study indicates that management and conservation practices can be implemented to maintain the sustainability of tourism, preserving the authenticity and integrity of the heritage while contributing to balanced socioeconomic development in tourist regions.

Cultural experiences that go beyond historical and architectural heritage were identified, related to the process of colonization of the old settlements from the Gold Cycle. The districts of Ouro Preto have been reviving local traditions and festivals, integrating into the expanding tourism circuits and enhancing tourism in the region.

In the main district of Ouro Preto, traditional cultural events contribute to the visibility of local cultural heritage. Rabbiosi (2016) highlights that these



events can be considered itineraries of consumption and instruments for promoting cultural heritage. In the case of Ouro Preto, the celebrations of Holy Week, Congado, Carnival, and the Winter Festival stand out.

Congado is a manifestation deeply rooted in Ouro Preto, strongly linked to religion (Evaristo, 2019). Minas Gerais has the tradition of Congado since the 18th century, through the brotherhoods of Nossa Senhora dos Homens Pretos in Ouro Preto. This tradition dates back to the founding of the village in 1711 (Evaristo, 2015). According to Filho (2010), the Brotherhood of Santa Ifigênia is one of the most representative of Afro-descendant culture in Ouro Preto, using elements and cultural expressions typical of African origin. Congado/Reinado is a ritual that incorporates elements of Afro-Brazilian religiosity within the colonial Catholic culture, and this tradition persists to this day. The Reinado of Nossa Senhora do Rosário and Santa Ifigênia typically takes place in the second week of January, preserving elements of Afro-Brazilian cultural traditions and the stories of Chico Rei in the city of Ouro Preto.

The Congado/Reinado festival takes place in the urban area of Ouro Preto, specifically in the neighborhoods of Alto da Cruz and Padre Faria, where the Congado groups perform the procession from the Church of Santa Ifigênia to the chapel of Padre Faria. In this case, tourism activities combined with the festivity can be a tool for enhancing other cultural heritage assets of the city, including the region of the old settlements that formed the territory of the main town, such as Padre Faria and its Afro-descendant cultural contributions, beyond the narratives of suffering or the display of objects related to torture. The celebration provides a cultural experience that integrates visitors, the local community, and other cultural groups, enriching the interaction with the cultural heritage of Ouro Preto. Visitors have the opportunity to explore religious buildings, the support spaces for the Congadeiros, and the urban layout.

Another important cultural manifestation is Carnival, which, both in the city and in the districts, preserves historical legacies that enhance the cultural significance of the event. Among these traditions, the bloco Clube do Zé



Pereira dos Lacaio stands out, considered the oldest active carnival block in Brazil, founded in 1867 (Santos, 2011). Field observations indicate that the Zé Pereira block attracts and engages both locals and visitors, making it one of the main carnival manifestations in the main district.

The Carnival of Ouro Preto is characterized by the prominent presence of traditional blocks that parade through the streets, providing a visually and culturally rich experience. Among the blocks, the “Vermelho e Branco” and the “Bandalheira” call attention, aligning with the city's traditional blocks such as the “Bloco do Caixão” and the “Bloco do Pirata.” In addition to the blocks, the Carnival also features Samba Schools, representing the neighborhoods of Ouro Preto, which parade on Sunday and Monday, reinforcing the diversity of cultural manifestations that make up the local carnival.

According to data from the Municipal Government of Ouro Preto, the Carnival of 2023 attracted around 40,000 revelers over four days, with an occupancy rate of 80% and an average daily expenditure of R\$1,300, generating approximately R\$50 million for the municipality (PMOP, 2023b). In 2024, the audience increased to 50,000 revelers over six days of festivities, representing a 10% growth compared to the previous year. This growth may be a result of the cultural valorization of the city's Carnival, as well as municipal actions focused on planning the event.

The rituals of Holy Week are also worth mentioning in the municipality, as it is the longest celebration in Ouro Preto (Santos, 2011). The celebrations begin on Ash Wednesday, right after Carnival, continue throughout Lent, and culminate in the official rituals of Holy Week. The festivities include the Procession of Senhor dos Passos, the Procession of the Encounter, the Foot Washing Ceremony, the Descent from the Cross, the Burial Procession, and the Easter Procession.

During Holy Week 2023, which took place from April 2 to 9, Ouro Preto welcomed around 20,000 visitors, achieving an occupancy rate of 90% and generating approximately R\$30 million for the municipality (Galilé, 2023). In



2024, between March 29 and 31, tourist flow was 20% higher than expected, with full occupancy of the main accommodations, attracting 35,000 tourists (Diário do Comércio, 2024).

Holy Week, like the Congado/Reinado festivals, uses urban planning and landscape elements, such as houses and religious buildings, as a backdrop for the rituals performed. The use of urban space influences the tourist experience, both during the events and in the contemplation of the city. The routes come to life, and with elements such as music and theater, they enrich the cultural manifestations (Pereira, 2017; França, 2023). An example of this is the creation of sawdust carpets, carried out on the second Saturday of Holy Week, which attracts tourists every year and brings together locals and visitors, offering an immersive experience in the local cultural heritage (Araújo, 2024).

The Winter Festival can be considered the link between university culture and the cultural heritage of Ouro Preto. According to Oliveira (2018), the event has been held since 1967 during the month of July, with activities aimed at the community, and includes the celebrations of the anniversary of Ouro Preto on July 8. Carvalho, Reis, and Macedo (2010) highlight that festivals and popular events in Ouro Preto strengthen the connection between the community and its cultural heritage. These activities revitalize the heritage and attract visitors interested in the social and cultural processes that justify Ouro Preto's recognition as a World Heritage site, integrating contemporary productions, local traditions, and new cultural expressions.

The Festival uses the urban space of Ouro Preto to host its diverse cultural programming, promoting the experience of local cultural heritage. This approach aligns with the goals of the event's supporters, including UFOP and the Municipal Government. The theme of the 2023 edition of the festival was "My city is creative," focusing on creative tourism and involving the PPGTURPATRI of UFOP. In 2024, the theme of the festival was "Overflowings," as highlighted in the SEI/UFOP 0639608 notice, which defined the theme as a way to "bring together social/cultural movements from both inside and outside the



university" (PROEX, 2023). In 2024, during the festival's last weekend, around 20,000 people attended the event at Praça Tiradentes, and approximately 40,000 people were present at the UFOP Convention Center, according to data from SECULT-OP (2024).

In addition to the elements that make up the culture and heritage of the main district of Ouro Preto, the Rodrigo Silva district stands out for its municipally listed railway complex (Francisco, 2017), which highlights the potential of railways for the development of alternative tourism on a national scale. Moreover, the Feast of Santa Quitéria (Dias, 2018), marked by religious and devotional symbols, preserves traditions among the local residents of the region.

In the district of Cachoeira do Campo, the Jabuticaba Festival (Pires & Bohrer, 2022) draws attention, organized by the Lions Club and in the process of being recognized as cultural heritage. The event mobilizes rural producers from the districts and serves as a tourist attraction focused on gastronomy and handicrafts, with various activities centered around the culture of jabuticaba.

According to the Municipal Government of Ouro Preto (PMOP, 2024b), the district of Glaura, formerly known as Casa Branca, is renowned for its scenic view of the Rio das Velhas. Other attractions include the Rosary Festival, a century-old cultural and religious procession, and the Gastronomic Festival. These events contribute to strengthening tourism in the village and highlight the local hospitality.

In the district of Amarantina, formerly São Gonçalo do Amarante, whose history is linked to agropastoral culture (Gaspar, 2010), stands the Casa de Pedra. Considered a bandeirista construction identified as an element of local identity (Vieira & Andrade, 2017), it is currently used as a cultural space. Additionally, as a reference to the local culture, the traditional reenactment of the Cavalcadas, a manifestation typical of the Portuguese colonial influence in the region, takes place in September, dating back to the 1760s (Vieira & Andrade, 2017).



In Santo Antônio do Leite, a district with a tradition in goldsmithing, the tourist and cultural activities include the Folia dos Santos Reis and the centenary Festa dos Mineiros, in addition to livestock farming and the production of cheeses and dulce de leche (Kaminski, 2010). In Engenheiro Corrêa, a village with memorial characteristics, actions by the Guaicuy Institute project focus on the socio-environmental valorization of local communities (Gaspar, 2010).

In the district of Miguel Burnier, as in Engenheiro Corrêa, the Guaicuy Institute carries out actions for the preservation of socio-environmental heritage (Instituto Guaicuy, 2024). In a similar initiative, the company Gerdau implemented the "Patrimônio Vivo" project, encouraging a sense of cultural belonging through the appreciation of the industrial heritage present in the district (GERDAU, 2023).

In Antônio Pereira, the main tourist attractions include the Gruta da Lapa (Lapa Cave) and the Queimada Church (PMOP, 2024c). The district is known for mineral exploration, and the Legislative Assembly of Minas Gerais recognized the work of artisanal miners through Law Project 788/2023 as a cultural heritage of significant value. Additionally, in recent years, archaeological assets of social interest were discovered along the Estrada da Purificação (Diário de Ouro Preto, 2023).

The Folia de Reis festival is the most prominent attraction in Santo Antônio do Salto and Santo Antônio do Leite, and it was included in the listing process carried out by the State Institute of Historical and Artistic Heritage (IEPHA-MG) in 2017. The local cuisine has significant potential for cultural tourism and the creative economy, with emphasis on the Festival of Traditional Cuisine, which represents the region's local cooks (Melo, 2024). The event also features the performance of the Congado de Nossa Senhora do Rosário e São Benedito (Coelho, 2022).

The district of Santa Rita de Ouro Preto stands out for the creativity of its soapstone craftsmanship, which supplies the traditional market at Largo do



Coimbra in the historic center of Ouro Preto. This traditional knowledge was recognized by the Municipal Chamber of Ouro Preto through the Legislative Bill 422/2022 as an intangible heritage of the district (Rodrigues, 2023), strengthening local artisans by providing alternative sources of income (Almeida, 2006).

The district of Lavras Novas, the largest in terms of accommodation and dining facilities in the municipality (Pettinatti, 2016), plays a key role in driving tourism demand, especially with the celebration of the Divino Espírito Santo. Lavras Novas has its urban core listed as a heritage site, contributing to the preservation of the traditional craftwork of the "doninhas" (local artisans), whose stories and handmade goods illustrate the everyday life of the village (Camargo, 2019).

Finally, the district of São Bartolomeu is known for its rural atmosphere, the Festa Cultural da Goiabada, and the craft of making Goiaba Cascão (guava sweet paste) (Lopes, 2019), which was recognized as the first intangible heritage of the region, highlighting its cultural and gastronomic aspects (Delabrida & Carvalho, 2018). The district was also named one of the best tourist villages in the world by the World Tourism Organization, standing out for its traditional Minas Gerais cuisine and hospitality. Additionally, it celebrates the Festa do Divino Espírito Santo, which includes playful elements and a theatrical performance organized by the local festivity group (Cardoso & Farias, 2020).

The results indicate the importance of an integrated approach between cultural tourism, heritage preservation, and heritage education. By recognizing the interdependence of these elements in achieving the designation of a creative city, it is possible to develop effective strategies for the appreciation and promotion of cultural heritage. This contributes to enriching the tourist experience, strengthening cultural identity, and promoting sustainable development and community autonomy. Based on the knowledge and understanding of the cultural references presented here, educational activities



can be developed to promote heritage, emphasizing creativity, in order to support the potential designation of Ouro Preto as a creative city.

CONCLUSIONS

This study highlighted heritage education within the context of cultural tourism and its contribution to the preservation of cultural heritage, aiming for the recognition of Ouro Preto as a creative city. Through the literature review and analysis of the results, it was possible to demonstrate the interrelation between these elements and their relevance for the awareness, appreciation, and preservation of cultural heritage, achieving the objective proposed by this article.

Cultural tourism emerges as a powerful tool for the promotion and preservation of heritage by fostering an interaction between visitors and cultural heritage. Heritage education is inseparable from heritage itself, and both are essential for a proper understanding of heritage as a dimension of social participation, its cultural references, and, naturally, its valuation. This process empowers society to appreciate and respect the history, culture, and identity of local communities.

Through the multiple ways of making heritage assets visible through tourism, it is essential to first understand that cultural heritage is a unified whole, where both material and immaterial heritage components are integral. These elements only convey meaning when they are valued by those who engage with them. The valorization of cultural heritage is also a form of social awareness, and among its many benefits, it allows for the discovery of meanings beyond those already publicly associated with a celebration, a tradition, or a built heritage. Creativity, in this context, becomes a key factor in promoting culture and enhancing its significance for both locals and visitors.

The diverse cultural heritages of Ouro Preto serve as prime examples that reconcile cultural tourism, heritage education, preservation of these assets, and the acquisition of new meanings for both visitors and locals. When



analyzing cultural expressions, it is evident that cultural practices were established based on Portuguese legacies from Brazil's colonial period. However, these practices evolve over time, incorporating contemporary societal values, fostering a unique visitor-community interaction. In this dynamic, both the visitor and the local community become active participants in these social practices. As a result, the tourist experience becomes more meaningful, as the visitor is no longer just a spectator, but someone who actively engages, learns, and appreciates the heritage.

In light of this, it is essential to adopt an integrated approach that considers the needs of the heritage, local communities, and visitors. Careful planning of cultural tourism, combined with educational programs and preservation efforts, can contribute to the balanced socioeconomic development of tourist regions, promoting an enriched experience and the appreciation of cultural heritage. This approach ensures that tourism not only benefits the economy but also strengthens the identity and continuity of cultural practices, fostering a sustainable and mutually beneficial relationship between heritage sites, local communities, and tourists.

In the case of Ouro Preto, the municipality's heritage as a whole, along with creativity associated with crafts, festivals, gastronomy, and other aspects, enables new approaches to be developed. Cultural tourism, integrated with educational heritage initiatives, can play a crucial role in promoting Ouro Preto as a creative city. This approach can generate income, support local artisans and businesses, and contribute to the preservation and ongoing vitality of the cultural traditions, ensuring the continuity of the city's rich cultural identity while fostering sustainable economic development.

Although this study includes a theoretical approach and non-participant observation, it is understood that the absence of other sources, as well as quantitative methods that capture the perceptions of both visitors and residents more broadly, are key limitations. Additionally, it should be noted that data collection occurred during a specific period, without considering



seasonal variations or long-term changes. These limitations suggest the need for further research that incorporates a broader range of perspectives and a more extensive data collection process to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of cultural tourism and heritage preservation in Ouro Preto.

For future research, it is recommended to conduct comparative studies with other cities that share similar cultural attributes, as well as the application of quantitative methods to deepen the understanding of the impact of tourism and heritage education. Finally, it is hoped that this study can be expanded to observe changes over time, as well as interdisciplinary investigations that connect heritage education, sustainability, and economic development.

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