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## **Research Notes.**

### **From Creative Crowds to Creative Tourism:**

#### **A search for creative tourism in small and medium sized cities**

**Teun den Dekker and Marcel Tabbers**

When making policy for creative tourism, small and medium sized cities too often take after touristic metropolises such as Berlin and Barcelona. Or they use the development of, for example, the city of Bilbao as great example and look for the development of their own Guggenheim's. This phenomenon was referred to by Murray (2007) as the 'Irritable Bilbao Syndrome' or 'city boosterism at its worst, a poor substitute for doing the hard work and planning required to compete in the new global creative economy'. Physical or product oriented developments of creative tourism can generate great results, however a lot of non metropolitan cities already have a beautiful proposition for the contemporary tourist.

Since publications by Florida (2002) and Landry (2000) the developments in the area of creative class and creative clustering have multiplied in Europe. The creative industry is an important item on the political agenda and a lot of municipal centres and urban areas have invested significantly in this part of the 'knowledge economy' in recent years (Hospers and Pen, 2008). This is mainly because the creative industry makes an important contribution to the attractiveness of the city: for companies, for (new) inhabitants and for visitors (such as tourists). When focussing on this last group, there are still many opportunities in the area of creative tourism development.

#### **Creative tourism in a broader perspective**

Creative tourism was defined for the first time by Richards and Raymond (2000) as offering 'visitors the opportunity to develop their creative potential through active participation in courses and learning experiences which are characteristic of the holiday destination where they are undertaken'. At first the development of creative tourism was mainly focussed on the creative activity of visitors, while today the creative environment in which the creative experience takes places is more centralized. Binkhorst and Den Dekker (2009) argue that a merely product-oriented approach to the creative activity does the contemporary tourist no justice. They therefore advocated a more people-oriented approach. In this approach, the experience network is centralized and the touristic experience is named with all its active actors and its surroundings. One for example can think of unexpected collaborations within this network, the activation of residents or facilitating a dialogue between the tourists

themselves. Now a broader definition of the concept creative tourism is formed. The ultimate goal is to let the tourist be part of the new surroundings of his or her destination. In other words, the tourist becomes part of the creative core of a destination.

This analysis leads us to the following proposition: the easier a creative environment can be approached and infiltrated, the more attractive this city is for the contemporary tourist. In this case, small and medium sized cities have a competitive advantage over their bigger brothers, which are more attractive because of (creative) touristic products such as leading museums, cool clubbing areas and famous festivals. In the small and medium sized cities, the creative class is easier to pinpoint and easily approachable. The creative class decreases slower and (perhaps the most important advantage) has another relationship with the city. As in bigger cities the creative class is mainly drawn by the possibilities (the presence of breeding places, art galleries and platforms) of the city (much the same as in other cities), the creative class in smaller cities is more connected with the city itself, its history and its social and often familiar structures. Moreover, because they do not have the product range of a bigger city, they try to create experiences themselves. The creative crowd in a smaller city is more connected to its surroundings and wishes to contribute to make something of these surroundings. The approachability of the creative class in small and medium sized cities is a very interesting advantage for policy makers and communities.

### **The creative tourism development model**

There are obviously opportunities for small and medium sized cities in the area of creative tourism. The identifiable creative class that is connected to the city as a contributor to creative tourism offers opportunities for visionaries and policy makers. But creating a creative environment for tourists is not easy. Not only the meaning of the word is abstract, but also the execution has to be 'authentic'. Moreover, the creative class is critically-minded. However, the government can still stimulate such developments. To reach this goal, the creative tourism development model offers three steps:

#### 1) Stimulate a dialogue

The first step of this development model seems the easiest, but needs the most attention. The more time and effort is invested in this step, the more interesting and lasting the results will be. In this first step it is important to map the complete experience network of the tourist (Binkhorst and Den Dekker, 2009) and all actors involved in the city. Figure 1 gives an example of an experience network. The network of a creative tourism differs from that of a conventional tourist. The challenge is to stimulate a lasting dialogue between the actors within the creative core themselves and between the actors and the creative tourist in the

centre of the network. The dynamics of this dialogue make up for a larger part of the creative environment.

### 2) Seeing possibilities

The second step is about seeing possibilities. Which individual dialogues are interesting enough to invest in? Where are the surprising combinations and interesting market potential? This not only asks more in terms of deepening the experience of the creative consumer, but also of the network itself. Developers of creative tourism (for example policy makers or local tourist offices) need to know the business of the creative core and acknowledge new initiatives and trends. The perspective should not be top-down, but from the core itself.

### 3) Converting chances into cash

The government should play a facilitating role in converting chances into cash. A lot of initiatives come a long way because of intrinsic motivation, but sometimes they need a little push to really succeed. If the network functions well and the government has the appropriate role, the government will know which initiatives to stimulate and where a little adjustment is needed towards its own touristic (policy)goals.

Steps 1 to 3 should be a combination of the extrinsic and intrinsic motivation of the network. Extrinsic motivation by creating conditions and creating means is controllable, but does not facilitate developments which are lasting and complex, such as culture changes in a sector. Intrinsic motivation, appealing to inner values and needs, contributes to more complex developments, but often is difficult to steer and make objective. A good mix of both motivations is the basis for a successful execution of the development model. A successful contemporary approach of creative tourism starts not only with redefining the meaning, but above all with the right approach towards the creative network in which the municipal centre should take its own specific place among smaller and medium sized cities.

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## Barcelona Creative Tourism

### Caroline Couret

The *Barcelona Creative Tourism* programme was established by FUSIC (Society and Culture Foundation) in 2005. FUSIC had been fostering civic creativity in Barcelona for thirty years, through the management of participative projects aimed to stimulate social involvement in artistic activities. As the *name* FUSIC suggests, the focus is on the way culture is produced and not just 'consumed' by society - all the projects led by FUSIC include this participative component. In this context, we were rapidly aware of the growing demand from foreign groups eager to perform or have an artistic experience in Barcelona. At the same time, Richards and Raymond's (2000) research on creative tourism confirmed that we were facing a new tourist trend. Although this way of discovering a culture by experiencing it had been followed by a minority of 'romantic and bohemian travellers' for decades or even centuries, it now seems that there are more and more 'conventional tourists' who want to dedicate at least some hours of their stay to take part in a creative and participative activity that gives them the opportunity to know more about a concrete aspect of the local culture, as well as to feel like a local for a while.

Why do creative tourists come to us? On the one hand there is no public organization or private company that could provide creative tourists with personalized information or services such as - in the case of a youth choir for instance - a venue adapted to their artistic needs and their budget. Whereas the public sector used to provide standard information, the commercial sector – generally incoming agencies – doesn't want to invest time and money in a niche that they do not see as a profitable activity.

However, thanks to its 30 years experience of dealing with culture and arts management, FUSIC could offer creative tourists the personalized attention and professional background they need to achieve their projects. They soon saw us as 'their friend from Barcelona' who would help them in resolving their artistic 'problems', with our local knowledge and our rich network of personal contacts.

We formally created the *Barcelona Creative Tourism* platform in 2005 to offer the creative tourists a unique interlocutor, and to enable artistic and creative initiatives in Barcelona to promote themselves abroad. This was a period in which Barcelona - whose tourist boom really started after the Olympics of 1992 - had in two decades reached and even surpassed the tourist volumes of other European capitals, at the risk of losing its friendliness and intimacy. This is why we proposed 're-humanizing' the relationship between visitors and inhabitants, by using creativity, a universal attribute, as the motive for collaboration between travellers and locals. As a new promotion tool for the city, the launch of Barcelona Creative Tourism gained the support of the city council through Barcelona's tourism marketing body.

Our challenge is to promote the artistic and creative community in Barcelona to a broader audience, while maintaining its authenticity. This is why we help art schools, theatres, artists and art residencies in Barcelona to adapt their offers to creative tourists' demands – by designing workshops, offering rehearsal spaces and facilitating artistic collaboration. Most of those offers are available in our website: [www.barcelonacreativa.info](http://www.barcelonacreativa.info).

When creative tourists need more than standard information or activities, we propose customized solutions to their specific requests, which may range from event design to technical production, including communication, press relations, translations, etc. This is more generally the case with groups or tour operators who prefer to utilise our local knowledge, professional skills and experience in cultural management, and to focus themselves on the touristic and logistic issues. A tour operator - even when they are specialised in the performing arts - will often commission the organization of a concert instead of utilising their own staff. Such creative outsourcing reduces travel costs and avoids complications with licenses, church schedules or equipment rental.

Communication is also essential to reach cultural audiences in a city like Barcelona, which has a very large selection of cultural events. Creative Tourism Barcelona can offer groups a professional press and communication campaign in different languages – of course including Catalan – and deliver them press clippings and other material they can then use for

fundraising. Those are all on-demand services that make part of the regular activities of our foundation.

Since the creation of the Internet platform, we have seen that there are also more and more generalist tour operators interested in adding 'creative' elements to their products. For this, cooperation between the touristic and cultural sector is essential, and in particular creative tourism providers need to be able to speak the language of both tourism enterprises and cultural organisations. We therefore try to maintain what we could call an 'eco-system' between the artistic and touristic sector.

Our experience of managing *Barcelona Creative Tourism* has indicated that a growing range of travellers are interested in creative activities. The unifying factor among these creative tourists is the importance given to the creative and artistic activity they undertake in the destination. Often they are passionate about a specific form of creativity that they are also eager to explore in new destinations. For this reason we thought that it would be useful to offer these creative tourists a range of different destinations that can offer a variety of creative experiences. We therefore founded the *Creative Tourism Network* ([www.creativetourismnetwork.org](http://www.creativetourismnetwork.org)) in 2010 with partners from Paris and Rome with support from the European Commission through the Culture Programme. The network aims to give more visibility to destinations – be they villages or major cities – that have the potential to welcome creative tourists. This initiative started with the organization of the International Conference on Creative Tourism, held in December 2010 in Barcelona (at the emblematic Gaudi building 'La Pedrera'). This event attracted experts and entrepreneurs from 26 countries, all already involved in or eager to start developing creative tourism. This highlighted the very rapidly growing interest in this sustainable tourist trend, as well as the rich potential for cooperation between the academic and commercial sectors. The active participation that characterized the conference was subsequently translated into an active international network. Our objective is to offer the members the possibility to develop their own initiatives related to creative tourism, while benefiting from the 'capital' accumulated by the network in term of databases, international recognition, etc. In addition to this, the network provides an observatory for the creative tourism sector and helps to formulate best practices, as well as generating synergies within the flows of creative tourism. Our challenge for the future is to continue developing the network alongside the programmes of individual members, whilst maintaining the authenticity of creative tourism and preventing it from becoming a mere marketing gimmick.

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## **COLIN's creative tourism experiences: The opportunities for the province of Noord-Brabant, The Netherlands.**

**Kristel Zegers**

### **Introduction**

In this paper the results of COLIN's experiments with creative tourism are discussed. Which opportunities does creative tourism offer Noord-Brabant? COLIN, network organisation for creative businesses in the province of Noord-Brabant, took this subject on board since it provides a different angle to COLIN's research themes: the development of creative industries and creative economy.

### **Creative industries and creative tourism**

The notion that creativity is an important driver for the contemporary economy has become widespread. Especially since the work of Florida (2002) and Landry (2000) policymakers and professionals acknowledge the economic and social value of culture and creativity. The creative industries have been associated with aims like city branding, urban development, employment, participation and integration of citizens, neighbourhood development and social cohesion (see also Matarasso, 1997; Mommaas, 2004; Marlet & Poort, 2005; Bianchini & Parkinson, 1993). In The Netherlands, the development of the creative industries is on the political agenda as being one of the economic pillars that deserve attention and stimulation in order to keep up with global competition (Ministerie EZ & OCW, 2009). Especially in times of recession and expenditure cuts the importance of smart solutions and combinations becomes prominent. Stimulating links between creative sectors and other economic sectors such as health, tourism, and logistics are essential in order to innovate (Waarde van creatie, 2010). The interface between creativity, culture and economics forms the rationale of the 'creative economy' (United Nations, 2008).

The rise of the creative economy provides opportunities for the tourism sector. Tourism suppliers and destinations search for new ways of keeping the tourist satisfied or attracting new tourists. Creativity is needed in order to provide or (co)create authentic tourism experiences. Richards and Wilson (2007) mention that tourists would like to be part of the local community and want to experience the everyday life of others. Creative tourism (see Richards and Raymond, 2000) deals with interaction with the local culture, encounters, taking previously unknown routes, becoming acquainted with the 'real' or 'authentic' culture and traditions of the visiting community. The tourist increasingly becomes a prosumer: producing and consuming their own experience. Following the definitions of Richards and Raymond (2000) and UNESCO (2006), it appears that the content of creative tourism



programmes is highly related to the cultural and creative industries. The creative sector provides opportunities for creative tourism in terms of product development, designing methods, and is at the same time a potential target group.

When developing creative tourism programmes or methods cultural intermediaries can play a role in establishing smart combinations between the tourism and creative sector. In the province Noord-Brabant (south of The Netherlands) COLIN functions as a linking pin between culture and economy. Last year COLIN brought together representatives of the tourism sector and the creative sector. The following sections of this paper introduce and discuss the results of COLIN's experiments.

### **COLIN**

COLIN (Creative Organisations Linked In Networks) was established in September 2006. Being able to work interdisciplinary and linking culture and economy, COLIN operates at the crossroads of education, government and entrepreneurs, and is financed via these three parties. COLIN connects, establishes encounters, boosts processes and makes illogical connections logical. By means of creative methods COLIN aims to inform, inspire and connect creative businesses with one another and with other economic sectors. By doing so, COLIN stimulates the further development of the creative industries and the creative economy in Noord-Brabant. Since COLIN is initiated and facilitated by NHTV Breda University of Applied Sciences its base is education and (practically oriented) research focused on leisure, creative industries and imagineering. Students and professionals work together to fulfil COLIN's aims.

COLIN's research and events developed from the stimulation of cultural and creative entrepreneurship to concepts focussing on the creative economy. The base of COLIN's products is knowledge being developed and spread via network events, education, articles, and in constant dialogue with the creative sector. More than 2000 entrepreneurs are part of COLIN's strong network; over 30 events are organised annually (see [www.COLIN.nl](http://www.COLIN.nl)).

### **Noord-Brabant**

COLIN operates in the province of Noord-Brabant. This province has 2.4 million inhabitants. The main economic drivers are high-tech, design and logistics although the agricultural sector is in terms of landscape still an important sector. The five biggest cities of Brabant (Breda, Tilburg, 's-Hertogenbosch, Eindhoven and Helmond) and the Province (authority) are united in an alliance called BrabantStad. Their common agenda aims 'to create an excellent environment for economic and social development towards a high quality of life

and, through this, to achieve an innovative and globally competitive region' (Provincie Noord-Brabant, 2010, p.3). BrabantStad is a candidate for the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) in 2018. Leitmotiv is 'the art of living together'. 'It is an expedition to explore the unknown; being able to trust each other, finding smart solutions, defining rules together, using each others knowledge and the wisdom of previous generations in order to move forward' (2018Brabant, 2010, p13).

### **Opportunities**

COLIN believes that creative tourism offers several opportunities for the cultural and creative field of Noord-Brabant, especially in the light of the ECoC bid. Creative tourism can help in creating stories, routes and programmes that link the urban and rural areas. Via creative tourism programmes, inhabitants and visitors of BrabantStad can meet, interact and experience the area. It provides a platform for (among others) creative businesses to show themselves, to collaborate, and to generate business. By creative tourism programmes or using creative tourism methods (cultural) infrastructure can be strengthened: different audiences can be reached, new market opportunities can be explored, and entrepreneurship is stimulated. Cities can use creative tourism as an instrument for branding the area, the city, or the entire province (as long as been build upon the strengths or DNA of that specific place). Most importantly, it shows persons to look differently, to experience the environment in another way. Therefore, it leads to connections: between people, sectors, disciplines and areas.

### **COLIN: experiments with creative tourism**

The above-mentioned opportunities led to a variety of actions and experiments. COLIN started with practically-oriented research into the opportunities creative tourism offers Breda. This research included several experiments, among which the design of two creative tourism routes in an upcoming neighbourhood in Breda during the Graphic Design Festival Breda. It also led to an article in a trend report (see De Wijs and Dings, 2010) and two think tanks. Furthermore, COLIN took creative tourism from the city to the countryside by supervising a research group of eight students who developed an inspiration magazine containing several creative tourism routes through Noord-Brabant on the basis of Brabant icons such as carnival, fairytales, burgundian life and famous Brabant people. To illustrate COLIN's method of working the two creative tourism routes and the think tanks are further explained.

### **Creative tourism routes**

The creative tourism routes attracted 18 participants, among them (cultural and tourism) policy makers, creative professionals, cultural intermediaries, visitors of the graphic design festival, students and lecturers in leisure management. The two routes both took two hours but differed in theme and character. One group of ten participants were asked to explore the neighbourhood from the point of view of a mascot; in this case a potato, which reflects the underground character of the neighbourhood. Participants were asked in advance to pimp a potato and bring their mascot to the tour. The tour started at a cultural exhibition and meeting space where the group was told that they were going to make a photo exhibition of their potato family. They were given a booklet with pictures of certain spots in the neighbourhood that the group could visit. The group was encouraged to make pictures of the potato family at several spaces in the neighbourhood.

The other group, consisting of eight participants, took the bird watching tour which was designed to meet locals. The group was given a birdcage with several pictures of birds in it resembling the street names of the neighbourhood. When guessing the name of the bird and walking to the specific street the group was asked to speak to locals on their way or ring the bell of the given house number. The group was surprised to meet a photographer, an urban design company and a visual artist and hear their stories about living and working in the area Belcrum.

In her thesis COLIN intern Maril Dings (2010) elaborates on the designed tours. Reactions of the participants showed that the alternative ways to discover the neighbourhood appealed to them. 'I think it's a fun and creative idea. You show yourself round and see the environment in a different way.' and 'It was startling. Your creativity was stimulated and you saw spaces you did not know before.' Both groups valued the creativity and interactivity of the concept. The active involvement made the concept work. Participants described the trip as a creative discovery tour in which they detected an unknown area or rediscovered a known area. Interaction within the group, contact with locals, and freedom were key to this. The main suggestion for improvement was to extend the duration of the tours, so presentations or culinary food stops could be part of it as well. Dings (2010) concludes that designing creative tourism routes would be a unique selling point for branding Breda as capital of visual arts and heritage.

### **Think tanks**

Based on the success of the experiments COLIN decided to dive deeper in the topic and to organise a creative think tank. In Breda the discussion was organised in such a way that several ideas were generated how creative tourism in Breda could be stimulated, while in

Tilburg the central question was how to use the body of thought of creative tourism for branding the creative area Veemarktkwartier (VMK). In both sessions participants were selected and invited personally on the basis of their expertise and their open attitude. An interesting note is that 'traditional' tourist information parties, such as the tourism promotion office, had difficulty understanding the notion of creative tourism and decided not to accept the invitation. A mixed group consisting of ho(s)tel managers, lecturers in leisure and tourism, festival organisers, a cultural broker, graphic designers, a landscape architect, a tourism related web designer, an organisation specialised in creative encounters, a museum director and students leisure management were present. Both think tanks attracted 15 – 20 persons who, after a presentation about creative tourism in which several exemplary initiatives were presented, were invited to express their views on the topic via several brainstorming techniques.

The think tanks generated ideas about potential creative tourism methods or programmes. Ideas varied from developing a handbook for a different view on the city (made by locals to become a tourist in your own city or made by tourists and locals to increase interaction between them), to a 'cultural snack bar' in Breda in which a customer orders a 'snack' which guarantees a personal experience, interaction, a meaningful encounter or a story. Snacks can differ in time, price and category: it can be an encounter on a specific location, an assignment like 'take the performance entrance of the theatre', a walk in the forest with a local, a visit at the workspace of a visual artist, etc. The think tank in Tilburg led to the idea of a creative tourism tour in the Veemarktkwartier (VMK). Since the area has a closed look and feel, the aim is to open it up and show the creativity behind the front doors. The tour includes a walking dinner and passes several outdoor and indoor locations of the VMK, starting at the bed and breakfast the area appeared to have. Combined with a course, participants get involved in the activities of a specific spot by either listening to stories of people working there, experiencing the history of the place or being part of a performance.

Participants of both think tanks reacted enthusiastically: 'it was useful; I learned to know several parties!' 'It's interesting to see how ideas come to existence; the mix of people brings energy' and 'it gave me the feeling that with shared creativity you get so much further'.

In both sessions the question popped up what to do with the generated ideas. As one entrepreneur said: 'for me the success of such brainstorms depends on what happens next.' Logically, this also depends on the participants themselves.

**What lessons did COLIN learn?**

COLIN showed opportunities and inspired stakeholders by organising and facilitating the first steps. It stimulates participants to take the subject further. The difficulty here is getting a feasible business case out of the ideas. Although in Breda one concluded: 'it's all here, we just have to collect and connect the parties and make a programme out of it', this is easier said than done. Partly, this relates to the characteristics of the creative sector: many small sized organisations lacking investment capital. However, they are used to work via networks and collectives. Since the think tank was for several tourism entrepreneurs the first time they met creative businesses, it's logical that networks are still weak and trust should grow. Time will learn whether the generated ideas are good enough to be thought through and turned to practice. Still, someone should take the lead; there is a clear need for ownership. Since the think tank in Tilburg was partly initiated by the manager of the VMK, she organised the next steps in which the idea was strengthened.

Another lesson learned deals with the interpretation of the word 'tourism'. COLIN discovered it lead to misinterpretations. The city of Tilburg does not attract many tourists; therefore the area manager of VMK had difficulty seeing the relevance of the topic creative tourism. This shows a narrow interpretation of the word 'tourism'. While creative tourism is much more about experiencing your environment in a different way, it is not perceived that way. To overcome this confusion with the concept COLIN decided to talk about creative tourism without using the term 'creative tourism'. This worked exceptionally well, but it raises the question whether 'creative tourism' is the best term to describe what is in essence a different way of experiencing your environment leading to transformation.

In conclusion, being a learning company with a base in education as COLIN is, you are a relatively neutral partner that easily generates energy among participants. Looking at the generated ideas and the enthusiasm of the participants, one can conclude that opportunities for Brabant definitely exist, but that it is difficult to turn the ideas into a business case. Stronger networks between the creative and tourism sector are necessary in order to bring the generated ideas one step further. Furthermore, the need for ownership becomes prominent when there are parties that are willing to invest time, energy and money to make the idea a reality. COLIN tries to take its role as a facilitator by spreading the word, connecting partners and generating knowledge in order to give this topic the boost it deserves.

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