



Case study 2: Folkestone Pilot Project - led by the Creative Foundation

Engaging cultural tourists with Folkestone Triennial

Established in 2002, the Creative Foundation has a remarkable record of success having already transformed the most run down part of Folkestone. Ninety buildings have been restored in the Creative Quarter, and Quarterhouse, a performance venue for music, theatre, dance and comedy, has been built. The area has been animated by three internationally acclaimed visual art Triennials, a collection of significant and permanent contemporary public art, a full performance programme and an annual book festival. The aim of the pilot project was to integrate the work of the Creative Foundation more fully with tourism in the area. Starting with a focus on attracting visitors to Folkestone during its third Triennial in 2014, the goal of the project was to grow Folkestone as a cultural destination, building collaborative relationships with hotels, transport providers, and other visitor attractions in the area, and to create the community and ecology of a dynamic visitor economy.

Key Outcomes

- 1 The pilot project helped kickstart relations with local hotels, opening the door to frank discussions about the impact of the Triennial on businesses. Collaboration with hotels included creating quirky 'Do Not Disturb' signs for guests to use in their rooms advertising the Triennial.
- 2 Culture Kent partner Visit Kent helped broker fruitful partnerships with Southeastern Railways and DFDS Ferries - enabling the Creative Foundation to run workshops on DFDS Ferries and have a pop-up presence at St Pancras International - engaging London audiences and Kent commuters, and leading to subsequent successful collaborations with Southeastern.
- 3 The Creative Foundation attracted a 'cross-over' market to the Triennial through kiosks and leafleting campaigns at visitor attractions in the area, and were invited by Bluewater to create a gallery showcasing the work of Folkestone's creative community in a pop-up shop - featuring 26 artists, over 6 weeks and reaching 6,000 shoppers - to promote Folkestone and its creative communities.

Culture Kent - a 3 year project funded by Arts Council England and VisitEngland, as part of the Cultural Destinations Programme.

Led by **Turner Contemporary** the aims of Culture Kent were to showcase Kent's cultural assets; extend reach by attracting new audiences; create new strategic relationships and develop the information and knowledge core required to strengthen the Kent cultural tourism offer.

Culture Kent developed 6 pilot projects to test new initiatives and cultural offers and 6 case studies have been developed to disseminate lessons learnt.



Issues & opportunities

Building awareness of the Triennial as the basis for a cohesive visitor experience.

As an independent arts charity whose work straddles many boundaries, the Creative Foundation is in a unique position to engage in cross-sectoral collaborations with the tourism sector. Their focus on 'place-making' - grounded in their belief in the transformative power of creativity - meant that the Creative Foundation still had an untapped potential to play a further role in the evolving development of Folkestone and East Kent as a cultural destination. The Triennial's contribution to building critical mass for Folkestone's cultural tourism offer is crucial for driving visitor numbers, spending and length of stay in the destination, in addition to communicating a renewed sense of place.

With over 135,000 visitors in 2014, the third Triennial was the most successful so far in attracting people to Folkestone, cementing its position as one of the region's leading cultural destinations. The Creative Foundation's decision to move the Triennial to the autumn, informed by research by Visit Kent into the seasonal tourist market, highlighted a desire by the Triennial partners to expand their reach beyond locals, education and arts specialists to include tourists. This evolving alignment with the visitor economy was a key feature of the work carried out during the Culture Kent Pilot Project. Central to this was support given to the Creative Foundation as they sought, for the first time, to develop strategic partnerships with a range of organisations, including visitor attractions, retail, transport, and hotels, to attract new audiences to Folkestone and the Triennial. Whilst the aim of the Creative Foundation continues to be centred on culture-led regeneration - to change not just the townscape, but to bring people to Folkestone and inject dynamism into the town - the Culture Kent Pilot has been about exploring how cultural tourism can play a significant role in achieving these wider goals and brokering the relationships that need to be developed to make this a reality.



"For us, tourism is the bi-product of what we do - changing the perceptions, not just of visitors to the town, but of people who live here..."

Ioannis Ioannou, Marketing and Engagement Manager, Creative Foundation

Key learnings

As it was one of the first Culture Kent Pilot Projects, time was short for brokering key strategic partnerships for the 2014 Triennial. The experience gained in the project showed that aligning the interests of cultural organisations and the tourism industry is a learning process that takes time. The Creative Foundation's profile and track record from the past 15 years helped enormously with this process, and nurturing and building on these relationships will remain a priority.

Legacy and ways forward

In the run up to the fourth Triennial in 2017, the Creative Foundation continues to look for and build synergies with tourism and cultural partners. Hotels in Folkestone have agreed to place the Creative Foundation's Culture Guide in over 900 hotel rooms, which, alongside Folkestone's Creative Quarter, will also feature other cultural visitor attractions in East Kent. The Creative Foundation is also playing a key role in implementing the destination management plan for Shepway, integrating culture, arts and creativity into its tourism offer. Capitalising on the flagship of the Triennial, and the journey steered by involvement with the Culture Kent Project, has helped the Creative Foundation to think more strategically about the positive role that they can play in developing Folkestone as a cultural destination and how the different aspects of their work can be developed to reach new audiences, bringing more people from outside the town to explore and experience the creative community.



Written by - **Tourism and Events Research Hub**, Canterbury Christ Church University, as part of the Culture Kent Research Programme - delivered in partnership with **Visit Kent**

