

A Round Table Discussion Event (Feb 2017): Attended by 25 stakeholders involved in the Culture Kent Pilot Projects together with some key representatives from tourism, culture/the arts.



'Cultural Destination' has become a widely used term, but what does it actually mean in practice for providers working in the arts, culture, and tourism/hospitality sectors around Kent? The six Culture Kent Pilot Projects aimed to explore the mechanics of cultural destinations by trialling new ways of working across the sectors. Reflecting on their experience of participating in the pilot projects, stakeholders attending the Round Table Discussion identified three key areas of best practice for building a cultural destination. These were: building networks and collaboration; understanding and working with difference; and curating the destination experience.

BUILDING NETWORKS AND COLLABORATION

Networks and collaborative partnerships were identified as key elements in the success of the Culture Kent Pilot Projects. Strong networks have been found to deliver multiple benefits:

- they extend organisational reach, providing access to sources of complementary data, knowledge and expertise, as well as new audiences and markets;
- they permit strategic coordination of programming, allowing local businesses to prepare for and support a calendar of cultural events, and cultural organisations to accommodate the needs of local businesses;
- inclusive networks incorporating the resident community boost local pride, and secure local buy-in, generating a buzz about the destination that, in turn, makes it more appealing to visitors;
- they provide a platform for developing new funding proposals and business ideas; and
- they enable cultural tourism stakeholders in a locality to develop a shared vision, and speak with a shared voice.

Areas of best practice for networks and collaboration include:

- identifying a lead person responsible for facilitating relationships and meetings;
- being honest about the time and resources required for networking and collaboration; and
- ensuring that different stakeholder groups are represented in the network, including commercial interests, community, and relevant business owners.

WHAT IS A 'CULTURAL DESTINATION'?

The Culture Kent Research Programme reviewed the existing evidence on cultural destinations in policy and practice, from national and international perspectives.

According to the working definition developed in the Evidence Review, a cultural destination is *'a networked space delivering a total experience to visitors that helps them understand a location and its people, through history and contemporary culture.'*

The definition proposes that visitors and 'cultural tourists' are primarily interested in what a place has to offer, and are best served by a joined-up approach that 'curates' a destination for them. Conventional industry-led distinctions between arts, culture and heritage sectors, need to be replaced by the notion of a destination value chain of networks based on location, proximity, and identity, fostering place-based cross-sectoral working.

Thomas K, Scott J, Brebeanu R and Berkeley-Corner R (2017) Culture Kent Research Programme Summary of Findings Report

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.

Two summaries have been developed to disseminate the findings of the Round Table Discussion Event, to reflect Best Practice and Legacy-Ways Forward.





UNDERSTANDING AND WORKING WITH DIFFERENCE

Difference is a strength when seen as a source of complementary skills, knowledge and resources. But the perception of difference can also act as a barrier to communication and collaborative working. In interviews carried out amongst tourism, heritage and arts/cultural organisations as part of the Culture Kent research, the perception of cross-sectoral differences, in language, culture, and priorities, was found to be a persistent mind-set. In terms of actual practice, however, these differences largely evaporated. Culture Kent gave participating organisations and stakeholders the opportunity to encounter 'other' ways of working, and find ways of understanding and overcoming the nature of difference in their everyday practice. Stakeholders observed that:

- there is a need for a focus – provided by Culture Kent – to enable conversations to start, and show that projects can work;
- it is possible to become fluent in the 'new language' of collaborating partners, and this can open up new worlds of opportunity; and
- 'cross-sectoral' collaboration provoked new thinking on what constitutes a target audience or market, and how organisations communicate with them. For example, 'audience', 'tourist/visitor' and 'community' need not be mutually exclusive categories.

Key areas of good practice include:

- making use of the complementary expertise of other organisations;
- ensuring that a focus is agreed and maintained throughout;
- being open-minded, and aware of the sensitivities and objectives of other organisations; and
- ensuring a level playing field, with equal access to resources and support.

CURATING THE DESTINATION EXPERIENCE

The notion of 'curation' is one example of how language migrates across borders of sectoral practice and expertise. With its implications of selection, presentation and care, the term 'curation' is now routinely found outside its original museum and gallery setting, and was applied by participants and stakeholders involved in Culture Kent to the process of creating that 'networked space' that lies at the heart of the cultural destination. A project theme of 'art in unexpected places' saw a new range of organisations taking on the role of curator, connecting visitors with a range of experiences, attractions and events that create a particular sense of place. As participants observed:

- ad hoc and spontaneous performances can bring a place to life, and create a sense of magic and excitement;
- artistic interventions can also embrace the natural environment;
- the curation of the wider destination offers festival goers added value to their stay; and
- curation of the cultural offer should also extend to local food and drink culture, and the gastronomic experience.

Best practice for place curation included:

- good networking and communication, being aware of the wider cultural offer in the destination;
- coordination of programming and planning in the destination; and
- the training and employment of 'greeters' and 'place ambassadors', to provide a welcome and orientate visitors in the destination.

Image credits: Page 1: Summer of Colour-Red Ladies, courtesy of Turner Contemporary. Fan Bay, photo Sebastian Edge, courtesy of Dover Arts Development. Pablo Bronstein, Beach Hut in the style of Nicholas Hawksmore, photo Stuart Wilson courtesy of Creative Foundation. Turner Contemporary, Margate, courtesy of Turner Contemporary. Page 2: Webb-Ellis, Parlor Walls, photo Bernard G. Mills courtesy of Whitstable Biennale, Urban Playground, bOing! Festival, photo Manu Palomeque courtesy of Gulbenkian. Dutch/Light- Jyll Bradley photo Thierry Bal; courtesy of Historic Dockyard Chatham.

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**