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2021-04

## Creative Tourism in Smaller Communities: Place, Culture, and Local Representation

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University of Calgary Press

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Scherf, K. (Ed.). (2021). Creative tourism in smaller communities: Place, culture, and local representation. University of Calgary Press.

<http://hdl.handle.net/1880/113280>

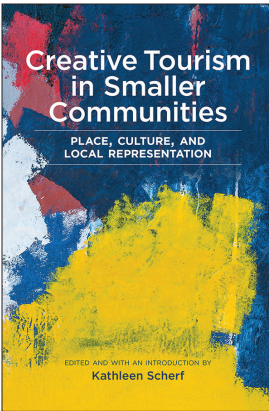
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**CREATIVE TOURISM IN SMALLER COMMUNITIES:  
PLACE, CULTURE, AND LOCAL REPRESENTATION**  
Edited and with an introduction by Kathleen Scherf

ISBN 978-1-77385-189-1

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# Creative Placemaking Strategies in Smaller Communities

*Greg Richards*

This final chapter reviews the main themes of the book and contextualizes them within emerging trends of creative tourism, and within the larger field of creative placemaking. This volume brings together an impressive range of analyses of creative tourism in small places around the world. These are based on many different analytical perspectives, including sustainable development, networking, co-creation, producer collaboration, digital technologies, and Indigenous cultures.

Creative tourism is often linked with areas that are in some way disadvantaged in regards to tourism, because it arguably gives places lacking in more traditional tourism resources new opportunities (Duxbury and Richards 2019). For many of these places, small size is a major disadvantage. It often means physical isolation, as in the case of the Azores or the Canadian Arctic, but it also implies a relative lack of the tangible heritage resources that are usually the backbone of traditional cultural tourism.

One of the points made by this volume is that being small can often also be an advantage. For one thing, small places already know they can't engage in the global competitive rat race of city branding and iconic architecture. This is in many ways a good thing, because city branding tends to be superficial, concentrating on just one image or story of a place, blocking all alternative voices for the sake of being "on brand." Although place branding and marketing is where the big money is, there are alternatives for small places that want to put themselves on the map and make themselves better places to live in. The most important of these is

“placemaking,” which can be viewed as an alternative to place marketing (Richards and Duif 2018). As Hildreth (2009) has pointed out, marketing and branding simply do not work unless the reality of a place matches the image. He suggests, then, that places that want to be successful should improve their reality. The image will follow. If a place is good to live in, it will also be good to visit and to invest in. And places of any size can be good to live in.

This is why there is growing attention nowadays to placemaking. However, while placemaking is in vogue, it is poorly understood. There are many different definitions, and most of these relate to a fairly narrow concept of placemaking as an intervention in the physical environment of a place. But as I will argue here, placemaking is far more than a physical intervention. It is, rather, a complete social practice that involves physical change, as well as changes in thinking and doing.

## Placemaking for Smaller, Happier Places

Historically, placemaking has been the preserve of architects and planners. Not surprisingly, they tend to concentrate on the construction of the built environment and how this can improve people’s lives. Providing better places to live and work was an ideal of the garden cities movement, and of Jane Jacobs (1961). Many recent scholars have also drawn on Lefebvre’s (1991) ideas about the nature of space to show how people interact with the places they inhabit. He argued that physical space was just one element of space as a whole. People also make space through their use of it—the “lived space” of everyday life. And planners and designers and politicians also create ideas about space that influence the way space is viewed and used—“representational space.” Physical space, lived space, and representational space form an essential triad, and as such, need to be considered together in the making of places. Most importantly, the spatial triad underlines the essential link between people, communities, and places. People form an attachment to places through living in them, and through using them. Place attachment is also emphasized by Ball (2014), who argues that

Placemaking is a concept that emerged to describe the intentional process of activating new or existing public spaces to

create that emotional connection. Placemaking, which can take many forms and include a range of activity, activates public space through design, programming, community empowerment, wayfinding, art, marketing—whatever is needed for that particular community. Placemaking is contextual and situational, and whether a project begins with a community’s needs or a specific physical location, it will require a unique recipe.

The importance of this emotional connection to place is increasing as people become more mobile. Communities therefore need to find new ways to define themselves. When many people in the developed world can be anywhere they choose, the choice of location is an important one. Why here? Why now? As a result, cities around the world compete not just to be the most powerful or the richest place on earth, but also to be the “place to be.”

The phenomenon of global mobility has also produced a new range of explanations for the success of certain places. Perhaps most famously, Richard Florida (2002) has suggested that it is no longer the availability of work that attracts people, but the creativity of places and the presence of other members of the “creative class.” Nichols Clark (2003) has also argued that the amenities that places can offer are important in attracting people, including the built infrastructure, cultural facilities, and “atmosphere.”

One of the effects of such ideas about the attractiveness of places is that big cities tend to be the favoured locations. These are the world cities, the creative hubs, the storehouses of cultural treasures. Florida (2017) has even suggested that today’s major cities are simply not big enough, and that they need to grow bigger to be more efficient and competitive as “superstar cities.” At the same time, however, there is a countervailing movement toward smaller places. People fed up with sitting in traffic for hours and paying a fortune for a cramped apartment in the big city have begun to reassess the benefits of metropolitan living. Charles Montgomery’s book *Happy City* (2013) rails against ever-increasing urban agglomeration as a process that alienates and makes people unhappy. He advocates smaller-scale developments that bring people into contact with one another, and which make them happier as a result. In Canada, Denis-Jacob (2012,

110) found that the presence of cultural workers is no lower in small cities than in larger ones. Many small places have therefore managed to stop or reverse their previous population decline. Being small, they have managed to foster an emotional connection between people and the place they live in. These are places that many people now want to visit.

In our book *Small Cities with Big Dreams* (2018), Lian Duif and I outline how smaller places can compete with bigger ones if they effectively follow a few basic placemaking principles. The most important of these include having vision and giving that vision meaning for people. People feel connected to places because they have meaning; they are special because of the things that happen there, the experiences we have, and the feelings of identity they create. Our very mobility stimulates us to seek links with and meanings in places. This can take us to the smallest and most peripheral places as well, as the Culture, Sustainability, and Place conference held in the Azores in 2017 illustrated. In bringing the conference to the Azores, Nancy Duxbury drew on her extensive international networks to make this small archipelago a focus of global attention for a short while. One of the emerging themes of the discussions at the conference was the way in which the Azores have been at the forefront of globalization for the past five centuries, as part of an essential survival strategy. Small places such as the Azores have been influenced by, and have in turn influenced, globalization just as large urban centres have done. Smaller places and peripheral locations face similar challenges as a result of global changes, but they have a smaller resource base with which to confront these challenges. Networks, along with the ability to connect with other places and mobilize people at a distance, are an essential key to extending this resource base. Small places, as Nancy Duxbury points out in chapter 1 with her analysis of the situation in Portugal, often suffer from a lack of ambition, or a lack of belief in their own capabilities. The CREATOUR project in non-metropolitan places in Portugal is one concrete attempt to address this credibility gap.

Making the necessary connections between the local and global and between tourists in search of meaning and the local meanings of culture, takes a lot of imagination, a lot of creativity (Richards, Wisansing, and Paschinger 2018). We need to be creative to understand what resources and meanings we can offer to the inquisitive tourist or the global investor.

The creativity of places lies not just in the formal types of creative industries that are now so popular with governments seeking to stimulate economic development. Creativity also lies in the everyday life of places, in the daily rhythms of work and play, in the ingenious ways in which people have adapted to the world around them. Usually these things are almost invisible to the “locals,” like water is to the fish that swim in it. In order to frame their creativity for others, places must therefore first think creatively about what they have and how this could be interesting for others.

These issues are also considered by Richards and Marques (2012), who note that

“Creative tourism is a form of networked tourism, which depends on the ability of producers and consumers to relate to each other and to generate value from their encounters. Creative tourists are ‘cool hunters’ in search of creative ‘hot-spots’ where their own creativity can feed and be fed by the creativity of those they visit” (10).

The creative tourist is therefore seeking interesting encounters with local people and their creativity, which they can then turn into creative capital that will increase their knowledge, skills, and creative status. A number of recent studies have provided profiles of these mobile consumers. For example, Tan, Luh, and Kung (2014) confirmed that creative tourists are novelty-seekers who want to acquire knowledge and skills and who have an awareness of environmental issues. Huang, Chang, and Backman (2019) also found creative tourists to be predominantly female, relatively young (thirty-one to forty being the largest age group), well-educated, and with a relatively high income. This profile is fairly close to that of the cultural tourist, with the main distinguishing feature being the motivation to engage in active creative experiences.

This desire for active engagement is an important potential asset for placemaking. Placemaking can be seen as a combination of three essential elements: resources, meaning, and creativity (Richards and Duif 2018). The resources of a place can more effectively be exploited by giving them meaning for those within and beyond small places, which in turn requires creative thinking and action. This triad of elements deliberately mirrors

the three elements of social practices identified by Shove, Pantzar, and Watson (2012): materials, meaning, and competences. To use a suitable creative example, the practice of painting embraces all of these elements. A painter needs basic resources such as paint and canvas, as well as resources that might trigger creative ideas, such as landscapes or cityscapes. But having these resources available is not enough: they also need to be used in a competent way that gives meaning to the finished work of art, both for the artist and the audience.

Placemaking is also an art, particularly if we consider what Markusen and Gadwa (2010) have termed “creative placemaking.” The problem is that too many places have bought into the rhetoric of “creative cities” and the “creative industries,” seeing artists, architects, and other members of the “creative class” as central to the process. Although there are members of the creative class everywhere, even in the most remote locations (Brouder, 2012), most places simply do not have the concentration of artists that will feed a creative cluster or a biennale. For analysts of the creative class and creative industries like Richard Florida and Alan Scott, only big cities can really claim to be creative hubs.

But this ignores the everyday creativity that is present in all places and that visitors also increasingly want to experience. The everyday creativity that is embedded in local lifestyles is what makes most places. It is found in crafts, pastimes, the arts, music, and literature. These are among the aspects of creativity that help to keep places distinctive in a globalizing world. These were also the types of creativity that inspired the original concept of “creative tourism,” which Raymond and I originally defined as

Tourism which offers visitors the opportunity to develop their creative potential through active participation in learning experiences which are characteristic of the holiday destination where they are undertaken. (2000, 18)

This definition was based on the idea that tourists could develop a relationship with the places they visited through learning about local creativity. Originally, we thought about this in terms of formal learning: courses or workshops. But as we gained more experience with the concept, we realized that most people don’t want to spend all of their holiday in the



classroom or atelier. What most people want is an experience, a taste of creativity that will enable them to develop their own knowledge and skills, as well as provide a relationship with the people they were visiting. The most memorable part of a cookery class is usually not the recipe or even the food, but the people who were sharing their creative skills. This was when we began to see that creative tourism was not just about learning, but also about creating relationships. Creative tourism seems to work particularly well in the “lived space” of the everyday, where people can encounter one another on an equal footing. Creative tourism can therefore also be a form of “relational tourism” (Richards 2014).

The relationships formed via creative tourism also tend to be of a particular type. People seek out the “local” creative, often their equal in terms of knowledge and skills, but embedded in a different local context. We could argue that the local has become the new touchstone of authenticity or originality (Russo and Richards 2016). We want to go where the locals go, do what they do, experience what they experience. As Kathleen Scherf shows in her introduction, the desire for the local is now being made tangible in the creation of “localhoods” in the city of Copenhagen (Richards and Marques 2018). The “live like a local” phenomenon is now widespread on the Internet via sites such as Spotted by Locals. Even global companies such as Airbnb offer their clients the chance to “belong anywhere.” But the reality of this kind of “relationship” often entails a brief encounter with a gentrifying property developer or one of their staff, who hands over the keys and a guide to local restaurants before heading to the next client.

Much more sustainable portals to the local are provided by creative links. People who want to share their creativity and skills with each other are likely to form more lasting relationships than hotel staff and their guests. Learning a skill involves extensive face to face contact with those who have the skills we are seeking. The focus on skills also removes the problem of the language barrier that usually restricts entry to the tourist market. Sharing interest in skill is a great leveller—it can reduce barriers of gender, class, and origin. The common (often non-verbal) language of making and doing is an important form of communication.

Creative skills and knowledge are also widely present in the host community. People are usually looking not for “experts” but for people with whom they can share an emotional link to a creative process and,

by extension, the place they are in. In this sense, the act of “doing” is key. Crispin Raymond summarized the essence of creative tourism with a saying from Confucius: “I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand.” It is the doing that is essential in social practices (Baerenholdt 2017). By doing things together we share information, ideas, and feelings. This is very different from the normal range of interactions between tourists and locals, which tend to be acted out in a scripted way at reception desks or restaurant tables.

Creative tourism as a way of sharing experiences and skills between tourists and locals moves the focus of tourism into the sphere of daily life. This tends to enrich the tourist experience, but it also increases the vulnerability of local culture. When sharing the creative process, it is much more difficult to confine tourists to the “front stage”—they want a backstage pass. But you have to be confident that those who share an enthusiasm for creativity will be relatively small in number and positive in demeanour.

## Placemaking through Creative Tourism

If we view placemaking as a practice that unites the elements of resources, meaning, and creativity, then we can start to chart the potential contributions of creative tourism to this process.

In terms of resources, creative tourism can be a means of conserving those things that the local community might otherwise be in danger of losing. Just as cultural tourism has been important in stimulating the conservation of tangible heritage in recent decades (UNWTO 2018), now creative tourism is providing more possibilities for conserving intangible heritage as well. Very often the everyday creative skills of the community are losing ground to new areas of creativity that are more attractive to young people. One way to get young people interested in the creative legacy of the community is to show that it is important and that it can generate more resources and opportunities. By introducing tourists to the creative products and processes of a community, these can be valorized and successive generations can find new ways of interacting with them. This was one of the original inspirations for the creative tourism concept—the rediscovery of traditional craft skills through the EUROTEx project in the Alto Minho region of Portugal, on the island of Crete in Greece, and in Finnish Lapland (Richards 1999). By taking traditional crafts and

retrofitting them to be attractive to new generations, the pool of craft producers and the potential tourism market could be expanded as well.

In terms of meaning, the development of creative tourism generated new ways of looking at the relationship between communities and the areas they live in. Through the EUROTEx project, textile crafts suddenly became a source of income in rural areas. More importantly, the fact that tourists were coming to learn traditional skills changed the meaning of the tourist-local relationship from host and guest, server and served, into a relationship of equals—people interested in the same skills and creative processes. Creative tourism also became attached to new meanings as an alternative to “mass cultural tourism” and as a touchstone for authenticity (Richards 2018).

This led to the realization that creative tourism could be an important path for placemaking, and that the use of tourism to identify, concentrate, and harness creativity was an important potential means for making places better. If we view creative tourism as a practice, as a means of doing, then the power of creative tourism compared to more conventional forms of tourism becomes more evident. When we examine the practice of creative tourism more closely, we also begin to identify the essential elements of practice that make it different. Going back to our triad of placemaking, the action of developing creative tourism also falls into three basic areas:

1. “what we have,” including materials, people, and the knowledge endowments of a place;
2. “how we do things,” which encompasses the application of creativity to the use of our resources, including governance modes and the representational nature of place; and
3. “what we do” to implement knowledge- and creativity-related policies and projects.

For many small places there is also a need to do things differently, particularly in relation to larger places. As Comunian and England (2018) argue, smaller places will almost inevitably have to rely on bottom-up strategies that make effective use of the relatively limited resources they have. In the

development of creative tourism, small places need to employ a variety of different strategies to overcome their relative disadvantage.

In the wake of COVID-19, creativity will also be essential to helping smaller places recover. Although it might be expected that flight from overcrowded cities will help smaller places attract tourists again, they will have to convince people that it is safe to come. The personal relationships built up through creative development may be a key factor in this.

## Lessons Learned About Creative Tourism in Smaller Communities

The variety of different cases examined in this book underline that places are not just sites for creative activity: they are also an important context that shapes, and is also shaped by, creativity. Place-related creativity stands in contrast to the more globalized models of creative development that have been propagated by researchers such as Richard Florida. In small places in particular, the context of creativity is key. Unlike larger cities, where cosmopolitan forms of creativity circulate freely and the creative class provides a ready market, small places have to use their endogenous creativity to survive. In smaller communities, place itself becomes an important asset because often it is one of the few resources available. The centrality of place also provides an important link to the concept of placemaking.

Among the lessons emerging from the cases presented in this volume is the strong role played by local communities and social networks in developing and supporting creativity. Placemaking can be seen as a collective effort by individuals/groups to reimagine and remake the environments that surround them (Strydom, Puren, and Drewes 2018). Placemaking processes have been propelled to the foreground by the desire of local communities for more control over the places they live in, and their growing concern with quality of life, well-being, and conservation.

In a globalizing world, the role of place becomes more important than ever. When you can choose to be anywhere, where you choose to be matters. Where you spend your time matters, who you are with matters, when you are there matters. Just by making such choices, you are already involved in the placemaking process. This is why the renewed attention to smaller places is so important. A meaningful implication is that instead

of writing small places off as economically uncompetitive, many people are choosing to be in smaller places because of the other qualities they offer: a human scale, social cohesion, and a slower pace of life (Richards and Duif 2018).

We have also learned that taking advantage of the creative energy of local communities means paying attention to the factors that enable creativity and creative placemaking. The cases in this volume emphasize the importance of governance mechanisms, particularly in terms of facilitating bottom-up processes of decision-making and creativity. This will often mean empowering networks in small places, particularly where those networks can link to the outside world and provide new opportunities. In this sense, tourists can generate the weak links that bridge to other places and carry new ideas and ways of doing.

How can such links be made between locals and tourists? In the past this usually required some kind of physical intermediary, but now platforms such as Airbnb are offering peer-to-peer connections, also for creative experiences. The question is whether this will produce new forms of interaction or simply become a new way of distributing experiences? As the market for destination experiences becomes more consolidated, there is a danger that these will also become more standardized. If, however, new intermediaries and producers are facilitated by the possibilities offered by new technologies, then there should be more opportunities for innovation and creative development.

Directing the relationships between locals and visitors has also now become a task for the public sector in many places, as many of the chapters in this volume illustrate. The recent report by United Cities and Local Governments highlights the importance of giving both tourists and locals a role in the social, cultural, and creative life of places (Richards and Marques 2018). The interface between the “global nomad” (Richards 2015) and the places they visit, dwell, or stay in is arguably by its very nature creative, since it involves a constant negotiation and renegotiation of identity and belonging.

In such negotiations, giving tourists a stake in the places they visit is important, as Barcelona has recognized in its efforts to designate tourists as “temporary citizens.” The temporary citizen concept is of course a formalistic way of saying to visitors that they can share the city with

residents, enjoying the same rights, but also shouldering the same duties with respect to the use of public space and consideration for others. The less formal and more effective means of belonging lies in the relationality of the place itself, in fact; as Randall Collins (2004) argues, “shared co-presence” and a common focus of attention creates an “emotional energy” that makes us feel good about ourselves and about being in a place. This emotional energy can already be attained by passive participation in rituals such as visiting the Louvre to view the *Mona Lisa*. But it can be much greater in situations where we are actively involved in the creative process, particularly when we are connected to others who can share with us the skills, meanings, and understandings attached to the place we are in. This is the type of energy that can lead to very effective creative placemaking.

The contributions to this volume also show us that one of the key goals is to get “on the map” and attract attention—which is an increasing challenge in the face of the concentration of media power in major cities. Brabazon (2014) outlines the plight of smaller, slower places in the competitive race against “fast” global cities. She sees the neo-liberal rhetoric of the creative class and cool cities as “corrosive” to small cities. As in many of the cases presented in this volume, she sees the context of place as being vital to understanding the dynamics of small cities. Cities that often flourished in the industrial age are floundering in the information age, often because they are not effectively networked, either externally or internally. To build such links, places need to find a purpose. Brabazon argues that events are often central to finding a purpose and aligning stakeholders behind a development agenda. There are opportunities for smaller places (or “third-tier cities”) to grab attention if they can organize the right kind of programs and events. This has been illustrated in many of the contributions to this volume, which show how events can act as a focal point for attracting people, attention, and resources, and giving new purpose to small places.

## Conclusions

In a rapidly globalizing world, the serial reproduction of culture is giving new urgency to the distinction of places. While most places still seek distinction in place marketing and branding, a growing number of communities are realizing that there are other routes. A number of these are

outlined in this volume. Above all, the importance of harnessing the creative energy of local communities is an important factor.

Most importantly, places need to improve their reality, not their image. If the reality is attractive, the image will be too. These realities can be improved through the provision of physical infrastructure, but far more important these days is the development of “soft infrastructure,” and in particular the creative skills needed to link the local to the global. Tourism is one important route for doing this, but the flow of people, ideas, and resources has to be locally controlled. It needs to be developed by people who are embedded in the places they come from, and who can help interpret the creative resources of that place to others. This act of sharing can help to stimulate the emotional energy that is needed to drive the place-making process. Creative tourism is an effective gateway to developing shared experiences between “tourists” and “locals” and ensuring that the creativity of placemaking is maintained.

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