



Case study 4: Canterbury Pilot Project - led by Gulbenkian

Putting culture at the heart of tourism marketing

Canterbury's reputation as an historic city and world heritage site attracts visitors from all over the world. The aim of the Canterbury Pilot Project was to embed an arts/cultural dimension into the marketing of the city to promote the city's vibrant cultural offer to its overwhelmingly heritage-driven audiences. It was important that the project was led and 'owned' by local cultural organisations and so Culture Kent worked with the Gulbenkian (University of Kent) to enable the project to achieve its overarching ambition of putting culture at the heart of tourism marketing. The project involved a range of organisations from the tourism, arts and heritage sectors: Visit Kent, Visit Canterbury, Canterbury BID, Canterbury Cathedral, Canterbury Tales, Sydney Cooper Gallery, The Beaney, the Marlowe Theatre, Canterbury Festival, Wise Words, and City Sound. By building a cultural forum to facilitate and promote collaboration amongst the city's arts and cultural organisations, and developing on-line platforms and social media marketing channels, the project aimed to create a common voice for Canterbury, pinpointing the unique arts and cultural events happening around the city. Our aim was to 'curate Canterbury for the visitor' (Dave Yard, Head of Marketing, Gulbenkian).

Key Outcomes

- 1 *The Giant Culture Tellers*, based on origami paper fortune tellers, distributed around cafes, restaurants and visitor attractions in the city, caught the imagination of visitors and media, as a 'fun and innovative way of guiding visitors around the city, enabling them to 'live like a local', experiencing the best of music, comedy, poetry, art, exhibitions and performances during their stay' (Kentish Gazette, Canterbury & District, 15/12/2016).
- 2 Recognising the importance of understanding digital traffic and on-line behaviour for reaching cultural audiences, the project used hitwise and analytics to carry out research on key gateway sites. Supported by Culture Kent the project developed an on-line platform, to curate the city's cultural offer www.canterburyculture.org - a combination of cultural blog and events listing.
- 3 In the cultural forum - created by the collaboration of many diverse arts, culture, tourism and heritage organisations - the project piloted a new way of partnership working, based on new channels and levels of communication. Rachel Pilard (Canterbury Festival), commented that 'as a partnership we are learning a lot from each other'. Maintaining the forum and collaborative model will be a key part of the project's legacy.

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

“Flying the bigger flag’ for Canterbury!

The project brought together key marketing personnel across tourism, culture, arts and heritage. Although, nominally, they represented different sectors, they found that they shared many common aims. Head of Marketing at The Beaney, James Williams, has watched how visitors to The Beaney plan their visit to Canterbury at the Beaney’s visitor information point before taking in one of the Beaney’s exhibitions and then heading out into the city, and observes that visitors don’t think in terms of sectors – they want to experience the totality of what Canterbury has to offer. ‘Moving forward, that would be the change in my focus, not to be thinking in terms of silos, and heritage, culture, tourism, but to be thinking about the visitor, and the experience we can offer them, and joining up the partners, so that everyone feels very confident talking about everything else [on offer in Canterbury].’

According to Canterbury Festival’s Marketing Manager Rachel Pilard, ‘as a marketing person you are always trying to find a new audience, and always trying to look that little bit further... You need to be talking to other people to find out how you can help each other out’. Tapping into different audiences by crossing over into the core audiences of partnering organisations – as The Beaney did with their collaboration in the Whitstable Biennale’s Public Programme in 2016 – not only extends an organisation’s reach, but can surprise and delight non-traditional audiences, and offer visitors an unexpected and authentic sense of place. Achieving this means organisations’ buying into the ‘bigger Canterbury message’, and understanding the benefits to their own organisation of a wider, destination-focused, curatorial role.

“Culture Kent has sparked a new focus on joint working in Canterbury which will continue to benefit us all going forward”

Dave Yard, Head of Marketing, Gulbenkian.



Key learnings

A substantial investment of people, time and thought was an essential element in achieving the planned, and also the unanticipated, gains of the Canterbury Pilot Project. The availability of a core group of people throughout the ebbs and flows of project planning and delivery was crucial; however, the inclusive and fluid multi-partner structure provided additional support and partner engagement from across the city. Some of the more innovative ideas emerged organically out of time spent together. The success of the ‘culture tellers’ showed that a combination of heritage and contemporary culture could be used to surprise visitors by adopting a playful approach to curating a set of visitor experiences by sending them to secret locations in Canterbury - tapping into a visitor focused, experiential and digitally networked perspective.

Legacy and ways forward

A key legacy of the pilot is the emergence of a new way of working, and an improved perception of the inherent value of collaboration. It has established a solid partnership network to take forward the work that began in the pilot. With the financial support of Canterbury BID, and with further funding applications in the pipeline to extend the project’s editorial post, there are plans to widen involvement in the Canterbury Culture website, expand its content, and launch a new podcast series. A next step will be to open up communication with hotels and other accommodation providers, in order to promote cultural venues and events to weekenders and other visitors to Canterbury.



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**



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