Cultural Tourism Landscape

REVIEWING THE EVIDENCE ON CULTURAL TOURISM

The Evidence Review was the first component in a tripartite research strategy aimed at informing the development of Culture Kent and laying the foundations for future work on cultural tourism in Kent. The review of the cultural tourism landscape surveyed national and international research and policy documents, in order to gather baseline data and build a picture of the contemporary cultural tourism landscape. The Evidence Review fed into subsequent in-depth primary (survey and interview based) research exploring organisational and consumer perspectives on cultural tourism in Kent, which is summarised in the Culture Kent Research Insights Papers 2 and 3, and reported in greater detail in the Culture Kent Research Programme Summary of Findings Report.

CURRENT TRENDS – IMPLICATIONS FOR KENT

- **Cultural tourism is in robust shape and has maintained its upward trend in the face of economic austerity:** Culture is regarded as a key driver for tourism, with UNWTO figures estimating 37% of world travel undertaken by 'cultural tourists' with consistent growth in the market.

- **Tourism is evolving from a 'service industry' to an 'experience economy':** Emerging consumer demand for 'cultural experiences' is a game changer for the tourism industry, implying the need for tourism and arts/cultural organisations to work more effectively together to connect visitors with a strong experience of place. Arts and cultural organisations have the capacity to play a key role in place-making and in generating innovative new experiential products for tourism, whilst tourism can contribute to the growing of audiences and markets for arts and cultural organisations and diversification of income sources within a transformed funding environment.

- **Kent is in a prime position to capitalise on the inbound cultural tourism market, as well as the increasingly important UK domestic and VFR markets:** With its proximity to London, Kent has a great source of both inbound and domestic tourism on its doorstep. The UK domestic market in particular has the potential to make positive connections with a smaller scale and more localised cultural tourism offer, and has greater impact in sustaining small and medium sized cultural venues. Trends identified by the Great Britain Tourism Survey related to the VFR (Visiting Friends and Relatives) market are also of real interest to tourism, cultural and arts organisations wishing to extend their audience base.

More detailed findings and analysis can be found in the following Culture Kent Research Programme reports and resources:

- Report 1- Evidence Review
- Culture Kent Research Programme Summary of Findings Report
- Culture Kent Pilot Project Case Study Summaries 1-6
- Culture Kent Round Table Insights – Best Practice; and Legacy and Ways Forward.

WHAT IS 'CULTURAL TOURISM'?

Recent years have seen a proliferation in cultural tourism styles, alongside a broadening understanding of what constitutes 'culture' to take in spontaneous and authentic encounters, experiences, and a strong sense of place. 'Creative tourism' is an emerging trend, which UNESCO promotes through its Creative Cities network, and defines as 'travel directed toward an engaged and authentic experience, with participative learning in the arts, heritage, or special character of a place, [which] provides a connection with those who reside in this place and create this living culture' (UNESCO Creative Cities Network Discussion Report 2008).

Image credits: Whitstable Biennale 2016- courtesy of Whitstable Biennale; Dutch/Light by Jyll Bradley, photo Thierry Bal - courtesy of Historic Dockyard Chatham; Urban Playground, bOing! Festival, photo Manu Palomeque- courtesy of Gulbenkian.

DEFINING AND CREATING THE CULTURAL TOURISM OFFER

- **Cultural tourists do not make the same 'supply side' distinctions between destination attractions and cultural activities as professionals working in the field:** The type of cultural experience demanded by cultural tourists is wide ranging, and crosses specialist boundaries – it could relate equally to a deep engagement with museum objects, or a fondness for the venue's overall atmosphere (Culture24 Moving Targets Report, 2012). 'Cross-sectoral' partnerships are key mechanisms for linking up different elements in the cultural destination value chain, to appeal to different market segments and increase the length of stay.

- **A cultural destination can be viewed as a spillover effect of a thriving cultural ecology with strong connections to place:** Successful cultural destinations need a healthy underlying 'creative economy' or 'creative milieu', characterised by an attractive public realm, a creative workforce, local audiences, and community engagement, to sustain cultural attractions and activities year round. Thus, the Evidence Review reveals complementary interests and agendas for arts/culture and tourism in Kent, particularly around the regeneration of the seaside towns, and post-industrial inland locations, with scope for collaboration in developing innovative kinds of cultural and creative tourism to revitalise the domestic tourism offer.

- **Turning a creative place into a creative destination means bringing out the essential qualities and features of a place and making them accessible to the visitor:** Mobile technologies and the internet can have an important role in guiding the cultural tourism experience and mediating the sense of place, in particular meeting the growing demand for spontaneous and authentic cultural experiences by directing visitors to lesser known cultural attractions and 'alternative' venues.

- **Cultural tourism can mean different things to different people:** However, the Evidence Review revealed a consensus view that 'authenticity' is increasingly valued across the range of visitors in the cultural tourism continuum. The challenge for destination organisations is to identify the key elements of the supply chain involved in the 'production' of authenticity for this heterogeneous market, and establish what these organisations have to do to create authenticity and communicate it to their customers.

- **Partnership working is essential to the delivery of the cultural tourism offer:** Arts/culture and tourism sectors share a number of interests, particularly with regard to the growing of audiences and creating a sense of place. However, the mechanisms for identifying and achieving these commonalities of interest are not clear. Collaborations require a catalyst – the recognition of a shared goal and vision, an opportunity to realise that goal, and the existence of an enabling environment to encourage and support organisations in recognising and exploiting opportunities.

"There is nothing so magical as bringing artistic intervention into a wonderful place and getting the buy-in of local people."

Karen Eslea, Turner Contemporary

WHAT IS A 'CULTURAL DESTINATION'?

Cultural tourism destinations are the product of a complex supply chain comprising a wide range of expertise, orientations and values, and including curators, writers, artists, performers, audiences and publics, as well as spatial planning and place-making activities, transport and accommodation providers, marketing and digital technology.

This complexity is reflected in the working definition of the cultural destination developed from the Evidence Review:

"The 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."

This definition highlights the importance of the cultural tourism supply chain, connecting public, private and third sectors and communities with different kinds of space – including museums, visitor attractions, seafronts, high streets and cultural routes – and a range of technical specialisations and functions. This points the way towards new kinds of partnership and collaborative relationships, in which location and proximity, rather than sectoral identification, play the crucial role.

Image credit: Turner Contemporary – courtesy of Turner Contemporary