

Creative tourism as a strategy for regional development and cultural heritage promotion: Sojourning abroad and creativity enhancement

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Abstract

This article investigates the contemporary tendency of cultural sojourning (spending a certain length of time abroad) in culturally rich developing contexts and its positive influences on creativity enhancement. Sojourners are individuals - often creatives - who move to a foreign context for some time in order to experience the local culture, find a better work-life balance, and increase their productivity. When, at a wider framework, the design discipline supports the tourism industry, this phenomenon could be a key factor in heritage protection/promotion and for the empowerment of indigenous communities. The reference context investigated in this work is South Africa, where promoting the encounter between sojourners and local communities could contribute to making a shift in regional development, cultural enrichment, equality, and social integration link to an inclusive approach that considers all the stakeholders involved. The active involvement of stakeholders through a participatory approach is assumed as the enabler of the processes of cultural enrichment and acculturation through a direct positive “contamination” of ideas and skills. The research led to the definition of a set of guidelines to inform the design of creative-based touristic systems and development projects aiming to spark urban regeneration, safety, and accessibility to networking opportunities and an alternative education model based on the direct and active participation of people coming from different social and cultural backgrounds. Designing an effective proposal could be a positive hint for growing contexts in need of integration and equality, contributing to better conditions and bringing attention on specific issues while providing an answer to the contemporary tendency of sojourning for creativity enhancement. This work has been developed as a literature-based research on sojourning and creativity enhancement and constitutes the basis for a site-specific meta-design proposal shaped for Cape Town; informed by on-site investigations that include visits to local cultural and artistic institutions and associations, the participation to design-centred events, field trips, discussions with locals, and site visits for the collection of audio-visual documentation.

Keywords: Creativity enhancement, creative tourism, community participation, cultural exposure, regional development, sojourning.

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Introduction

The hypothesis investigated in this work is international mobility and creative tourism as a tool for local development and heritage protection and promotion, achieved through multi-stakeholder, community-based, participatory systems. The intercultural exchange, creativity enhancement, and cultural and economic growth ignited by this hypothesis are supported by the positive benefits of the design practice on tourism, being a critical force in regional development.

Methodology

The research developed between March and December 2016 and followed three main phases. A preliminary literature and case studies review - started in Italy and then deepened in South Africa - was carried out in order to define a general picture on the state of the art around sojourning, to investigate its effects on creativity enhancement, the current offer and the impacts of relocating on the indigenous communities and environment. This collection of information informed the hypothesis proposed in this work, clarified the context in which the research is positioned, and helped the identification of possible needs or gaps in the current state of the design research. A second phase, developed in South Africa, focused on the on-site investigation of the context of reference through qualitative research, including visits to local cultural and artistic institutions and associations, the participation to design-related events, field trips around Cape Town area, discussions with local creatives and professionals, and site visits for the collection of audio-visual documentation.

An interesting point that emerged at this stage was the involvement of several actors at different levels: not only those relocating, but also local communities, institutions and organisations, implying a multi-stakeholder approach over the system design phase in order to satisfy the specific needs. A third step, started in South Africa and completed in Italy, focused on the theoretical investigation of possible and existing inclusion strategies between sojourners and locals, particularly on how they can meet and gain benefits from their encounter - which can be promoted by effective design solutions that provide the optimal conditions to meet, learn, share, and exchange knowledge and skills.

The different phases of the work led to the compilation of a list of guidelines, intended as a tool for effective system design and planning that considers both the needs of sojourners and local communities. The proposed guidelines and the outcomes of this work were tested as tools that informed a meta-design proposal of a creative tourism system concept for the city of Cape Town.

Findings and Discussion

International mobility and creativity enhancement

International mobility is an important factor concurring to integration (social, cultural, and economical) within continents and at a global scale: it simplifies communications thanks to linguistic knowledge and by establishing a network of international links thus promoting a sense of belonging to a supranational dimension in those relocating, raising regional and global awareness.

People tend to relocate abroad for a certain period of time as it favours intercultural sensitivity gained through the contact with new cultures, concepts, and lifestyles, as well as the improvement of personal skills (such as flexible and counterfactual thinking (Markham, Lindberg, Kray & Galinsky, 2007) and retrieving unconventional knowledge (Leung, Maddux, Galinsky & Chiu, 2008) and the possibility to take a break from the routine of their environment or job in search of inspiration, a lower cost of life, and a better live-work balance (Fodas, 2015). Given the increasing global interconnectivity of today's world, being bicultural or having lived abroad, also enhances the competitiveness of a candidate: recruiters consider foreign experience as a demonstration of open-mindedness and independence (Chura, 2006), making living-working abroad a great career booster.

International sojourns are particularly important for creatives that seem to be the individuals most attracted by such kind of experiences: this tendency dates back in time since it is identifiable in writers, painters and composers of the past (amongst them, Gauguin, Nabokov, Handel, and Stravinsky). Looking at these examples, it has been hypothesised that creatives are more likely to leave their context of origin in order to travel and spend some time abroad compared to less creative people (Maddux & Galinsky, 2009).

Within a daily life-context, creativity helps individuals in the process of solving problems and tasks, while on a wider scale it is at the base of new inventions and discoveries, involving several artistic and scientific fields. Although many studies investigate this subject, it remains hard to define due to its psychological origins, and because of the influences that personal variables and external factors play on it (Kaufman & Sternberg, 2010). Creativity is a wide concept that does not only refer to strictly artistic abilities, but it includes personal and cognitive skills, and reasons why a multicultural sojourning experience could interest a wide range of individuals and professionals whose work implies flexible, multidisciplinary and innovative thinking, resulting in better proficiency at work and enhanced productivity.

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Routinised pre-existing ideas and conventional knowledge connected to the context of origin of individuals could constrain their creative and innovative expansion due to a lack of stimuli and novelty coming from the familiar environment that surrounds them. Multicultural exposure changes those dynamics, and after the adaptation process it supports creativity through offering new perspectives on everyday problems, new visual stimuli, the chance to acquire new skills, and to learn new thinking approaches. Particularly, it strengthens the conceptual expansion processes (that usually are at the base of the most innovative ideas and solutions), where an existing concept is expanded through the attribution of seemingly irrelevant concepts, extending its initial conceptual boundary (Leung et al., 2008).

Moreover, living abroad increases the openness towards new ideas and the ability to interpret requirements and problems under different perspectives (Maddux & Galinsky, 2009), increasing the likelihood of higher creativity by fostering the ability to juxtapose and cross-analyse problems and concepts retrieved from cultural experiences that normally are not considered as relatable (Leung et al., 2008). Cross-cultural experience also fosters creativity by offering the occasion to directly get in touch with new stimuli and ideas, often very different from the ones to which individuals are used to; these concepts do not only relate to ways of thinking or designing, but they also influence the psychological and behavioural sphere of an individual. It is the living abroad experience – rather than the mere traveling one - that brings benefits to creativity as the person relocating juxtaposes the culture of origin with the new one (Leung & Chiu, 2010), recombining the stimuli and using them as inputs during the creative process.

Adaptation, acculturation, and previous exposure: the role of design

The individuals relocating for a set period of time to a new country go through adaptation, which has been analysed and described by researchers according to different approaches. One of the most recent (although somewhat dated) and interesting ones is the “culture learning” approach, where adjustment is interpreted as a removal of known supplements (usual, customary social and material reinforcements) and the exposition to unknown, novel and adverse stimuli; this process requires acculturation, the acceptance of the new context, and the acquisition of new reinforcements (Church, 1982).

Acculturation is a line of research in psychology that explores the internal changes within individuals upon exposure to new environment, norms, values, behaviours, and meanings, essential factors in shaping one’s cultural identity (Ryder, Alden & Paulhus, 2000), challenged by the process of relocating to a culturally diverse place. Culture provides habits and rules that coordinate a specific group or society, and multicultural experiences challenge those acquired

reinforcements by offering to sojourners a new cultural setting. The deriving ambiguity, at first, generates a condition of loss of references in sojourners (known as “culture shock”), but then it fosters curiosity and openness towards the new environment in search of new sets of habits (Tadmor & Tetlock, 2006). This concept sums up several ways in which relocating affects creativity: first of all, the “*destabilization of routinized knowledge structures*” (Leung et al., 2008) increases the tendency to research new settings and access new knowledge; secondly, the temporary loss of structured habits tends to enhance one’s readiness to recruit new concepts, that then adopted by the individual together with those coming from the culture of origin thanks to a process of positive contamination (Leung et al., 2008). This shows how some of the common traits of creative people, like cognitive flexibility, risk-taking and ambition (MacKinnon, 1978) develop thanks to a period of residence abroad, positively influencing - together with multicultural contamination - sojourners’ creativity and innovativeness. Although it takes some time for sojourners to adapt to the new context and to the initial culture shock, “*sojourning makes a person more adaptable, flexible, and insightful*” (Furnham & Bochner, 1986), features that contribute to thoughtfulness, cross-thinking and reflection while approaching the creative generation of a solution for a specific task.

People who move and travel often are more likely to live abroad for a certain period of time; this is valid especially when referring to creative individuals (Maddux & Galinsky, 2009). Some authors argue that previous cross-cultural experiences or previous exposure to the host culture facilitates the adjustment process for sojourners, who would still perceive the cultural shock but overcome it in a better and faster way (Arensberg & Niehoff, 1964). Since, according to the dynamic constructivist theory of culture (Hong, Morris, Chiu & Benet-Martinez, 2000) people develop a cognitive representation through their direct and indirect experiences with a culture, the adaptation process when relocating does not only include the present actions and experiences of an individual, but also his previous contacts and exposures with new cultures. This might favour experienced travellers and people who have already been through the relocating process but, seen how even indirect experience contributes to the generation of some sort of “previous contact”, also a phase of preparation to relocating might be important to the effective inclusion in the new context. Such approach would make the move effective for both experienced and non-experienced sojourners: some researchers pointed out how the quality, accuracy, and similarity of the previous experiences are more important than the quantitative amount of previous exposure (Church, 1982).

Kim (1988) suggested how adaptation could also be enhanced and facilitated by the contact with people coming from the new context, as well as by being exposed to the mass media of the host culture, facilitating acculturation by spreading traditions, promoting cultural changes (Gerbner, 1969; Varan, 1998),

and the acceptance of the differences between the culture of origin and the new one (Miglietta & Tartaglia, 2008). Simultaneous exposure to the symbols and features of different cultures leads to the activation of the cognitive representation of both cultures (Torelli, Chiu, Tam, Au & Tat Keh, 2011); it is a process to which we are always exposed, even if we do not often realise it: globalisation leads to the simultaneous presence of the symbols of multiple cultures in the urban space, or in everyday life products (Torelli et al., 2011).

It is necessary to note that previous experiences might have other kinds of impacts on individuals; for example, they might reinforce the stereotypical perception of a certain culture and the reluctance towards the acceptance of different uses and traditions, so opposing the integration process (Du Bois, 1956). The balance between the positive inputs coming from the increased cultural exposition and the possibly negative or stereotypical cultural perceptions deriving from this process is fragile: being exposed to different stimuli enriches knowledge and curiosity towards other countries, but it might also promote an augmented perception of cultural distance and increase the contrast between the acceptance of foreign influences and the preservation of the local identity and heritage. These perceptual phenomena have been defined by scholars as “bicultural exposure effect” (Torelli et al., 2011). Mass media might reinforce those phenomena as they facilitate a preliminary contact with new cultures (with foreign TV programs, radio broadcasts, websites), while at the same time they constitute a way to maintain contacts with the original culture, thus fostering national and regional identification instead of promoting a shared sense of belonging.

According to some authors (Brislin & Pedersen, 1976; Triandis, 1975; both cited in Church, 1982), an effective strategy to promote acculturation and help sojourners in establishing new patterns while contrasting negative stimuli consists in offering more “culture-specific” oriented programs to sojourners, cushioning their adaptation process (Church, 1982). While it might be argued that such tailored solutions would provide a distorted perception of the host culture, diluted through the filters of habits thus inhibiting the real encounters with the local culture and heritage, it is worth mentioning how learning abroad mainly occurs through observation, participation, and communication (Schild, 1962); these factors are fundamental for the effectiveness of a sojourn in terms of cultural and personal enrichment, and they can occur by providing sojourners with occasions to directly meet, live and experience the local traditions, techniques and habits. Design here stands as the answer to balance out a designed solution with the authenticity of cultural encounters, supporting the tourism industry in offering the right system structure, spatial solutions and conditions favouring both adjustment and cross-cultural exchange.

Creative tourism and community involvement

Globalisation and the effects of bicultural exposure are phenomena that have to be considered while designing systems that promote cultural encounters and cross-cultural contamination, which can bring benefits both to those relocating and locals facilitating their integration, enhancing their innovativeness and the outcomes of their creative production.

Building on said creative tourism systems could contribute to regional growth, economic and community uplifting, and poverty alleviation particularly in the developing areas of the world, since tourism is one of the largest industries worldwide and a driving development factor. If well managed, distributed, and allocated, the revenues coming from tourism-related activities can become enablers of actions towards conservation (Walpole & Leader-Williams, 2001) that strengthens and preserves the local community, as well as the environment; such approach can be inserted in the general framework of “sustainable tourism” according to the definition provided by the World Tourism Organization: it is a form of tourism that *“takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities”* (World Tourism Organisation, 2013).

The interest in the so called “pro-poor” strategies is rising as well - with particular reference to sustainable tourism and the sub-categories that it includes, promoting community and local empowerment together with a more sustainable approach that does not drastically impact the environment and society of a place (Binns & Nel, 2002). Considering how in several areas of the world (especially in low and middle-income contexts) there is a lack of governmental funds for conservation, other funding strategies become necessary: through the tourism industry, particularly by involving its related private sector (e.g. touristic facilities and activities) and promoting its cooperation with public institutions, a possible response to this issue could emerge (Walpole & Leader-Williams, 2001).

The demand for “exotic” and “remote” destinations keeps increasing at a fast rate, especially in the so-called “developing countries” (Scheyvens, 1999); the intrinsic features of remoteness of such areas make them more vulnerable to the impacts caused by the affluence of foreign visitors, both in terms of cultural disruption and environmental degradation (Cater, 1993); moreover, many times local communities are exploited for their public relations value (Woodwood, 1991) rather than for a real interest in protecting their heritage. Local heritage and knowledge tends to be stereotyped and transformed into “souvenirs” rather than being valued as unique sources of enrichment, often filtered to meet the expectations of foreigners rather than fully expressing the cultural richness and diversity of a place or community. As Scheyvens (1999) notes, *“there is a need*

for an approach (...) which starts from the needs, concerns and welfare of local host communities"; therefore the attention over the planning phase should focus on the needs of all the stakeholders involved in the system, in order to benefit both sojourners and local communities.

Paired to a community-based approach (that actively involves locals in the planning, design, management, and maintenance of the system), employment and empowerment would be promoted. This early involvement of the indigenous community promotes a favourable attitude towards the system that is important for the effectiveness of the result (Arnstein, 1969; Chambers, 2002; Rohe & Gates, 1985; Sewall & Coppock, 1997; Waters, 2000; all cited in Wang & Pfister, 2008), that should not just be evaluated according to the traditional quantitative parameters, but according to the outcomes of Rio+20's summit, also according to more qualitative analysis over the well-being, involvement and life quality of those participating in the system (UNESCO 2013). Another factor concurring to the success of the project is the formation and development of the community skills related to tourism industry, necessary for a correct, successful planning and management of the site (Sebele, 2010).

The South African case

When focusing on South Africa, the growing presence of international and multinational corporations in the tourism industry might perpetuate negative impacts and reinforce the past divisions. Moreover, in post-apartheid South Africa, the lack of skills in marketing and business - together with the legacy of poor education, makes it harder for previously disadvantaged communities to be competitive (Goudie, Khan & Killian, 1999). Involving indigenous people, local communities, institutions, and associations in creative-based tourism systems for sojourners would be beneficial in terms of skills enhancement, competitiveness, and better integration; the need for wider community participation in tourism activities in the country has been officially expressed by the Government with the "Tourism White Paper" (Government of South Africa, 1996).

South Africa is a culturally rich and diverse country, but its potential to share the local heritage and creative know-how is limited due to some gaps in the current offerings, and to stereotypes that interfere with the optimal promotion of the indigenous cultural richness at an international level. According to several authors (e.g. Ashley, 1995) and the South African National Department of Tourism, the cultural and heritage tourism potential of the country is not fully exploited, and there is a strong need for a more authentic, targeted and sophisticated offer (Jessa, 2015). However, internationally there is a growing interest towards cultural and creative tourism as more and more people – such as sojourners – seek for a more authentic, direct and engaging experience of local culture and creative industries.

Heritage, “intercultural pollination”, cultural planning

Article 4 of the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism prescribes that “*tourism activity should be planned in such a way as to allow traditional cultural products, crafts and folklore to survive and flourish, rather than causing them to degenerate and become standardized*” (World Tourism Organisation, 1999).

Heritage is not only directly influenced by a specific local community, but it is also one of its prominent features of identification and recognition; the perception of heritage as a collective property that should be managed together with locals constitutes the basis to implement a participatory approach. Cultural and creative tourism – being among the fastest growing tourism markets worldwide (Grobler, 2008) - can, therefore, be a beneficial key factor in promoting social change and integration in emerging countries such as South Africa by creating employment, enhancing skills development, and generating income.

Cultural properties express value and are strongly connected with identity and socio-economic factors (UNESCO, 2013): the assumption that meeting and exchanging experiences and knowledge could be a potentially winning strategy in the field of integration and tourism is supported by the literature - particularly by the theory of “social exchange”, that analyses the beneficial outcomes deriving from the relations among stakeholders or from the action of an individual actor in relation to the others (Emerson, 1976). The mix between cultures, skills, techniques and knowledge happens at different scales and levels, promoted by today’s globalisation and accessibility to international mobility: the mutual interaction between sojourners and local communities, creatives, and design associations, could spark an “intercultural pollination” process, promoting innovation, creativity, integration, and the generation of new creative ideas.

Conclusions

The bases for successful creative touristic systems for sojourners and local communities sparking culture-led development, because of a careful consideration of the local stakeholders, aiming to the active involvement of the community, of the institutions and of the cultural entities already operating in the area: establishing a network at a local level reinforces the offer as on-site connections provide experience and are already known/trusted by people. Similarly, designing the system as a shared one that envisions the redistribution or investment of revenues locally contributes to stimulate acceptance and support from the community.

Cultural planning becomes a key concept, aiming to integrate cultural resources in the lives of people in order for them to receive beneficial outcomes, thanks to

the transformation of physical spaces; cultural resources, therefore, are strategic urban assets and actors in the new economy and for the quality of life, so central elements to be considered while designing culture and creative tourism systems. The benefits would interest the cultural and skills sphere (e.g. formation, education, creativity enhancement, positive “cultural hybridisation” through international, multi-expertise collaboration) but influence the social and economic one, too. A creative tourism-led urban regeneration program conjugating the design practice with the tourism industry could constitute a strategy for effective system planning to increase the safety and overall quality of a site, and provide the infrastructure and occasions for encounter, exchange and networking between people from different contexts, age ranges and professional backgrounds. This contributes to fight the still present legacy of apartheid and promote the advertisement of a renewed image of the context, turning the national and international perception of the place from negative (e.g. influenced by the past history) to positive (for example, connected to cultural richness and coexistence).

The need for a system whose focus is not limited to the environmental heritage and natural attractiveness potential of the country (as most of the current offer), but that leverages on the rich indigenous knowledge and creativity in order to enhance the image of Cape Town as a cultural capital – also exploiting the legacy of the city’s title of “World Design Capital” in 2014 – emerged when focusing on the South African context.

The research led to the definition of a set of guidelines to inform the effective planning of systems; they can be synthetised as:

- Identification of all the stakeholders involved and of their needs; needs-to-requirements conversion to meet their exigencies
- Partnership between the public and private sectors for “community profit”
- Design of “shared systems” envisioning the direct involvement of local communities in the design, planning and management phases
- Avoid the exploitation of communities for their public relations value
- Generate benefits for sojourners while promoting conservation and enhancement at the local level
- Offer an authentic product and a non-biased image of the local cultural and creative heritage
- Promote skills and culture exchange and creative stimulation through common activities and opportunities of encounter
- Development of community skills through direct participation and formative activities
- Offer to sojourners previous exposure to the host culture for easier, quicker adaptation to the new context
- Meet the terms of ‘sustainable development’ and promote territory and skills at local and international level

This research proposed design and creativity as facilitators of development at different levels, discussing how different industries such as design and tourism can beneficially reinforce each other thus influencing in a positive way the local context by promoting creative, economic, and cultural development, urban regeneration, and by addressing social issues (e.g. racism, safety, unemployment). Therefore, a hint that can be derived from this work gravitates around the promotion of a new role of the design discipline as a provider of systems that actively promote developmental, fair, and sustainable solutions for contexts in need for cultural, economic and social enhancement.

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