

UNCOVER



Transitions from
Global to Ground

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Uncover
Uncover stands for discovering things together. This magazine offers Breda University of Applied Sciences (BUas) a platform to share research and projects with its network. Through this Uncover, we explicitly try to reach and bring together our entire network around knowledge sharing and knowledge development: entrepreneurs, government, education, research and social organisations.

BUas
BUas is an international higher education institute offering a small-scale educational environment with a diverse community and a wide range of degree programmes and research themes. BUas offers professional and academic bachelor's and master's programmes in closely interrelated fields: Data Science & AI, Games, Hotel & Facility, Leisure & Events, Logistics & Built Environment, Media & Creative Business, and Tourism. At BUas, research, education and society form a dynamic synergy. They are treated as equally important, mutually reinforcing and interconnected functions that contribute to industry, students, academia and society at large. BUas focuses its R&D on five core themes: three domain themes (Places & Flows, Experiences, Digital Realities) and two transversal themes (Sustainability Transitions, Artificial Intelligence). These themes address current and future societal challenges of local importance within a global context. BUas' fundamental and applied research helps industry partners to innovate and transform, while enabling students to better understand societal issues and develop solutions.

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11,500
printed
magazines

10
editions

644
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69
authors from
the Academy for
Leisure &
Events

301
unique
authors

316
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35
student
authors

38
WLO
authors

14
keynote
interviews

UNCOVER

RECREATION

TRANSFORMATION ECONOMY

ENERGY TRANSITION

PARTICIPATION

CLIMATE ADAPTATION

SMART DESTINATIONS

RESILIENCE

EXCLUSIVITY

CURIOSITY

DIGITAL

KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

ULLB

SPORTS

LIVEABILITY

GROWTH AND POST-GROWTH LIMITS

TECHNOLOGY

CO-CREATION

AI

IDENTITY

BREDA MARKETING

IMAGINEERING

PLAY

PHYSICAL

HOSPITALITY

AUTHENTICITY

SCALE

CULTURE

CELTH

BELONGING

WORLD

FUTURE ORIENTED

EXPERIENCE

ENTERTAINMENT

ECOSYSTEM

PLACE-BASED

EQUITY

DIVERSITY

IMMERSION

SUSTAINABILITY

WELL-BEING

IMPACT

WLO

INNOVATION NETWORKS

COLLABORATION

NATURE

INTIMACY

TOURISM

RURAL

MEANING

QUALITY OF LIFE

RESIDENT

EUROPE

WONDER

PLACEMAKING

PUBLIC VALUE

ATLAS

BROAD PROSPERITY

PUBLIC SPACE

NRITMEDIA

URBAN

LANDSCAPE

COMMUNITY

STUDIO CEL

ACCESSIBILITY

VISITOR

LEISURE

ESCAPISM

ENGAGEMENT

STORYTELLING

DATA

EVENTS

HYBRID EXPERIENCES

FREEDOM

REGENERATION

VOLUNTEERING

CREATIVITY

INCLUSION

REGIONAL

KREATIVEU

LOCAL

FESTIVALS

GLOBAL

VISITOR ECONOMY

DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT

MOBILITY

CIRCULARITY

HERITAGE

BREDA UNIVERSITY

Introduction From Space to Soil

Peter Horsten
& Simon de Wijs

Peter Horsten and
Simon de Wijs are the
final editors of Uncover.

Imagine viewing earth from space in a UFO. A blue sphere, spinning quietly, teeming with life. No borders in sight, just the big picture. Water and land. As you get closer, you discover what is happening on the continents; you see coastlines and rivers. As you are about to land, you discover cities, streets, squares, people. When you step out, you experience the ground. Literally: earth beneath your feet, the soil where something grows, where something is being built and developed, where something is changing quickly or slowly.

This is the driving force behind this anniversary issue of Uncover. From macro to micro, from the global to the local, from the abstract to the tangible. From the big questions about climate, biodiversity, inclusivity, and heritage to the places and people who grapple with these issues on a daily basis. Because transitions do not take place in policy documents or on conference stages. They take place on the ground. Driven by passion. Driven by commitment. Drawing energy from the local environment.

'There are no passengers on Spaceship Earth, there is only crew.' Those words by Buckminster Fuller resonate throughout this issue and in the work by our keynote speaker Koert van Mensvoort. With the Evoluon as his UFO, having landed right in the heart of Brabant, he serves as a guide in exploring how we as a society can move forward. *'Forward to nature,'* he proclaims.

Not back to an idealised past, but beyond the present, towards something new. An invitation to join him in considering what is possible when you do not just observe the world but also shape it.

In this issue we are taking the same journey. We set off from the spaceship and travel across the continents, exploring inspiring projects and lines of research with the World Leisure Organization and ATLAS. We then zoom in on Europe via KreativEU and focus on the Netherlands with Sprong/CELTH. Finally, we land at our home base: Breda and the BUas campus.

Ten years of Uncover

This is the tenth edition of Uncover that the Academy for Leisure & Events of BUas releases. A milestone that calls for more than just looking back. It calls for a demonstration of what is possible in a decade when you connect people, organisations and ideas. We are celebrating this with a special opening article spanning all ten editions, as well as an exhibition in collaboration with the BUas Library. Ten years of working on the question of how leisure, tourism and hospitality can contribute to a world that is fairer, greener and more liveable. That ambition is more urgent than ever.

BUas: sixty years and in transition

This issue is being published in a special year for BUas. The university of applied sciences is celebrating its 60th anniversary. Sixty years of education, research and engagement with the region, society and the world. But an anniversary

is not an end in itself. BUas is itself in transition and embraces this as the core of its identity. As Zoöp, the institution is actively working towards a climate-positive campus where people and nature flourish together, with initiatives in the fields of biodiversity, ecological awareness, and sustainable food supply. Not just words, but deeds: the recognition at SustainaBul 2026 is no coincidence.

BUas does not do this alone. In a conscious decision to operate across different scales simultaneously – rooted in the North Brabant region and the city of Breda, yet connected to Europe – students, researchers, entrepreneurs, civil society organisations, and policy-makers work together on issues that no one can solve on their own. The ambition: not just to contribute ideas about the future, but to help shape that future. With the hope that the footprint we leave behind will be meaningful.

The topics and contributions in this edition are recognisable for anyone who feels the urgency of our times: green transitions, climate adaptation, cultural heritage as an anchor in a changing society, and inclusivity as a precondition for real liveability. But Uncover does not opt for grand abstractions. We zoom in. We seek out the people who are committed to a cause, the places trying something new, the projects that show that things can be done differently.

From Space to Soil. From Global to Ground.

“

Where big transitions
meet the ground
beneath our feet.

Celebrating Ten Editions of Uncover

A glimpse into a long-standing tradition

Peter Horsten and Simon de Wijs
are the final editors of Uncover.

This is the tenth edition of Uncover magazine, which started out as the in-house magazine of the Academy for Leisure & Events and has grown over the years to represent BUAs more broadly. This is an excellent moment for us as editors to look back on this decade, discuss developments, and highlight some of the special elements and moments of Uncover.

Knowledge valorisation

From the outset, Uncover has been intended to provide the entire network of entrepreneurs, governments, education, research, and social organisations with a platform for knowledge acquisition, knowledge sharing and knowledge development. A place where new developments, policies, insights, innovations and/or projects could be shared. Uncover provides a direct link between the Academy for Leisure & Events and the entire professional field. It is not only a place to share our own projects and insights, but also to offer a platform to others in our network and to give thought leaders a voice. Stories in Uncover often provided a conclusion to a successful collaboration with the professional field, but just as often they served as a starting point for new collaborations. From the very beginning, a mix of professors, lecturers, students, professionals from the network of companies, governments, and social organisations have acted side by side as authors.

Umbrella themes

It is telling that we devoted the first Uncover to the theme of 'the value of leisure time', which immediately highlighted the multifaceted

nature of our field.

Each year and each edition, the aim is to find an urgent topic that provides focus, while at the same time creating sufficient space to cover the diversity of projects and developments in education, research, and projects at that moment in time. Many of the editions that followed are a continuation or elaboration of the research into how leisure contributes to meaning and to a better, more inclusive and sustainable world.

Keynote interviews

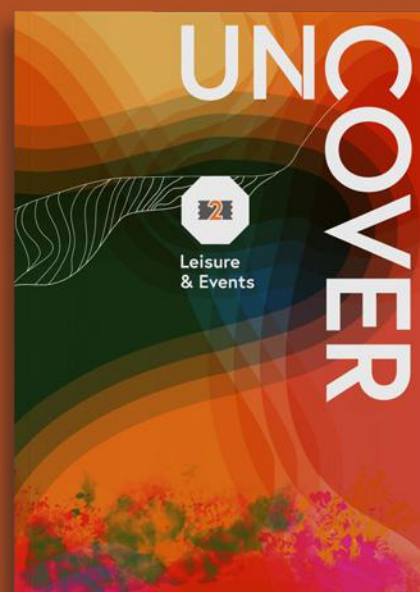
A very important element of Uncover is the keynote interview. For each chosen theme, an opinion leader from the field is carefully selected and interviewed about developments and challenges in their field of work and the added value of leisure in that context. This resulted in fascinating conversations that surprised us, the audience and sometimes even the interviewees themselves with new ideas to explore further. The interviewees were academic experts in specific fields, such as Joe Pine on the transformation economy, Tony Blackshaw, professor of sociology on leisure as the art of living, and Keith Still on crowd safety. Others were prominent figures such as Hans Mommaas, director at the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency, and Hugo van de Poel, director at the Mulier Institute research agency. We also drew inspiration from practitioners such as Jeroen de Schuyteneer, director of Events, Festivals, Markets and Forums for the city of Ghent, who spoke about the 175th anniversary of the Ghent Festivities, Kristian Koreman of Buro ZUS (Zones Urbaines Sensibles) on permanent temporality in urban development, and sustainability strategist Milan Meyberg on the inevitable evolution towards a regenerative society.

Scale and scope

Although Uncover has more than doubled in size over the years (from 40 to 92 pages), an equally remarkable milestone is that a total of 317 articles have been published in Uncover over the past ten years (including this issue). These articles were written by more than 300 unique authors. If we were to rank them, there are 13 authors who have contributed more than five articles and four authors with more than ten articles. 12 authors have contributed articles to at least five different issues of Uncover. In addition to the hard copy version of Uncover, which has an average print run of 1,000-1,250 copies, the magazine is also distributed digitally. This is done, on the one hand, via the BUAs website and, on the other hand, via our partnership with NRITmedia, where all Uncover articles are published separately but can also be found in a bundle. In addition, authors distribute their own articles in PDF format via social media such as LinkedIn and they use them in education.

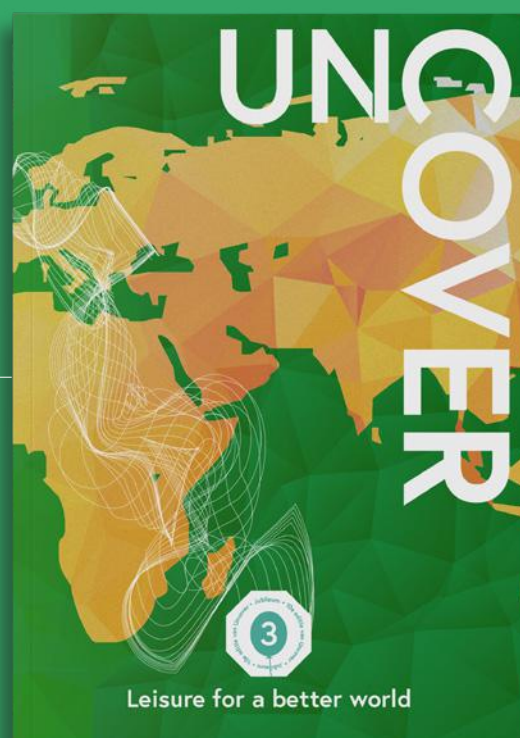
Corona times

During the corona period, everything seemed to stand still for a moment. But the social 'changes' resulting from the lockdown, combined with the lack of available leisure activities, made the importance of leisure (time and activities) all the more apparent. 'Leisure in a bubble' (the umbrella theme for 2021) – reflects a time when we did more in, from and around the home, spent a lot of time behind screens and sought online connection, or if meeting live we kept 1.5 metres away from each other, which was also true for many outdoor leisure activities at the time. Together with crowd management scientist Keith Still and placemaking and events expert Greg Richards, we discussed the impact of COVID-19 on our domains.



Leisure for a better world (the 2019 edition)

Simon: "In retrospect, Leisure for a better world has been the theme that has most strongly guided the direction we have taken with Uncover since then, with a broad view of the importance of our sector in relation to the SDGs or, as is now often referred to, broad prosperity. The magazine is full of concrete examples from sport, culture, and attractions that focus on societal issues such as waste, climate, cultural bonding, and accessibility. But what has always stayed with me is the keynote interview with Hans Mommaas, in which we saw leisure as a space for experimentation, where systems and the life world meet. Where leisure elements such as creativity, humour, imagination, storytelling, and voluntarism can make a difference. Leisure for a better society is now firmly established as a perspective in the latest educational profile and the theme is at the core of my role as a transition manager, working with front runners in Leisure Tourism Hospitality in Brabant to accelerate sustainability transitions."



Conference connections

In both 2023 and 2025, Uncover was closely involved in two major conferences. In 2023, the conference took place before the publication of the magazine, and Uncover made an important contribution to the design and programme of the Future of Leisure Congress in Breda at BUas. The future was explored through the themes of sustainability, inclusivity, placemaking, and technology, and both the conference programme and the magazine were organised around these themes. Keynote speakers at the conference were featured in a keynote interview in the magazine. The umbrella theme of that year was, of course, Future of Leisure. In 2025, the order was reversed. Uncover magazine (themed Meaningful Leisure Experiences) was the welcome gift at the international World Leisure Conference in Breda in August 2025. Over the years, these kinds of connections have proven to be an effective and connecting method for asking authors to be workshop leaders and/or speakers and vice versa ask speakers and workshop leaders to contribute an article.

Valuing internationalisation

Amidst the political storm surrounding internationalisation, we have compiled an edition in which we discuss the positive experiences and learning outcomes of intercultural encounters. Jorrit Snijder, chair of the BUas board of directors, is convinced that such experiences enable young people to surpass themselves and explains why our institution has stayed the course on this issue. We also asked Lem van Eupen, then director of Nuffic – the Dutch association for internationalisation in education – to explain why they are committed to ensuring that everyone at every level of education has access to enriching international experiences. A valuable edition that certainly fits in with BUas' current strategic course, which has Europe, including KreativEU, as an important direction and scope. It is also a valuable edition when you see that dozens of authors, from students to alumni, from lecturers to researchers, from entrepreneurs to experts, share their personal stories about the value of intercultural contexts and internationalisation.

Language developments

Uncover itself has also become more international over the past decade. This began with a shift from the first few editions, which were almost entirely in Dutch, to an increasingly hybrid version featuring both Dutch and English articles side by side, followed by the release of both a Dutch and an English edition in 2022. And from 2023 onwards, we have published exclusively in English. Over time, stories have appeared from every continent in the world (except Antarctica). Authors from Canada to Hungary, Brazil to China, South Africa to New Zealand have published in Uncover. And in this current anniversary issue, we will again zoom in and out – from the super-local to the farthest corners of the world. Over the past years, we have also maintained a close collaboration with the World Leisure Organisation and its Centres of Excellence around the world. In this year's anniversary edition, they are well represented alongside international networks such as ATLAS, and KreativEU.

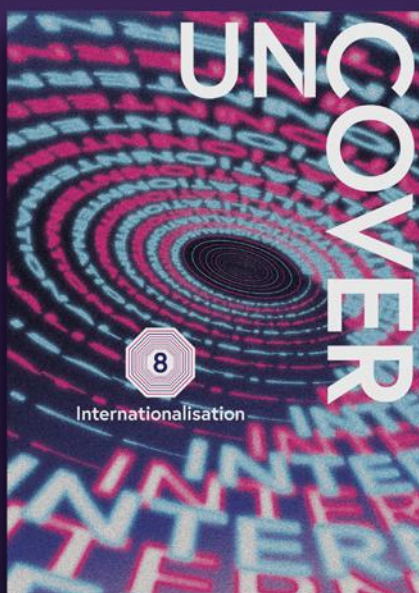
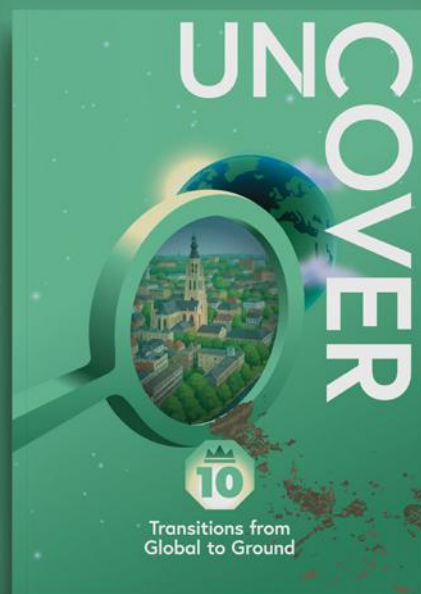
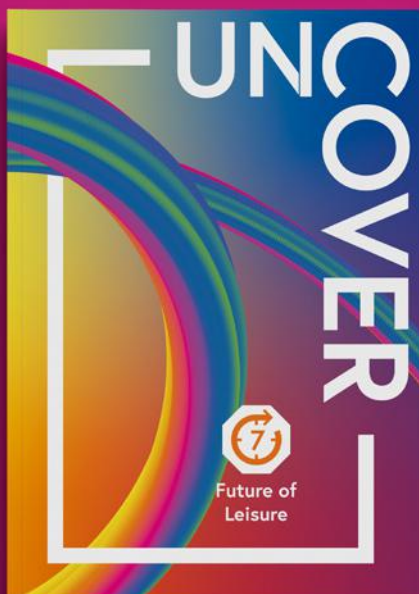
Network approach

From the very beginning, Uncover served as the physical record of all activities organised by the network organisation COLIN (Creative Organisations Linked In Networks) together with BUas students for the cultural and creative

Inclusive Leisure (the 2022 edition)

Peter: "For me Edition 6, themed Inclusive Leisure, has been the most influential, both from a content interest perspective and due to the personal urgency at that time. An edition with the biggest print run of over 2,000 copies that found its way everywhere, even to the ministries. The keynote interviews with the first Minister for Disability Affairs, Rick Brink (an inspirator who sadly passed away recently), and National Coordinator against Discrimination and Racism, Rabin Baldewsingh, helped with this. And through the call for a Sterkplaats 2.0 with experts by experience, it is up to today largely guiding my projects and teaching at BUas - at least in its most valuable element. Designing for and with all has become a major focus. This Inclusive Leisure edition also marked the step towards maturity in form and design. Uncover became a 90-page quality magazine with its now highly recognisable cover with flaps."





industries in North Brabant.

In that respect, connecting networks has been part of Uncover's DNA since its inception. COLIN was a BUAs outpost with branches in Breda, Tilburg, and Oisterwijk, which we ran together with students and colleagues. Even when Uncover became the in-house magazine of the Academy for Leisure and Events in 2017, it continued to maintain its network approach. With colleagues from various specialisations, it was easy to establish contacts with main cultural partners such as Brabant C, KunstLoc, Van Gogh Brabant, Cubiss and Erfgoed Brabant, but also with organisations such as the Club van Elf and IAAPA in the attractions and theme parks sector, CELTH in the field of research, and STRETCH in the events sector, to name but a few examples. In addition, Uncover also often found its way to alumni. Many (emerging) social innovators, theme park, cultural or event managers became pioneers in our field somewhere in their careers after graduating and were happy to share their experiences with others through Uncover.

Content expansion

As mentioned earlier, Uncover originally focused on the cultural and creative industries. With the establishment of (let's call it) Uncover 2.0, which is now celebrating its tenth anniversary, Uncover became widely positioned in the leisure sector as the annual magazine of the Academy for Leisure and Events (ALE) at BUAs. Each year, articles were published on (special) projects relating to themes from the various educational programmes and research groups within ALE. Over the past three years, we have seen a further shift, with more and more areas of BUAs finding their way onto our platform. Academies for Tourism, Hotel & Facility, Built Environment & Logistics, and AI, Games & Media, just about all professorships, but also things like Innovation Square, BUAs Clubs, The Hyve, Global Engagement Office, Urban Living Lab Breda, and the community garden, have now been represented. We hope to continue this expansion in the coming years to build and showcase a BUAs-wide heritage.

Time to celebrate

We are very proud of Uncover's development and the position it has achieved over the years. That is why we will be taking some time this autumn (2026) to reflect on Uncover's legacy. As part of BUAs' sixtieth anniversary celebrations, a number of exciting events will be organised focusing on the network of education, business, and government, during which we will be promoting Uncover. One of the ways we will be doing this is through an exhibition developed in collaboration with the BUAs Library. The exhibition will include the series of magazine covers designed by Studio CEL. Incidentally, the theme of the sixtieth anniversary celebration is "60 years of pioneering beyond borders". That can't be a coincidence.

Looking ahead

In the autumn, we also want to look ahead quickly to the next decade for Uncover, starting in 2027. We'll do this together with our partners within BUAs and the external network, carefully built and maintained. We already have a tentative wish list with initial umbrella themes, including "AI & Technology", "Ethics" and "Heritage". However, this is not yet finalised, as we continue to search for urgent topics together with our partners. For example, it is equally appealing to address the current turbulence by reframing it positively within our domains as "Dynamics" or "Turning Point".

Not Back, but Forwards to Nature

A talk with Koert van Mensvoort about the world of Next Nature

Peter Horsten
& Simon de Wijs



Peter Horsten and Simon de Wijs are the final editors of Uncover.



For the tenth anniversary edition of Uncover, its editors talked to Koert van Mensvoort. An excellent opportunity to zoom out on 'motherhood earth' and zoom in on the value of Next Nature Museum, education and the impact of leisure as a sector.

Van Mensvoort started his career as a video game developer and went on to study computer science, philosophy and fine art. He earned a PhD in Industrial Design from Eindhoven University of Technology and is the founder and director of Next Nature, a 21st-century nature organisation that aims to move forwards – not back – to nature. In 2022, he reopened the iconic Evoluon in Eindhoven as Next Nature Museum.

His projects are as varied as they are bold. From the travelling NANO Supermarket to the Data Fountain. He has also published several books, including The In Vitro Meat Cookbook and Pyramid of Technology. His work explores how people and technology evolve together, in search of a future that is good for both people and planet.



Koert van Mensvoort

How have the different paths you have taken shaped you? And can you identify a turning point when you began to focus more on developing a vision of where we are heading as a society?

As a teenager I wanted to express myself and that found a place in making video games. With both parents working at Philips and a father who was an engineer, the move to computer science was an easy one. But I realised I also wanted to give the visual side some space. When I found out that you could study multiple courses for the price of a single tuition fee, I simply enrolled at art school and also studied philosophy for a while. That was a very defining step for I ended up in two completely different worlds: computer science students who are very technically and operationally minded, and art school students who either did not want to engage with the world, or wanted to create a different world. Both were creative, but in very different ways. Art school allowed me to infuse the dry, abstract thinking of computer science with imagination and design.

Then I went to the Sandberg Instituut, which had an unconventional approach where the lecturers would ask straight away: "How are you going to change the world?" and tell me: "You're going to get a 10 or a 1, and we're not going to discuss anything in between." Around 2004, a light really went on. I discovered that it is wrong to view nature and technology as opposites. That idea took root in my mind, and I had the freedom to simply spend time on it. I would recommend that kind of space to everyone, because success is never the goal, but always a side effect of genuine fascination and in-depth understanding. By giving a delicate little flower attention and nurturing it, it will grow.

Can you give some examples that clarify why the distinction between nature and technology is actually an illogical one?

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Art school allowed me to infuse the dry, abstract world of computer science with imagination and design.

People often think that technology is futuristic but in fact, it is deeply rooted in our past. Take agriculture, for example: ten thousand years ago, it was the great innovation. People stopped hunting and travelling, began growing crops and domesticating animals, and from then on lived in villages that grew into cities. Without that invention, eight billion people simply could not survive. In short, we have become an agricultural species.

Another example: bees collect nectar from flowers, but at the same time help spread the flowers dispersing pollen. On the large scale of evolution, this is co-evolution: two species that have shaped one another. Today we naturally refer to this as 'nature', but it is essentially an intimate intertwining between two organisms that need each other, and I believe the relationship between humans and technology should be understood in exactly the same way.

From the very beginning onwards, we have been fundamentally intertwined with technology.

Take cooking food, for example; something no other animal does. That invention provided more calories in less time, and literally helped shape who we are today, with a smaller digestive tract and a larger brain.

Moreover, some technological systems even take on a natural dynamic of their own. We created the financial system, but it has taken on a life of its own. And studies show that the growth of cities bears a striking resemblance to the spread of microorganisms.

In short, humans are, by nature, technological beings, just like a bird that builds a nest or a beaver that constructs a dam. But we take it much further than that. Scientists have calculated that the total mass of everything created by humans – the technosphere – now outweighs all biological life on earth combined.

How can we prevent 'forwards to nature' from becoming just as romanticised and follow a concept as 'back to nature'? Scientists often express reservations with regard to the technosphere. Where do you draw the line between a dream future and a nightmare?

The biblical narrative is deeply entrenched into our culture: nature as a paradise, which humans have done nothing but spoil ever since. But it is a persistent misconception that nature used to be better. If you seriously think about how our grandparents lived, you certainly would not want to go back.

Yet, I believe it is our duty to find a sense of optimism. It takes no effort at all to see how everything is going wrong; the newspapers are full of it. But it takes a great deal of imagination to picture a world that is desirable, that you would wish for others, and that is achievable. In seeking out what is possible, every generation plays with fire, embracing new opportunities whilst also facing new risks and responsibilities. Techno optimism must be balanced and not be naive: there is a real risk in forward thinking that simply kicks today's problems into the future. You must always set out what the desired future looks like and, through a disciplined approach, give tangible substance to how to get there.

It is often a private dream that is actually a public nightmare. Big tech billionaires who put their own interests first, whilst trampling on everyone else. In effect, it's a feudal system. When it comes to techno-privilege, questions

of access are essential, and public ownership is, for me, a fundamental principle. Consider also 'enshittification': platforms that people join because they are convenient, but as soon as they become dependent on them, they are squeezed dry. As McLuhan said: 'The medium is the message', and you often only realise that once you're right in the thick of it: 'The fish didn't know it's wet.'

Can you give specific examples of when technology and nature strengthen each other?

For me, cultured meat sat right at the intersection of the manufactured and the grown. When I joined a group of TU students to discuss this topic, I literally said to them: the number of people working on cultured meat worldwide has now doubled, from three to six. Ten years ago, I was still being laughed at on the children's television show 'Klokhuis'. But what seems strange today may be the norm tomorrow. Hunting used to be the norm; now it is called 'game'. In a hundred years' time, cultured meat might be the norm and slaughtered meat might be called 'game'. The crux of the matter is serious: a protein transition is needed. If the whole world ate as much meat as we do, you would need three planets.

Another story is that of the artificial womb. Following a lecture for gynaecologists, we are collaborating on this development. At Next Nature, we are adding a social dimension, because as soon as the technology is available, fundamental questions arise. Is this the ultimate feminist project? Or are male engineers taking away something essential from motherhood? We see ourselves as facilitators of that conversation. Putting perspectives on the table before you end up wandering off in it whilst sleepwalking.

Finally, the energy belt from the Nano Supermarket: the idea that you can charge your smartphone using your own belly fat. With just one kilo of body fat, you can charge your phone for a whole year. The molecular mechanism is simply established science. I think it makes perfect sense that, within this century, people will link their electronic devices to their own metabolism. And that immediately raises questions about equality: when some people can upgrade themselves and others cannot, the distinction between the haves and the have-nots is far more fundamental than the choice between an iPhone or an Android. Let's start that conversation now.

Could you outline the essence of Next Nature Museum as a physical location?

What I see here is a spaceship, a UFO that has somehow landed here. It is a tremendous honour to be the director of such a magnificent building, but also of a UFO. In a sense, that makes me a representative of extraterrestrial life on earth.

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Humans are, by nature, technological beings.

And why has that UFO landed here? Ultimately, earth is our mothership. *'There are no passengers on Spaceship Earth, there is only crew.'* We are all crew. A narrative championed by astronauts and thinkers such as McLuhan and Fuller.

This UFO has docked here to help us become a better crew, working together towards a harmonious future for all life on Earth. I want to turn this into a museum of the future, a place where this conversation takes place and where everyone is welcome. Whether you're an eleven-year-old child or a forty-year-old engineer at ASML: if you see a spaceship, you'll want to go inside it. We need to capitalise on that feeling to appeal to everyone.

We live in an era of social media, podcasts and online dissemination – why does the Next Nature philosophy need a physical museum?

In 2019, we organised a major exhibition in Shenzhen that attracted forty thousand visitors, whilst all sorts of things were happening in Tokyo, Dubai and Brussels at the same time. At one point, we looked at each other and thought: wouldn't it be lovely to have one central place where we could bring everything together? And that is what this has become.

It really could not be better, not least because this building was originally constructed by Philips with a clear mission: to tell the story of how people use knowledge and technology to transform their environment. That is, in fact, a Next Nature story too. It was a perfect fit.

At the same time, I must be honest: we are currently so deeply involved with this place that, as a team, we have less time for other projects. My hope is that this museum will serve as a forum for discussing the region's future, but also act as a beacon from which that story can be shared with the wider world.

The museum is organised around four themes. Could you explain the journey that visitors ideally undertake, from a cosmic perspective to a sense of personal urgency?

I wrote this down five years ago and we are still working on it. But the direction is very clear.

As soon as you enter, you are immediately asked: what sort of crew member could you become? You answer a few questions, and based on your answers, AI creates a personalised journey for you. Certain exhibits are highlighted as particularly



important for you, you are given training tasks, and you earn badges. In this way, you build up your own crew member profile step by step. The journey may be different for everyone, but the overarching story applies to everyone.

The journey begins with the *geosphere*: how did it all begin? There is a ring you can turn to take a ten-minute journey to the earth's core and back again. Next comes the *biosphere*: how did life originate? As far as we know, earth is the only place in the universe where there is life – and that is what makes it so special. Then the *technosphere*: the transformative impact of technology on the planet, right now. We humans are the link between the biosphere and the technosphere. We originate from nature, yet at the same time we are the ones who set the technosphere in motion – a crazy jungle which we ourselves no longer always have control over. At the very top is the *mindsphere*: what does technology mean for your life? That is where the Digital Wellness Centre is already situated. By actively participating in this visitor journey, you move from a cosmic perspective to a sense of personal urgency. And then, as a certified crew member, you naturally return to the world.

Thinking in terms of crew roles and responsibilities can be overwhelming. How do you ensure that the museum experience remains manageable?

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The technosphere is now heavier than the total mass of all biological life on earth, the biosphere.

You have to break it down into small steps. People can feel overwhelmed by the scale of what is at stake and feel insignificant. But you are also connected. If you make that connection tangible, the focus shifts from the scale of the problem to what you can do right now in your own life – and that can be something small. At the same time, I want to encourage people to think on a planetary scale. That is not easy, because we evolved on the savannah, with priorities such as food and tribal conflict. You see that reflected in geopolitics today through the most advanced means, such as AI and weapons. That is precisely why I want to keep it light: when I get up today, what can I do?

Young people are the future, but they would rather spend all their time staring at a screen. How do you try to reach that generation with a real-life experience, and does steering clear of smartphones really fit with the idea of 'forwards to nature'?

It starts with getting to know the child within yourself. We get a lot of young people coming in here. During a session with astronauts, I was blown away by the energy that 10-year-olds radiate. I don't see it as lecturing, but rather as laying a few foundations, with a focus on experience. And children can teach us a great deal too.

We do indeed make very limited use of screens in the museum. The spaces are real experiences. That is not a rejection of technology; it is always a double-edged sword. What matters to us is exploring a better relationship with technology and awareness. Take the swipe wall in the Digital Wellness Centre: inviting children to swipe with their whole bodies and make large movements that are better suited to our physical nature. The fact that an entire generation has become so engrossed in their smartphones has victimised some of them. But I hope that in thirty years' time we will be able to laugh about how an entire generation spent the whole day staring at a small screen as if it were some kind of religious object.

Social media turned out to have an addictive mechanism built into it. Do you see a role for the government here? What is needed?

First of all, better *design*. Many platforms are designed to draw attention and sell advertisements. A more human-centred design

appeals to people's senses and needs – with people as the end goal, not the means to an end. Because as things stand, you are not even a user anymore. You are a sensor. A reactor.

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A more human-centred design appeals to people's senses and needs, with people as the end goal, not a means to an end.

Those companies are not going to change that of their own accord, so *legislation* is important. Europe is taking the lead in this regard, not by banning everything, but by setting out frameworks. Those big tech companies are superorganisms that have become so dominant they can take on governments. That is why *culture* is also essential: norms and values. If all the incentives are designed to push you in a certain direction, you are defenceless as an individual.

Better design, legislation and culture. Those three combined.

How should the education system reinvent itself, and how can it avoid training people for jobs that will soon no longer exist? Which skills deserve to be given greater priority on a structural basis?

The model where the teacher simply crams knowledge into students' heads is a thing of the past. The teacher is increasingly becoming





a coach who helps pupils navigate the jungle of information. I am a strong advocate of competence-based, Montessori-style education, in which the student takes the lead in their own learning process.

And there are other skills that are becoming more important. Soon, a waiter will earn more than a lawyer, and a good nurse more than a surgeon. Lawyers and accountants are trained to handle large amounts of linguistic knowledge. A computer can do that too. Professions where human interaction is key and where you work with your hands are, in fact, becoming more important. The three key concepts: hospitality, empathy and human tact.

Then there is creativity, which by definition is something you cannot automate. To encourage creativity, I use the thumbtack model: a point and a broad head. You really excel in one particular area (depth), whilst at the same time being able to make connections with all sorts of other domains (breadth).

In the past, people were trained to do the work that computers and robots do. Now, those machines are getting better and better at doing it themselves. So let's get good at what makes us human: empathy, communication, connection, creativity.

How do you balance honesty about pressing challenges with keeping hope alive and leaving room for discovery?

For that purpose, I use the concept of *ikigai*: 'reason of being'. Four questions: are you doing what you love? Are you making a difference to others? Are you good at it? And are you earning a living from it?

That balance varies greatly among young people. Some say: "I just have to get rich," but do they actually contribute anything? Others want to save the planet from climate change, but can they make a living? Neither of these is *ikigai*. It's about balancing all four facets. And the wonderful thing about a good *ikigai* is that you no longer have to look up to

billionaires like Jeff Bezos. If you can give something to a hundred people or make them happy, that actually has more value.

And if we zoom in on our field of expertise of leisure and live experiences, is a new vision needed? Because, on the one hand, *ikigai* perfectly illustrates what leisure can be: people in a happy place, making a contribution, relaxing. On the other hand, you also see the extreme side where everything has to be a great spectacle.

The concept of 'leisure' was invented as a counterpart to work during the Industrial Revolution: a time to recover, so you could then go back to work. But that distinction has not always existed and is artificial. On the savannah, work and leisure were completely intertwined.

If I may dream, let's do away with that distinction again. Let's ensure that work and leisure go hand in hand, because your work is your passion. It reminds me of those holidays where people go to a farm in France to spend a week weeding. And then actually pay for it. Recently, a property owner who does not need to work for financial reasons said to me: "I don't meet any interesting people anymore, so I'd rather just get on with my work." This also highlights the importance of friction and urgency in life.

In that sense, for me it is not about 'going back to nature' either; Next Nature is about transformation. It is about how an intuition from the past resurfaces in a new way within an innovative framework. The essence we are looking for is enthusiasm: this is what I am working on, and this is what I want. That also requires self-awareness: *who am I, and what can I contribute?*

Joseph Pine talks about the transformation economy and 'human flourishing'. Isn't this also about a shared responsibility to create an environment in which we can flourish, and where growth is not the only driving force?

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It is often a private dream that is actually a public nightmare.

Absolutely; if the individual parts are doing well, the whole will do well too. If you and your surroundings are doing well, you do not just have flourishing – you have fractal flourishing.

Nature follows a cycle: a flower blooms and withers, becoming compost and nourishment for a new season. Everyone knows that at some point a recession will come, a reset, and then the next cycle begins. The mission is to bring the technosphere into balance with the biosphere. That love story is the underlying mission everywhere.

I like the garden metaphor: a good gardener looks not only at the individual plant, but at the orchestration of the whole. That gardener's mindset combines intervention with letting go. If we all become better gardeners, whether it is your vegetable garden, the city, or the planet, then it could still turn out to be quite a beautiful world.

Photography

- Jip Barth (page 8)
- Jeroen van der Wielen (page 9)
- Next Nature (page 10 and 11)

World Leisure Organization: Expanding the Horizon

From global presence to global relevance

Joanne Schroeder
&
Cristina Ortega Nuere



Joanne Schroeder works for Vancouver Island University and is chair of the World Leisure Organization and Cristina Ortega Nuere is Chief Executive Officer of the World Leisure Organization.

In recent years, the World Leisure Organization (WLO) has expanded its global footprint considerably. The challenge now is not just to be present across regions, but to be meaningful within them. This marks a shift in our ambition: to ensure leisure is recognised and activated as a transformative force across diverse cultural, social, and geographic contexts. As outline in our earlier contributions to Uncover Magazine, WLO has established a solid foundation through partnerships, field-based programmes and international events. We are now moving beyond growth for its own sake, towards a more deliberate, inclusive, and impact-driven approach to global engagement.

A clear ambition: global coverage with local meaning

Our ambition is to achieve broader global coverage not as a matter of geographic reach alone, but as a commitment to equity, inclusion and contextual relevance. Leisure is universal, but its meanings, practices, and challenges are deeply local. Therefore, our goal is to co-create knowledge and action frameworks that respect and respond to these differences. This ambition is driven by a pressing reality: global challenges such as climate change, social inequality, mental health, loneliness and urbanisation require holistic, human-centred approaches. Leisure,

when understood as a space for well-being, creativity, connection, and cultural expression, has the potential to address these challenges in ways that are both impactful and sustainable.

How we work: from networks to ecosystems

To move towards meaningful global coverage, WLO is evolving from a network of initiatives into a connected ecosystem of action, learning, and influence. This approach is built on three core principles:

1. Regional anchoring with global connectivity
We are strengthening regional hubs across Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Middle East, and Oceania, ensuring that local initiatives are not isolated but connected to global dialogues. Central to this is a strong focus on understanding local contexts, needs, and motivations, recognising that leisure is shaped by diverse cultural and social realities. Our field-based programmes are key to this approach, generating grounded insights into lived experiences, challenges, and opportunities. These insights inform international research, policy discussions, and educational frameworks, ensuring that global strategies remain responsive and relevant to local conditions.

2. Co-creation and participatory learning
Rather than exporting models, we co-create with communities, universities, and institutions. This means working with local stakeholders, not for them. To ensure that programmes reflect lived realities, respond to local priorities, and foster a genuine sense of ownership. It also involves building trust, valuing local knowledge, and creating space for diverse voices to shape both process and outcomes. Experiential learning and collaborative research remain central tools in this approach, enabling shared understanding, mutual capacity-building, and solutions that are both context-sensitive and sustainable.

3. Strategic platforms for dialogue and impact

Our congresses, regional events, programmes, and partnerships are designed not just as meeting points, but as platforms for transformation. They create spaces where ideas can be tested, knowledge can be exchanged, and collaborative solutions can emerge. By connecting academia, industry, policy, and civil society, we enable meaningful cross-sector dialogue and joint action. At the same time, we actively amplify diverse voices, particularly those from underrepresented regions and communities, ensuring that the future of leisure is shaped by a broad range of perspectives and experiences.

Why it matters: the benefits of a truly global approach

Expanding global coverage in this way generates multiple layers of value:

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To move towards meaningful global coverage, WLO is evolving from a network of initiatives into a connected ecosystem of action, learning and influence.





For communities, it ensures that leisure initiatives are inclusive, culturally relevant, and capable of enhancing well-being and resilience. It also empowers individuals and groups to actively shape initiatives that reflect their identities and aspirations.

For students and professionals, it offers transformative learning experiences that build intercultural competence, critical thinking, and social responsibility. These experiences help prepare them to work effectively in diverse, real-world contexts.

For institutions and policy-makers, it provides evidence-based insights and innovative frameworks to address complex societal challenges. This supports more informed decision-making and the development of policies that are both responsive and forward-looking.

For the global agenda, it positions leisure as a key contributor to sustainable development, aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. In doing so, it strengthens recognition of leisure as a cross-cutting driver of social, cultural, and environmental progress.

Ultimately, this approach enables us to move from isolated success stories to systemic impact.



Ultimately, this approach enables us to move from isolated success stories to systemic impact.

Looking ahead: from ambition to collective action

The future of WLO lies not only in expanding its ecosystem, but in deepening the quality and intentionality of how that ecosystem operates. Strengthening partnerships, empowering regional leadership, and bridging research, practice, and policy are critical steps. But their true value depends on how effectively they are connected through collaborative action.

Central to this is a more deliberate focus on working intersectorally and across disciplines to generate meaningful, lasting impact. Leisure does not exist in isolation; it intersects with public health, urban planning, education, environmental sustainability, cultural development, and social policy. Recognising this interconnectedness means moving beyond siloed approaches and actively designing initiatives that bring diverse sectors and forms of expertise into dialogue.

Achieving this kind of integration, however, is not automatic. It requires sustained effort, shared learning, and a willingness to engage with complexity. Collaboration across sectors and disciplines demands more than a shared vision. It calls for practical alignment, mutual trust, and the ability to navigate differing priorities, languages, and institutional cultures. It also requires cultural sensitivity and a deep understanding of place, ensuring that global frameworks are adapted to local realities rather than imposed upon them.

A shared responsibility: embedding collaboration for lasting change

This is where WLO's ecosystem approach becomes particularly significant. By fostering environments where universities, policy-makers, practitioners, community leaders, and industry actors can work together, WLO helps create the conditions for co-produced knowledge and coordinated action. These collaborations enable research to inform practice, practice to shape policy, and policy to support innovation on the ground, creating a dynamic cycle of impact.

At the same time, achieving broader global coverage cannot be the responsibility of a single organisation. It requires a collective commitment from all stakeholders to recognise the value of leisure as a driver of well-being, inclusion and sustainability. Universities must continue to generate and share knowledge; governments must integrate leisure into policy



We actively amplify diverse voices, particularly those from underrepresented regions and communities, ensuring that the future of leisure is shaped by a broad range of perspectives and experiences.

agendas; communities must be empowered as active contributors; and industry partners must invest in scalable and responsible solutions.

Ultimately, the challenge - and opportunity - is to move from collaboration as an aspiration to collaboration as a structured, ongoing practice. By embedding intersectoral and interdisciplinary working into the core of its ecosystem, WLO can help catalyse a more cohesive and impactful global movement. A movement capable of addressing complex challenges and creating meaningful change across diverse contexts.

Our ambition is clear: to make meaningful leisure experiences accessible to everyone, not just a select few. This means not only expanding access, but ensuring that these experiences are relevant, inclusive, and shaped by the diverse contexts in which people live. By collaborating across borders and disciplines, we can turn leisure into a powerful force for a more equitable, sustainable, and connected world. Ultimately, true global reach is not measured by distance, but by the depth of the connections we create and the lasting impact they generate.

The six regional contributions that follow make this ambition tangible. They showcase the expanding WLO network worldwide and reveal how meaningful connections between local action and global collaboration drive impact in diverse contexts.



The Sesc Sports Circuit

A strategy for the democratisation of active leisure in Brazil

Carol Seixas
&
Leonardo Calix Soares

Carol Seixas is Sports Manager at Sesc São Paulo. Leonardo Calix Soares is Project Manager at Sesc São Paulo.

The state of São Paulo, Brazil, is home to more than 44 million inhabitants distributed across highly diverse territorial realities. Although it concentrates extensive urban infrastructure, many municipalities in inland and coastal areas still face limitations in accessing continuous sport and leisure opportunities. Within this context, Sesc São Paulo operates as a private public-interest institution committed to promoting social well-being, particularly for workers in the commerce of goods, services and tourism, along with their families.

With a long-standing tradition in sport-for-all programmes, Sesc develops initiatives through leisure that integrate non-formal education, culture and health as interconnected dimensions of human development. In this framework, the Sesc Sports Circuit was created as a strategy to expand the institution's territorial reach, bringing sport activities to municipalities that do not have permanent Sesc facilities. The initiative connects local governments, community leaders, and nationally recognised athletes, broadening access to sport participation and strengthening community bonds among diverse stakeholders.

The Sesc Sports Circuit

Held between 6 November and 14 December 2025, the Sesc Sports Circuit was a state-wide community sport initiative that reached 35 municipalities across São Paulo. It promoted sport classes, friendly tournaments and workshops with Olympic and Paralympic athletes of national prominence. The initiative served 7,248 participants, involved 12 professional athletes, and included the active participation of local authorities, such as 13 mayors, 29 municipal secretaries and 14 union representatives.

The project was guided by clear principles: all activities were sport-based, aligned with each municipality's local sporting identity or tradition, and implemented exclusively in cities without Sesc venues. This straightforward structure ensured methodological coherence while strengthening institutional presence in new territories.

Activities included volleyball, basketball, football, table tennis and other modalities, delivered by athletes and instructors from diverse backgrounds, reinforcing the project's commitment to inclusion and representation. These facilitators conducted practical sessions, engaged in dialogue with participants and shared their personal journeys, fostering proximity between sports icons and local communities.

Sports as a tool

As a free and open initiative hosted in public community spaces, the project promoted sport in leisure time as a tool for social inclusion, encouraging more active lifestyles. The events brought together people from different areas of the city and diverse social backgrounds, inspiring them through the athletes' stories and motivating them to practise sports in public spaces.

The project acted as a catalyst for local networks by connecting athletes, public authorities, Sesc professionals, and community leaders around a shared goal. Sesc coordinators observed that the initiative encouraged public

managers to reflect on both short-term actions and long-term sport policies.

Moreover, it strengthened the qualified use of public leisure infrastructure, such as sports courts and public squares, attracting participants of different ages and sporting backgrounds. Community leaders reported that, after the events, more residents began using these public and free-to-access venues regularly. In this sense, the Circuit also functioned as a way of drawing attention to existing leisure facilities and encouraging citizens to reclaim and occupy them.

From a communication perspective, the Sesc Sports Circuit adopted a unified visual identity that integrated activities carried out in municipalities often located hundreds of kilometres apart. Consistent branding allowed communities to recognise themselves as part of a broader state-wide movement. In smaller municipalities, the presence of a structured visual identity and professional communication materials enhanced local pride and reinforced the legitimacy of the project. The Sesc Sports Circuit also generated 361 media features across open and cable television, radio stations, and newspapers, expanding public visibility and conveying its message to millions of people.

Connection with the WLO

The Sesc Sports Circuit aligns directly with the World Leisure Organization's global agenda by affirming leisure and sport as social rights and instruments for societal transformation. For Sesc São Paulo, participating in global networks such as the WLO is essential to fostering international knowledge exchange and deepening engagement in debates on community-based sport policies. Through this connection, Sesc enhances its local impact while positioning Latin America as a territory of social innovation in the field of leisure practice and policy.



Heritage, Sustainability and Cultural Innovation

Qatar Museums Authority and the National Museum of Qatar

Fatema Al Sulaiti
& Mireia Iglesias



Dr Fatema Al Sulaiti is Director of International Cooperation & Government Affairs at Qatar Museums Authority. Dr Mireia Iglesias is Head of Events, Programs and Communication at the World Leisure Organization.

Museums are increasingly stepping beyond their traditional role as guardians of heritage to become platforms for addressing contemporary societal challenges such as sustainability, cultural identity and community engagement. In Qatar, this shift is reflected in the work of Qatar Museums Authority, which has positioned culture as a driver of innovation, education, and international dialogue. A prominent example is the National Museum of Qatar (NMoQ), a project that combines heritage preservation, architectural innovation and cultural storytelling.

Over the past two decades, Qatar has placed culture and heritage at the heart of its national development strategy. Through institutions such as Qatar Museums Authority, the country has invested heavily in cultural infrastructure, heritage conservation and international cultural cooperation. These efforts form part of broader strategies to diversify the economy beyond hydrocarbons while strengthening national identity and global engagement.

Qatar National Vision 2030

This cultural agenda is closely aligned with *Qatar National Vision 2030*, which promotes sustainable development across social, economic, environmental and cultural dimensions. Within this framework, museums and heritage sites are increasingly recognised as spaces that support education, tourism and community participation. They also serve as platforms for international exchange, connecting with global cultural networks and initiatives, including those led by UNESCO and international museum partnerships.

In this evolving context, heritage is being approached not simply as a legacy of the past, but as a resource for shaping

the future. Cultural initiatives increasingly connect heritage preservation with innovation and sustainability, using cultural spaces to foster environmental awareness, youth engagement, and intercultural exchange. Across the region, such initiatives are positioning museums and heritage sites as catalysts for urban regeneration, cultural diplomacy and social transformation.

Heritage-led regeneration at the National Museum of Qatar

One of the most striking examples of this approach is the National Museum of Qatar, which integrates the historic Old Palace of Sheikh Abdullah bin Jassim Al Thani within a new museum complex designed by architect Jean Nouvel.

The Old Palace, built in the early 20th century, once served as the residence and seat of governance of Qatar's ruler. In 1975 it became the country's first national museum, marking an important step in the preservation of Qatar's cultural heritage. In the redevelopment of the National Museum, the historic palace was carefully restored and placed at the centre of the new architectural structure.

Rather than replacing the historic building, the project embraced adaptive re-use, allowing the past and present to coexist within a single cultural space. The palace now forms the symbolic and physical core of the museum, surrounded by Nouvel's contemporary structure inspired by the natural formations of the desert rose.

This approach illustrates how heritage-led regeneration can integrate conservation, contemporary architecture and cultural storytelling. The museum's exhibitions guide visitors through Qatar's environmental history, cultural traditions, and rapid social transformation, creating an immersive narrative that links past and present.

Connecting to societal goals

Beyond architecture, the museum plays an important role in broader societal goals. Through exhibitions, educational programmes and public initiatives, it promotes cultural awareness, encourages intercultural dialogue, and engages both local communities and international audiences. The project also contributes to sustainable cultural tourism and knowledge exchange, reinforcing the role of museums as spaces of learning and dialogue.

In this way, the National Museum of Qatar demonstrates how heritage institutions can contribute to sustainable cultural ecosystems, aligning with global agendas such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly those related to sustainable cities, heritage protection, and education.

Projects such as the National Museum of Qatar highlight the growing connection between culture, heritage and leisure experiences. Museums and heritage sites are increasingly recognised as spaces where learning, recreation and social interaction converge.

This perspective aligns with the broader mission of the World Leisure Organization (WLO), which promotes the role of leisure in enhancing quality of life and supporting sustainable development. Cultural initiatives in Qatar illustrate how heritage and leisure can work together to foster dialogue, creativity and more sustainable societies.





GREATER
MEDELLÍN
CONVENTION & VISITORS
BUREAU

Medellín and Antioquia

Tourism, events and purposeful development

The article was written by the Greater Medellín Convention & Visitors Bureau, a private, non-profit organisation responsible for promoting Medellín and Antioquia (Colombia) on the national and international markets as tourist destinations and event venues.

Medellín and Antioquia have consolidated a tourism development model based on coordination between the public, private and social sectors, where events and tourism are understood as engines for territorial transformation. In recent years, the city-region has strengthened its international positioning thanks to a diverse range of culture, entertainment, nature, innovation and business.

Vision, strategy, approach

This progress has been made possible through a strategic agenda that combines the attraction of large-scale events - such as congresses, trade fairs, and festivals - with the strengthening of tourism experiences within the city and its subregions. This approach not only stimulates the local economy but also promotes knowledge exchange, talent circulation, and the destination's international profile.

In this context, the Greater Medellín Convention & Visitors Bureau plays a key role as an orchestrator of the tourism ecosystem, connecting stakeholders, attracting events, and promoting the destination in strategic markets. Its management is complemented by a vision of tourism that transcends mere promotion and focuses on generating value for the territory, aligning with global agendas for sustainability, well-being, and inclusive development.

Turning tourism into sustainable impact

As part of this vision, Medellín has developed the *District Legacy Programme*, a strategy that seeks to transform events and tourism into concrete opportunities for social, environmental, and economic impact. This programme stems from a clear premise: every event that takes place at the destination can leave benefits that extend beyond its duration and contribute to the development of the territory.

The programme is structured into two major categories - social and environmental - and is implemented through five impact dimensions: social and community, educational and knowledge-based, economic and productive, environmental and sustainability, and cultural and identity-focused. This methodology allows for the design of actions aligned with the specific characteristics of each event and the needs of the city.

Among the initiatives developed are volunteer programmes, socially focused donations, knowledge transfer through scholarships and access to content, as well as the involvement of local suppliers and sustainable practices. These actions not only benefit communities and organisations but also strengthen the tourism value chain and generate economic opportunities for local stakeholders.

A central element of the programme is the *Digital Legacy Catalogue*, which facilitates the connection between events, social organisations, and companies with sustainable practices. This tool allows for the structuring of tailor-made impact initiatives and ensures their effective implementation.

Furthermore, the programme aligns with the *Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*, contributing to targets related to health and well-being, decent work, sustainable cities, responsible production, and climate action. It is also linked with local programmes, which reinforces its impact on the territory.

The support of the Medellín and Antioquia Bureau in this process is fundamental, as it allows for the coordination of actors, facilitates the implementation of actions, and monitors results, consolidating a tourism model that contributes tangibly to the social, economic, and environmental development of Medellín and Antioquia.

Medellín and WLO: connecting to drive global impact

Medellín's connection with the World Leisure Organization (WLO) strengthens this approach by integrating the city into a global network that promotes leisure as a driver of sustainable development and social well-being. This connection provides access to specialist knowledge, promotes the exchange of best practices, and positions Medellín as an international benchmark in the management of purposeful tourism.

Additionally, the relationship with the WLO provides institutional backing and visibility in strategic settings, consolidating a city narrative aligned with sustainability, culture and quality of life. In this context, initiatives like the Legacy Programme demonstrate how it is possible to connect tourism with territorial development, contributing to global conversations from a concrete local experience.

Photography

• Distrito de Medellín

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Every event that takes place at the destination can leave benefits that extend beyond its duration and contribute to the development of the territory.

Associative Life at the Heart of Leisure

The role of the Conseil Québécois du Loisir in strengthening community and well-being

Sonia Vaillancourt
& Annie Camus



Sonia Vaillancourt (MBA) is Chief Executive, Conseil Québécois du Loisir (CQL). Annie Camus (Ph.D) is Professor at ESG-UQAM and President at Conseil Québécois du Loisir (CQL).

The Conseil Québécois du Loisir (CQL) is part of the associative action in leisure in Quebec, whose existence dates back to the 1940s. Arising from the will of its members, the CQL was incorporated in 1998 and has the mission "to contribute to the accessibility and the outreach of leisure in Quebec by valuing the contribution of the associative sector." The CQL is a grouping of 39 national leisure organizations (NLOs), which bring together more than 5,200 local and regional organizations supported by hundreds of thousands of volunteers. The CQL offers its members various opportunities to get involved in relation to the adoption of democratic governance, as specified in its bylaws.

These organizations constitute one of the most important associative networks in Québec. They have adopted principles of associative and democratic life, as well as collective entrepreneurship as a solution to ensure their development. They strive to balance social profitability with economic viability. They aim to maintain and develop their capacity to act for the benefit of the population's quality of life while acting in favor of sustainable development.

Québec Declaration

The contribution of leisure, when it adopts certain characteristics as identified in the Québec Declaration (which was proclaimed during the 10th World Leisure Congress in 2008 in Quebec), plays a preventive role in individual and collective health. Leisure associations make it possible for individuals to be less vulnerable through the creation and strengthening of the social fabric, the development of their potential and their capacity to exercise citizenship, and a more active participation in social life. The empowerment and the benefits generated

by participation in leisure associations, whether through amateur practice or citizen volunteer engagement, deserve to be valued, especially in the current sociopolitical context.

The pressure experienced by organizations affects volunteer engagement, including onboarding and supervision, the recruitment and retention of human resources, as well as access to activities and services. The project 'Collective and Human, Associative Life at the Heart of Leisure' is being developed in this context to revalorize associative life and the favorable conditions that support volunteer civic engagement in leisure. This project will make it possible to update, develop and share a common understanding of the complex issues at hand, uncover blind spots, and collaboratively develop adapted, innovative and sustainable solutions. Knowledge generated through research will be disseminated using a knowledge transfer approach that supports participant engagement and appropriation. To achieve this ambition of valorizing associative life at the heart of leisure, a medium- and long-term vision is adopted, taking into account the lessons learned throughout this process. Associative life in leisure is sustained through participation in activities or by taking on responsibilities within organizations. It enables the leisure sector to be organized and dynamic. It is also a space where people learn how to live together in society and contribute to the emergence of a society that places the well-being of the population at the center of collective decision-making.

The CQL fulfills its mission through the exercise of the right to leisure. It has an expertise and a comprehensive approach to leisure, its accessibility, and its development, integrating cultural, economic, physical and temporal dimensions while placing individuals and groups at the center of its actions. *The Reference*

framework for accessibility and inclusion in leisure reflects this comprehensive approach. The CQL is a member of, collaborates with, and actively participates in the democratic bodies of organizations whose missions and values are aligned with its own.

For the CQL, membership in the World Leisure Organization, of which it is the Quebec chapter, demonstrates its commitment and solidarity in promoting a comprehensive approach to leisure, for the benefit of individual and collective quality of life.

Associative life is

... active participation, involvement, engagement of individuals... who have come together, associated around a goal, a cause, a common project, shared values.

... a collective work that is meaningful, a social action aimed at impact, social transformation, and that contributes to the dynamism of the organization.

... human relationships, a group living.

... also a place of power, that of determining orientations, a place of democracy, of decision-making... rules, obligations, formal mechanisms that frame this work, the exercise of this power.

... the heart of the organization!

More information

- www.loisirquebec.com
- www.loisirquebec2008.com

Green Active Living

Building leisure pathways for a better society
with the World Leisure Chinese Taipei Chapter

Su-Hsin Jasmine Lee
Yu-Lan Yua



Su-Hsin Jasmine Lee is Professor at the Department of Geography, National Taiwan Normal University and President of the WLO Chinese Taipei Chapter. Yu-Lan Yuan is Secretary General of WLO Chinese Taipei Chapter.

Across Taiwan, the concept of leisure is undergoing a profound transformation. It is no longer viewed merely as passive free time, but rather as a vital catalyst for human flourishing and the sustainable development of our society. As the region navigates rapid urbanisation, the transition into a super-aged society, and increasing climate-related risks, the rhythms of daily life are fundamentally changing. Consequently, the demand for inclusive spaces, community recreation, and meaningful outdoor experiences has never been more urgent.

Chinese Taipei Chapter

Stepping up to address these complex societal shifts, the World Leisure Organization Chinese Taipei Chapter (WLO-TC) has developed collaborative platforms, organised seminars in communities that successfully bridge the gap between academic institutions, local communities, public policy-makers, and industry leaders. Members have been encouraged to actively participate in WLO conferences around the world to exchange ideas with WLO members. Publishing articles in World Leisure Journal to share Taiwan's experiences and achievements in promoting leisure activities. The current agenda focuses on 'Active Living for All,' aiming to integrate meaningful leisure experiences seamlessly into everyday routines. Our vision: "Leisure is no longer just about sport nor entertainment; it has evolved into a critical social intervention that seamlessly connects public health, environmental sustainability, and the fabric of community life to foster truly liveable and loveable cities."

Reimagining sport and leisure for a sustainable future

To translate this vision into action, WLO-TC is launching a comprehensive, dual-pronged initiative in 2026 that directly addresses the United

Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly concerning good health and well-being (SDG 3) and sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11). This project aligns perfectly with our vision and goes beyond simply providing recreational activities; it emphasises leisure as a social intervention to build more resilient, liveable, and loveable environments.

At the grassroots level, the *Revitalising Sport and Leisure Forum*, hosted alongside Fu Jen Catholic University in May 2026, places a dedicated focus on youth empowerment and community cohesion. By actively showcasing student research, facilitating work placements, and promoting collaborative regional projects, the event empowers emerging young professionals to shape the future of sustainable sport and tourism.

Scaling these localised efforts to a national level, WLO-TC actively collaborate with the Taiwan Ministry of Sports to host the *Green Active Living: Towards a Smart and Sustainable Future* international conference in November 2026, co-organised with Tunghai University, champions the philosophy of climate-resilient environments. The conference involves 45 related associations and societies, 400 representatives from academia, government organisations and industries. Moving beyond traditional competitive sports, the conference expands its concern to how people of different ages, abilities and lifestyles can identify appropriate forms of physical activity within their familiar living contexts. The forum issues include sport and health, forest therapy, outdoor recreation and adventure, sport tourism, and industry paradigm. Crucially, this perspective emphasises the intrinsic value of the leisure environment itself. Parks, urban forests, and coastlines serve a dual purpose: they are recreational hubs and vital public infrastructures that foster social connection. To ensure these concepts translate into tangible reality, the initiative features experiential learning components, effectively moving ideas from

academic dialogue into real-world practice. As the president of WLO-TC states:

"Human flourishing is shaped not only by individual choices but by having accessible, regenerative environments that naturally encourage people to stay active."

The value of the connection with WLO

These regional efforts do much more than address local Taiwanese challenges; they contribute directly to the World Leisure Organization's core mission of utilising leisure for a better society. Taiwan's rich experiences - successfully blending regenerative outdoor recreation, proactive health promotion, and community-driven youth engagement - offer a valuable and adaptable model for other regions navigating similar demographic and sustainability transitions.

As the World Leisure Organization brings together global voices to address pressing societal issues through the lens of leisure, the Chinese Taipei Chapter effectively bridges local innovation with this global dialogue. This exchange ensures that delivering meaningful leisure experiences and impactful social interventions remains a universally vital pathway towards true human flourishing and the creation of more liveable and loveable cities worldwide.

“

Parks, urban forests, and coastlines serve a dual purpose: they are recreational hubs and vital public infrastructures that foster social connection.

Leisure in Africa

Attention to Nigeria

Lawal Marafa

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Leisure in traditional African

society was predominantly communal, active, and deeply integrated with work and ritual, encompassing dancing, storytelling, wrestling, board games, and communal festivals. Across most of Africa, leisure is far more than a footnote to social life; it is a dimension that draws all segments of society together. Woven into the social fabric, leisure in Africa follows discernible patterns shaped by demographics, geography and cultural tradition. Depending on one's location, leisure can reflect the interplay of tradition and modernity, from festivals and family celebrations to sports and outdoor adventures. Social gatherings are typically characterised by visible cheerfulness, and the sounds of merriment are a hallmark of communal events across the continent.

Understanding leisure in West Africa, and Nigeria in particular, requires a perspective that transcends conventional boundaries. Leisure and enjoyment are rarely solitary pursuits; the concept of having fun alone is largely unfamiliar to most Nigerians, who view leisure as an inherently communal experience in which people of all ages participate. It is, at its core, a collective endeavour, one in which entire families take part together. While participation tends to be broad and inclusive, an observable age hierarchy nonetheless influences the nature and form of leisure activities.

Beyond age, there is considerable diversity in how different regions and ethnic groups approach leisure. With globalisation, decolonisation, rising incomes, and the recent advent of digitalisation, everyday life and patterns of consumption across Africa have evolved, and leisure is no exception. Urbanisation has further accelerated this shift, modifying how leisure, recreation and tourism are experienced.

Regional differences

It is important to note that Africa is not a monolith. Leisure practices vary significantly by region, country, and even within a given country. This discussion focuses on Sub-Saharan Africa and, more specifically, Nigeria. In the Eastern part of the country, traditional activities such as wrestling and cultural dances remain prominent, drawing the wider community together. The Northern region tends towards a more conservative entertainment landscape, with notable gender segregation at leisure events. The Southwest is generally regarded as more cosmopolitan, dominated by Lagos, Nigeria's ultimate megacity, renowned for its events, nightlife, and eclectic entertainment offerings. The Southeast, predominantly riverine in character, is shaped by its waterways, with aquatic and waterside activities forming the core of its recreation and leisure culture.

Nigeria, Africa's most populous country and arguably its largest economy, is home to a young and dynamic population that is increasingly embracing a wide range of leisure activities. With an urbanisation rate of nearly 4% per annum, there exists a marked disparity between leisure in urban and rural settings. Urban centres such as Lagos, Abuja, Port Harcourt, Kano, and Ibadan are witnessing a surge in leisure infrastructure, including amusement parks, resorts, art galleries, and cinemas, reflecting broader trends towards modernity. Fundamentally, leisure ought to serve as a source of relaxation for both the body and the mind, and the evolving Nigerian conception of leisure has seen a meaningful shift in how time, space, and material resources are valued in its pursuit.

In recent years, Nigeria's leisure and recreation industry has undergone a remarkable transformation. As the nation's middle class expands and disposable incomes rise, there

has been a notable shift towards leisure, not merely as a form of relaxation, but as a driver of economic growth. The burgeoning industry now encompasses hospitality, sports, cultural festivals, and nature retreats, attracting both local and international audiences. This evolution is further reinforced by Nigeria's vibrant event culture: annual festivals such as the Calabar Carnival and the Lagos International Jazz Festival draw thousands of visitors and contribute significantly to the economy, while music concerts, comedy shows, and art exhibitions have become central pillars of Nigeria's cultural and entertainment fabric.

Enabling the SDGs

Leisure plays a significant enabling role in advancing the SDGs. Across Africa, communal and culturally embedded leisure practices contribute to SDG 3 by supporting physical health, mental well-being, and social cohesion, while shared leisure gatherings also reflect the values of SDG 16 by fostering peaceful and inclusive communities. The intergenerational and inclusive nature of Nigerian leisure aligns with SDG 10 on reducing inequalities, while the growing digitalisation of leisure connects to SDG 9 through inclusive innovation and resilient infrastructure. At the same time, expanding participation underscores the importance of SDG 5 on gender equality, and leisure activities in both urban and rural contexts contribute to the preservation of cultural resources and heritage central to SDG 11.

WLO engaging Africa

Africa already features on the WLO map through initiatives in Southern Africa. With its large population and growing middle class, the continent is poised for deeper engagement, including expanded membership, stronger institutional affiliations, and greater participation in WLO events, networks and commissions.

Meet ATLAS

Connecting tourism
and leisure professionals worldwide

Jane Turner
& Corné Dijkmans



Jane Turner is college liaison tutor at Leeds Trinity University (United Kingdom) and coordinator of the ATLAS SIGs. Corné Dijkmans is associative director of Academy for Tourism at Breda University of Applied Sciences and chair of ATLAS.

Where can tourism and leisure professionals find fresh ideas, international partners, and the latest insights to stay ahead? For over three decades, the Association for Tourism and Leisure Education and Research (better known as ATLAS) has been exactly that meeting place.

What is ATLAS?

ATLAS is an international network that brings together educational institutions, researchers, and industry professionals in tourism and leisure. But do not let the word 'research' fool you into thinking this is purely academic. ATLAS was built on a practical premise: people working in tourism and leisure (whether in a classroom, a destination management organisation or a hotel) can learn enormously from each other, especially when they cross borders.

With 150 members in around 60 countries, ATLAS has grown into a truly global community. The network spans Europe (where it all began) to regional chapters in Africa, Asia-Pacific, Latin America, and the Middle East. This reach means insights from a cultural tourism project in Portugal can inspire a heritage initiative in Kenya or best practices from event management in Japan can inform approaches in Brazil.

History

ATLAS was established in 1991, emerging when the European Union's Erasmus programme opened doors for international educational collaboration. The network started with a focus on developing transnational education in tourism and leisure, recognising that this growing sector needed professionals who could think and work across borders.

In its early years, ATLAS concentrated on building a shared 'body of knowledge' for tourism education that could facilitate student exchanges and professional mobility

across Europe. Over time, the focus expanded to include substantial research programmes, always with an eye on practical application. Today, ATLAS continues to be coordinated from the Netherlands, with the support office located in the Netherlands and chaired by Breda University of Applied Sciences.

Relevance for practitioners

What sets ATLAS apart is its consistent focus on bridging theory and practice. The network's annual conferences and regional meetings aren't just about presenting academic work; they are opportunities for genuine exchange between educators, researchers and industry professionals.

Conference themes address real challenges that tourism businesses and destinations face. Recent events have explored community collaboration in times of crisis, destination futures and changing tourism employment. In 2024 for example, BUas hosted the annual ATLAS conference, themed "Leisure & Tourism 2030: Navigating the Future" in Breda. For industry professionals, ATLAS offers access to cutting-edge research that can inform strategy and operations. For educators, it provides essential connections to workplaces and industry partners. The result is a community where academic rigour meets practical application.

Special Interest Groups: where expertise meets

Perhaps the most dynamic part of ATLAS is its collection of Special Interest Groups (SIGs). Currently, ATLAS features 19 SIGs, covering an impressive range of subjects. Some focus on traditional tourism segments: Cultural Tourism, Heritage Tourism and Education, Urban Tourism, and Gastronomy and Tourism. Others address emerging challenges: Climate Change and Tourism, Artificial Intelligence & Robotics in Tourism and Hospitality, and Circular Economy. Several tackle more specialised areas:

Dark Tourism, Medical Tourism, Volunteer Tourism, and the recently established Children in Tourism.

Each SIG runs its own programme of activities, including conferences, workshops, webinars, and collaborative research. They produce publications translating research into accessible insights. Most importantly, they create spaces where people passionate about specific aspects of tourism and leisure can connect, debate and innovate together.

In the following sections of this UNCOVER Magazine, five SIG coordinators share their perspectives, giving you a closer look at how these communities function and what they are currently exploring.

Getting involved

ATLAS membership is primarily institutional, meaning organisations join as members, giving their staff and students access to the network. Members receive regular updates on conferences, publications and projects, plus access to ATLAS mailing lists; valuable channels for networking.

For anyone working in tourism and leisure (whether in education/research, policy-making, destination management or operations), ATLAS offers a window into international best practices and a platform for genuine collaboration.

In a sector that is inherently international, dynamic and constantly evolving, having access to such a network is not just nice to have; it is essential!

More information

• www.atlas-euro.org



Climate Change and Tourism

The need for a transformative research agenda

Ioanna Farsari



Ioanna Farsari holds a PhD in sustainable tourism policy from the University of Surrey (UK) and she is currently an Associate Professor at Dalarna University (Sweden). She is the coordinator of the ATLAS SIG on Climate Change and Tourism.

Climate change and tourism are deeply interconnected. Tourism is highly vulnerable to climate-related crises, as travel can become restricted, more difficult, or more expensive. Simultaneously, the sector contributes significantly to climate change and can undermine the adaptive capacity of destinations. Tourism is responsible for 8% to 10% of global greenhouse gas emissions, and despite commitments to reduce its footprint, emissions continue to rise, making the Glasgow target of halving emissions by 2030 increasingly unrealistic (Becken & Scott, 2024). Despite the urgency, the sector still lacks a credible mitigation strategy.

Transport remains the major challenge. Tourist transport emissions have increased by 65% in the past thirty years, with air travel accounting for 75% of these emissions (TPCC, 2023). Industry techno-optimism regarding sustainable aviation fuels is constrained by climate justice concerns, slow technological progress, and accelerating air-travel demand, delaying meaningful emission reductions (Gössling et al., 2026). While emissions from accommodation, food and activities have remained stable, tourism growth risks offsetting these gains (TPCC, 2023). Scholars therefore emphasise the need for major structural changes supported by governments, industry and researchers. Grassroots and community-led efforts are also seen as vital for enabling sustainability transformations and redirecting development pathways.

In this climate of responsibility and urgency influenced by social movements like Fridays for Future, the ATLAS Special Interest Group (SIG) on Climate Change and Tourism was established. Founded as a grassroots ATLAS initiative, the SIG works to strengthen research, education and collaboration through transformative scholarship.

Challenges and ethical issues

Transformative research is a transdisciplinary, place-sensitive and collaborative approach grounded in an ethics of care for the planet. It emphasises critical self-reflection, requiring researchers to examine how their own practices may reinforce unsustainability or foster positive change. Insights from the SIG's first workshop (Farsari et al., 2024) showed that transformation concerns academics' travel practices, their responsibility to model sustainable behaviour, their capacity to influence tourism practitioners and policy-makers, and their role as educators guiding students through sustainability transitions.

Climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic have further exposed global inequalities, with vulnerable communities experiencing disproportionate impacts (Jamal et al., 2021). Hopes that the pandemic would lead to more just mobility patterns have not materialised, as international travel emissions have risen again (TPCC, 2023). Most tourism emissions originate in a small number of wealthy countries whose residents travel frequently, while vulnerable nations bear the greatest impacts and face disproportionate mitigation costs. Transformative, transdisciplinary approaches such as co-production of knowledge and design thinking, offer ways to address these injustices.

Case example: 'Walk the talk' - academic flying

Universities are major GHGs emitters, due to air travel, and in Sweden, most top emitting public institutions are universities (SUHF, 2026). Academic mobility is often regarded as essential, creating a 'mobility ideology' that links air travel with academic success. Reducing academia's emissions requires mindset shifts, particularly among early career researchers (ECRs), and critical reflection on non-essential travel.

Responding to this need, SIG members initiated research on academic mobility. Formica and Farsari (2025) used critical discourse analysis to examine the 'social wrong' of academic hypermobility. Interviews with doctoral students and ECRs revealed hierarchical expectations (seniors expecting juniors to deliver) and norms defining the 'successful mobile academic'. While mobility supports creativity, networking, and belonging, it also generates stress, reduced focus and climate hypocrisy. ECRs identify online meetings, alternative travel modes and institutional policies as key strategies for rethinking academic (im)mobility and reducing emissions.

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Orphanage Tourism

From good intentions to responsible impact

Rodney Westerlaken

Rodney Westerlaken is postdoctoral researcher on child rights, tourism ethics, and community resilience at NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences and he is coordinator of the SIG Orphanage Tourism.

Orphanage tourism has emerged over the past two decades as one of the most contested intersections between hospitality, tourism, and child welfare. What often begins as a well-intentioned desire by travellers to "help vulnerable children" has, in many destinations, contributed to the growth of residential institutions that are neither necessary nor in the best interests of the child. The SIG Orphanage Tourism brings together researchers, educators, and practitioners to examine this paradox and to develop responsible alternatives that align tourism practice with children's rights and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

At the heart of the issue lies a powerful but misleading narrative: that visiting or volunteering in an orphanage is a meaningful form of development assistance. In reality, global evidence shows that up to 80 per cent of children living in institutions are not orphans at all, but have families who could care for them with modest social support. The demand created by visitors can incentivise the separation of children from their communities, undermine family-based care, and expose minors to safeguarding risks. This directly conflicts with SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions) and SDG 10 (reduced inequalities), while challenging tourism's claim to contribute positively to local development.

From charity-driven engagement to rights-based responsibility

For the tourism sector, the ethical dilemma is profound. Hospitality organisations promote empathy, service, and intercultural connection, yet these values can be distorted when poverty is packaged as an experience. Tour operators, universities, and NGOs have historically facilitated short-term volunteering without sufficient understanding of child protection standards. The SIG therefore argues that the

sector must move from charity-driven engagement to rights-based responsibility. Tourism education has a crucial role in this transition by equipping future professionals with critical literacy, ethical decision-making skills, and knowledge of community-based alternatives.

A practical illustration comes from Bali, Indonesia, where tourism growth has coincided with a high number of residential care facilities. Research conducted from 2015 onwards documented how some institutions adapted their daily routines to meet visitor expectations: children were encouraged to perform dances, share personal stories, and form emotional bonds with short-term guests. While marketed as cultural exchange, such practices blurred the boundary between hospitality and exploitation. Collaboration with local social services revealed that many children had living parents facing temporary economic hardship rather than abandonment.

The above demonstrates that meaningful action is needed and that tourism actors must accept shared responsibility. Rather than withdrawing from social engagement, the tourism and hospitality sector can support SDG 4 (quality education) and SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth) by investing in scholarships, teacher training, and inclusive employment for caregivers. The SIG promotes principles of "do no harm", informed consent, and child participation, urging organisations to conduct safeguarding risk assessments comparable to those used in health and environmental management.

Child-safe standards

Looking forward, we should take up the challenge to normalise child-safe standards across the industry. Travel platforms still advertise orphanage experiences, and many universities continue to offer placements without robust oversight. The SIG Orphanage

Tourism calls for collective action: accreditation bodies should integrate child-rights criteria; tour operators must adopt no-visit policies; and researchers should evaluate long-term outcomes of de-institutionalisation within tourism economies. Only by uncomfortable truths being confronted can tourism contribute to a better society rather than unintentionally sustaining harm.

Orphanage tourism reminds us that hospitality is not only about welcoming guests, but also about protecting those who are most vulnerable. When empathy is guided by evidence and ethics, tourism can become a genuine partner in sustainability transitions, supporting families, strengthening communities, and ensuring that children grow up where they belong: at home.

Photography

In line with child-safeguarding principles, no real children were photographed. The accompanying visual is an AI-generated illustration created to avoid any identification of minors while conveying the ethical concerns discussed in this article.

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A powerful but misleading narrative: that visiting or volunteering in an orphanage is a meaningful form of development assistance.

Narrating the Unpleasant

'Ugliness' as a resource in tourism research

Konstantina Zerva



Konstantina Zerva is Professor of Marketing in the Faculty of Tourism of the University of Girona and Coordinator of the ATLAS Dark Tourism SIG.

Why do we assume that ugliness holds no appeal for visitors? This fundamental question invites a critical re-examination of the 'tourist gaze', which has historically been curated to seek only the harmonious and the sublime. In the realm of tourism research, beauty has long reigned as the primary focus, while ugliness exists perpetually in its shadow. The problematic nature of this relationship lies in our tendency to prioritise the 'cultural frontstage' – the polished, romanticised version of a destination – while ignoring the darker, dissonant elements that define a place's true identity. By consigning the unpleasant to the margins, we foreclose the possibility of aesthetic democratisation and reduce the visitor experience to a superficial apprehension, whereas engaging critically with this neglected dimension reveals that the unpleasant functions as a constitutive counterpoint through which beauty acquires depth, complexity and authenticity.

Aesthetics in tourism

The academic study of aesthetics in tourism has long been tied to beauty, the 'tourist gaze' and the romanticisation of places. This framework privileges scenic landscapes, pleasant environments, harmonious architecture and attractive service personnel as key drivers of the visitor experience. In this view, beauty is not only a visual preference but also a functional tool associated with outcomes such as customer loyalty, satisfaction, revisit intention and restoration benefits.

Despite ugliness's constant presence in the real world, tourism literature shows a clear research gap, having focused almost exclusively on positive aesthetics. This has contributed to the devaluation of ugliness, encouraging unnecessary beautification projects and the marginalisation of places with hidden

aesthetic value. Research has also tended to overlook 'borderline experiences', those nuanced moments between beauty and ugliness, producing a distorted understanding of how people engage with authentic, non-idealised spaces (Nasiri et al., 2024).

The notion of 'beautified ugliness' refers to the capacity of aesthetic mediation and cognitive reinterpretation to transform what is conventionally perceived as repulsive into something valuable (Gallent & Andersson, 2007; Speake & Kennedy, 2019). In philosophical aesthetics, authors such as Boileau and Kant argued that artistic form can elevate even disturbing subjects, making them worthy of contemplation and sometimes admiration, as in Goya's *Saturn Devouring His Son*. In tourism planning, this process works through an 'aesthetic common sense', whereby attractions linked to decay, rupture or discomfort, such as ruins, graffiti or dark tourism sites, become socially legitimised, normalised and institutionally framed as meaningful experiences (Speake & Kennedy, 2019).

Beauty versus ugliness

The distinction between beauty and ugliness is both philosophical and social. Beauty

is traditionally associated with harmony, proportion, perfection and elite ideals, and has often reinforced hierarchy and exclusion. Ugliness, by contrast, refers to what breaks aesthetic norms, embodying chaos, dissonance and marginality, and has often been linked to the vulgar or socially marginalised. While beauty directs the imagination toward harmony, ugliness introduces tension and disruption.

The paradox of ugliness

The paradox of ugliness refers to the way aesthetically negative experiences can be both repulsive and compelling. It helps explain why people may linger in front of disturbing or harsh places such as Comuna 13 in Medellín, Auschwitz-Birkenau, Boston City Hall or Alcatraz. In these cases, attraction arises from the tension between discomfort and interpretation. Drawing on Edmund Burke, while beauty produces pleasure, the very unease associated with the sublime – and, by extension, with forms of ugliness – can itself generate a mediated kind of pleasure when encountered at a safe distance or under conditions of symbolic control. Consequently, ugliness may become memorable and meaningful precisely because it intensifies imaginative engagement, demands cognitive interpretation and transforms discomfort into reflection.

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Photography

- Konstantina Zerva (top)
- Bernard Gagnon - Creative Commons (bottom)



The Future Is Now

Artificial intelligence and robotics in tourism and hospitality

Angela Wright
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Imagine checking into a hotel where a smiling service robot brings your luggage, an AI concierge curates a personalised city walk based on your Instagram likes, and behind-the-scenes algorithms forecast demand, optimise staffing and minimise food waste. This is not science fiction anymore; it is the fast-emerging reality that the ATLAS Special Interest Group (SIG) on Artificial Intelligence and Robotics in Tourism and Hospitality is exploring, shaping and researching.

Why do AI and robotics matter for tourism?

AI has rapidly penetrated tourism, from big data analytics and blockchain-based solutions to robots and AI-powered applications that personalise the entire customer journey. By analysing massive datasets on tourist behaviour, AI systems can anticipate trends, generate tailored recommendations, and support highly targeted marketing campaigns that boost both satisfaction and revenue.

Chatbots based on large language models have revolutionised customer interaction by providing 24/7 support, multilingual communication and instant, context-aware suggestions for trips, activities and services. At the same time, service and social robots are moving to the front lines of hospitality, providing information, delivering room service, cleaning floors, cooking,

serving dishes, preparing drinks and performing a wide range of other tasks.

Yet the SIG does not treat technology as a magic solution. Increased reliance on AI and robotics raises issues of job displacement, privacy and data security, and the risk that tech-savvy actors gain advantages over those less able to adopt these technological tools. It also puts ethical questions centre stage, from opaque 'black box' decision-making to fairness in automated systems that influence pricing, access and service quality.

Laboratory for ideas and platform for you

For students and lecturers, this SIG is both a think tank and a laboratory for the future of tourism work. It provides a platform for educators to share experiences, strategies and challenges in integrating AI into tourism curricula and classroom practice. This includes not only teaching the tools but also addressing their technical, economic and ethical dimensions from a multidisciplinary perspective.

The group emphasises that robots and AI applications are not toys; they are assets on a hospitality company's balance sheet that require careful cost-benefit analysis and sound financial reasoning. This perspective helps frame investment decisions in AI and robotics within broader questions of business models, productivity and long-term competitiveness in tourism and hospitality.

What the SIG explores

The SIG welcomes contributions from tourist, brand, societal, technological and educational perspectives, engaging with topics that speak directly to the careers of today's students and the research agendas of their lecturers. Key themes include emerging AI and robotic technologies (e.g. agentic AI, humanoid robots) and how they might reshape tourism, the impact of AI on tourist decision-making, and the role of intelligent systems and robots in enhancing tourists' and employees' experiences.

It is also deeply interested in tourist attitudes and trust towards AI, the way robots and AI

can support brand differentiation, and the use of AI in customer relationship management. Other agenda items include disruption to social interaction in hospitality, the economics of AI and robotics, task automatability, and new forms of human-AI collaboration. The group critically examines job displacement and job enhancement, the links between AI, robotics and the Sustainable Development Goals, their impacts on local tourism development, and mental health issues associated with the use of AI.

On the education side, the SIG looks at robot-friendly hospitality facilities, ethical considerations in AI-enabled tourism education, data privacy, and responsible use of AI tools in teaching and learning. It also focuses on bridging the skills gap by training future professionals for AI-driven tourism, including the use of AI-assisted teaching tools and promoting ethical AI literacy.

Ultimately, the SIG focuses on how to make tourism more human with the help of AI and robotics. Although automation technologies will permeate every aspect of tourism and hospitality and will be used by both tourism companies and tourists alike, the SIG aims to show that, if used properly, AI and robotics may help tourism strengthen its core value proposition – the *hospitality* that people receive while travelling.

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Agenda items include disruption to social interaction in hospitality, the economics of AI and robotics, task automatability, and new forms of human-AI collaboration.

Venice, Look and Learn – Again!

Why all-who-can-pay access fees miss the point on overtourism

Antonio Paolo Russo

Antonio Paolo Russo is professor in the Department of Geography, Rovira i Virgili University (Spain) and coordinator of the Space, Place, Mobilities in Tourism SIG of ATLAS.



Since their inception, the city of Venice has been the archetypal case in tourism development studies. It epitomises metaphors such as cannibalisation (success at the cost of survival), commodification (heritage as attraction, deprived of its organic ties with the community) or thanatophilia (the admiration for the dying, the last chance to visit something that will soon be gone). It inspired popular managerial models, such as the socioeconomic carrying capacity or the functional tourist region. It anticipated trends, such as the progressive loss of a stable working population, substituted by rentiers and temporary city users. It may well be said that any discussion about sustainable tourism, tourism resilience or, more recently, overtourism, would inevitably lead to Venice as a prime terrain for exemplification and scrutiny.

The access fee

Now Venice is doing it again: the introduction of an access fee system in the high season since 2024 did what no other urban destination had dared before: turn the city itself into a full-fledged, pay-to-get-in tourist attraction, with exemptions for those who live and work in the city, regional residents, and overnight stayers in its accommodation sector. The stated goal is to deter day visits (the majority), which contribute close to nothing to the local economy, but bear on local resources, mobility systems, and spaces, while raising some income from those who still decide to join the slightly more expensive party.

So what's wrong with this experiment? Firstly, its stated impacts have not been demonstrated. As could be expected: the demand to visit Venice in high season from the nearby region is so inelastic that ten euros do not make any difference, and if you do spend on that,

maybe you save on an ice-cream and a visit to a museum. Adding to that, the system of exemptions is tricky, privacy-obtrusive, and may discourage many other mobilities that feed what is left of the sociocultural centrality of the city: business visitors, event attendees and course participants or even guests at homes of people who are not official residents, students or second-home owners. This system, inevitably, does not only construct a fracture in the 'right to visit a city', between 'good visitors', who stay and spend, and 'bad (poor) visitors', who'd better stay out; it also operates by reflection on its residents – those who abide with the tourism mobility system, as hoteliers and Airbnb hosts living off tourism, and all the others, who at some point rely or depend on other sorts of personal connections.

Paradox

In 2026, overtourism, as widely claimed in critical tourism research – such as that promoted by the ATLAS SIG Space, Place, Mobilities in Tourism – is not just about visitor pressure in space, but rather about the touristification of any facet of residents' lives. While an access fee system might act on overcrowding on peak days (and Venice's doesn't), resident communities in Venice as in (most) other southern European historical cities are under threat for lack of housing, vanishing civic services, delocalising high-value jobs, loss of neighbourhood ties. The fee's governmental



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The demand to visit Venice in high season from the nearby region is so inelastic that a ten-euro fee does not make any difference.

logic deepens the plunge of the historical city into a sacrifice zone, a cash cow whose gains do not support life but only business.

Venetians have noted this paradox, and have taken a stance against it. Most of them would just want a more restrictive system; one that effectively leaves out the 'tourist excess'; or a radical ban on short-term rentals, which would possibly flow back to the residential market. But the basic question is that in order to fix an issue that only affects the top layers of the hospitality industry, whose playing field is a high quality city for high value customers, Venice has introduced a new stratification in terms of mobility justice, and a stigma against its very own citizens, the ones who resist in place and struggle daily to keep it alive. If Venice's move paves the way for this sort of 'managerial solutions' to overtourism, instead of revisioning its structural determinants, such as the neoliberal-fuelled appropriation of spaces of social reproduction and the unbridled expansion of tourist mobility systems, the future of cities is bleaker than what we thought.

The Crocus Project

Developing cultural and creative tourism in rural areas

Greg Richards
&
Leontine Onderwater



Greg Richards is (Emeritus) Professor of Placemaking and Events at Breda University of Applied Sciences and Professor of Leisure Studies at Tilburg University. Leontine Onderwater is a project manager in the Crocus Project. Both work with ATLAS.

Despite the boost given to rural tourism during the pandemic, developing rural tourism in Europe remains challenging. The countryside suffers from poor accessibility, a lack of human resources and skills and funding. Since 2024, the European Union has funded projects to boost cultural tourism in rural areas. The Crocus Project on Cross-Border Cultural and Creative Tourism in Rural and Remote Areas, coordinated by Aalborg University in Denmark, is one of these (Crocus, 2025). This article provides an overview of research into cultural and creative tourism in rural areas and outlines the current business models.

Opportunities and challenges

Rural and Remote Areas of Europe have common challenges and opportunities. Firstly, demographics because populations are ageing and declining, with low density threatening long-term sustainability. Secondly, economic challenges for areas traditionally based on agriculture, forestry, and light industry, which are now increasingly turning towards services and tourism. Preserving tangible and intangible heritage as an asset for cultural and creative tourism development requires both resources and skills. Thirdly, tourism is crucial to rural economies, supporting local culture and traditions and enhancing quality of life, but needs to be sustainably developed.

Crocus aims to increase rural resilience by encouraging cultural and creative tourism development and supporting new business models. The key challenges to be overcome include developing place-specific business models for different types of cultural heritage and community needs; supporting balanced and sustainable tourism development and developing policies for cooperation between rural and remote areas.

The Crocus Project aims to identify suitable Cultural and Creative Tourism (CCT) business models for different types of heritage and rural areas and create living labs to prototype sustainable CCT business models. It will also develop cross-border policy scenarios for the four EU macro-regions (Baltic Sea, Adriatic and Ionian, Alpine, and Danube); and create tools to support the development of sustainable and inclusive CCT in the future.

Activities

The Crocus Project is funded by the EU Horizon Programme, which has a research focus. The project first reviewed previous research to identify the major research themes and to assess research gaps.

The literature review found strong growth in research on rural CCT (Richards et al., 2025). Gastronomy, events, and festivals are important in shaping rural experiences. Although there is an emphasis on authenticity and nostalgia, innovations such as *albergo diffuso* (or scattered accommodation facilities with centralised facilities), and cultural routes are also stimulating change.

Intangible heritage research has grown significantly, largely because of the enhanced profile of the UNESCO Intangible Heritage List. This has also stimulated more attention for rural heritage and contemporary rural lifestyles. However, the 'local' lifestyles underpinning rural culture are threatened by population changes. Rural areas are diversifying, with growing numbers of lifestyle entrepreneurs, retirees, and digital nomads becoming new 'locals'. New productive activities are needed to link heritage and tradition with new 'incomers', develop creative hubs to stimulate innovation, as shown in the Brabant Kust de Kempen case below.

After the literature review, resident and visitor surveys were undertaken, as well as a Delphi Study, aiming to identify the main policy challenges in rural CCT. The Delphi study indicated that cultural events and festivals, local food and gastronomy (including wineries) and contacts with locals are the most important elements of CCT in rural areas. However, cultural traditions and practices and UNESCO World Heritage Sites were also considered crucial. Storytelling and oral history as well as local crafts were seen as slightly less important.

Research conducted by Crocus partners in eight Cross Border Living Labs also indicated that local inclusion, or re-grounding was a key success factor in cross-border collaboration. This means working with local communities to ensure that the actions developed meet their needs. The importance of sufficient levels of financial support and infrastructure development (the resources element of

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There is much more active collaboration when actors close to the border are involved in and have control over activities and resources.

placemaking), and skill enhancement (creativity) were identified as potential bottlenecks in cultural and creative tourism development in rural and remote areas. Policy-makers need to provide sufficient support for local placemaking activities to ensure tourism developments are contextually relevant and locally impactful.

Case studies of cross-border cultural tourism

A number of case studies were developed by the project to highlight cross-border cultural tourism development. The ATLAS team focused on cross-border cultural routes, including the Roman Limes, De Groote Heide and Brabant Kust De Kempen.

The Limes route follows the border of the Roman Empire across Europe from Hadrian's wall in the UK to the Black Sea in Romania. It crosses the Netherlands from Katwijk on the North Sea to Berg en Dal on the German border. This represents a 'relict border' which introduces visitors to Roman history. De Groote Heide is a nature area that stretches across the Dutch-Belgian border from south of Eindhoven to Pelt in Belgium. Brabant Kust De Kempen is a cross-border project developing a cultural route along Bels Lijntje, an old railway line between Tilburg and Turnhout.

A common challenge faced by all of these rural border routes is the lack of tangible cultural heritage attractions that can be visited. There is a need to develop new attractions based on intangible heritage, which in many cases is done through interpretation and storytelling. The Roman Limes route takes a more traditional approach to interpretation, which is probably not surprising given the archaeological base of the route.

In Brabant Kust De Kempen storytelling played an important role, because BUAs was one of the partners. Professor Moniek Hover and her team developed storylines related to the history of the area and the idea of the 'border feeling' found in these peripheral regions. This has supported the development of cultural routes, including a smugglers route, and a cross-border tourism information centre. These developments are supported by three storylines: Industrialisation, Vagrancy and Poverty and War, and Espionage, all related to the border (Brabant Kust de Kempen, 2025). These themes emphasise the role of the border in stimulating and inhibiting development and creating links between countries.

Our research showed that cross-border collaboration is challenging because of the differences in culture, language and administrative arrangements between EU member states. However, both Brabant Kust de Kempen and De Groote Heide have effectively utilised cross-border governance. In De Groote Heide a *Benelux Groepering voor Territoriale Samenwerking* (Benelux Grouping for Regional Collaboration (BGTS)) provides the framework for regular cross-border meetings and a common budget for tourism development.

There is still no standardised means of developing cross-border collaboration, although plans are advancing for the creation of a cross-border association framework. Cross-border projects seem to work better at local level. There is much more active collaboration when actors close to the border are involved and have control over activities and resources. In more top-down projects, such as the Roman Limes, national actors tend to work on their own tourism resources, rather than collaborate across the border (Richards and Onderwater, forthcoming).

Towards place-based cultural tourism development

A key insight from the review was the growing focus on intangible heritage in RRA. Unlike urban areas with abundant tangible cultural landmarks, rural regions rely on intangible resources - such as storytelling, local gastronomy, and traditional crafts - to attract tourists. This reflects the increasing importance of preserving and leveraging intangible cultural assets for sustainable tourism development. However, intangible cultural heritage needs to be made visible and accessible for tourists. One potential avenue is to combine placemaking strategies, which emphasises giving meaning to local resources, with 'placeshaping' principles (Horlings, 2016) including:

- *Re-positioning*: Reimagining how cultural assets are presented.
- *Re-appreciation*: Encouraging fresh perspectives on local heritage.
- *Re-grounding*: Strengthening the connection between communities and their cultural assets.

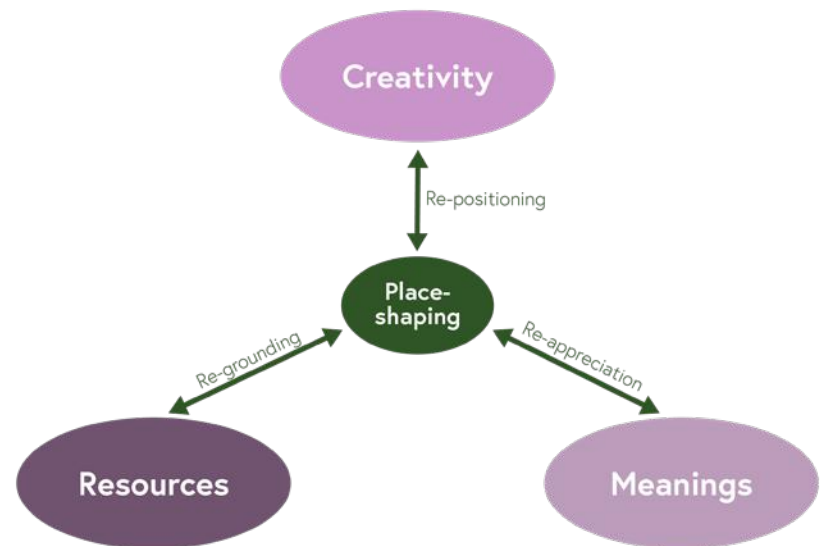


Figure 1: Integrating placemaking and place-shaping approaches (Source: Richards, James & Halkier, 2025).

Acknowledgements

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Rural regions often rely on intangible resources, such as storytelling, local gastronomy, and traditional crafts, to attract tourists.



We Found a Perfect Match in KreativEU

A positive and forward-looking perspective on Europe-wide cooperation

Maaïke Dukker-'t Hart



Maaïke Dukker-'t Hart is Communications Officer and Staff Writer at Breda University of Applied Sciences.

KreativEU is more than an international network – it is an invitation to rethink the way universities collaborate, create and forge links across borders. For BUAs, joining this European alliance opens doors to new partnerships and joint research. On behalf of Uncover, Maaïke Dukker spoke with Jorrit Snijder, President of the Executive Board of Breda University of Applied Sciences (BUAs), and Sannie van Boxtel, Institutional Coordinator of KreativEU at BUAs, to explore what the KreativEU partnership means for the university.

When BUAs went looking for European University alliances and partnerships, we found a perfect match in KreativEU – an alliance of European universities of applied sciences united by shared ambitions. This wasn't simply a board decision; it was, as Jorrit describes it, "a large-scale dating process" to find the right fit. "Joining KreativEU at such an early stage – alongside other driven pioneers – has been something I'm truly glad about."

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The future lies in Europe, and we need to play an active role in it.

Teaming up with 11 universities in Europe, the ultimate goal of KreativEU is to create a European University that puts the creative potential of Europe's cultural heritage at the heart of its teaching, research and knowledge-sharing activities.

A dynamic and proactive European campus

Looking ahead, Sannie sees short-term goals focused on getting as many students as possible involved in exchanges and European projects. In the medium term, plans include developing joint master's degrees, micro credentials – short courses that lead to recognised certification – and expanding research partnerships. The long-term vision? A dynamic, proactive European campus – whether physical or virtual – where people keep learning from each other and remain open to different perspectives and ideas.

KreativEU is all about connection – linking people, disciplines, and regions. In a world that's becoming more divided, it stands for Europe's democratic values while fostering innovation and resilience. As Jorrit puts it, "The future lies in Europe, and as a university of applied sciences like ours, we need to play an active role in it."

Human-Centred and Future-Forward

What makes KreativEU special is the remarkable synergy between its themes and BUAs' research agenda and degree programmes. Creativity, cultural heritage, and sustainability are key, with AI seamlessly integrated across all domains.

"It fits perfectly with our updated strategic direction," says Jorrit. "Human-Centred and Future-Forward aren't empty slogans – they reflect what we genuinely stand for. In today's challenging geopolitical climate, we want our students to face the future with confidence and the skills to navigate it. This includes human skills such as critical thinking, ethical

awareness and creative entrepreneurship, but also digital fluency. Being AI-informed matters – and so does knowing when to use it and when not to."

In the field of AI, BUAs is a leader within the KreativEU alliance. You may have already read about this in previous editions of Uncover. BUAs leads Work Package 5, focusing on AI and sustainability. "In this context," says Sannie, "we organise international hackathons where students, researchers and professionals collaborate to connect cultural heritage with sustainability through AI solutions. Recent events in Poland and the Czech Republic have generated innovation ideas like apps bringing historical stories to life and tools helping heritage managers with climate adaptation."

BUAs' expertise in applied AI, championed by Professor Carlos Santos, is in high demand across the KreativEU alliance – partners frequently call on us for support. But it's very much a two-way street. While we share our AI knowledge, we gain fresh insights into fields like cultural heritage and archaeology. This genuine cross-pollination speeds up development for everyone and gives our students valuable international experience.

"Future-readiness, then, is the first pillar of our updated strategy. But the whole KreativEU concept also fits in very well with what we at BUAs aspire to be," says Jorrit. "We are establishing ourselves as a leading European university, with a strong focus on applied research that is closely linked to education and society. That is the second key pillar of our strategy. We are strengthening our European presence through strategic partnerships, such as KreativEU."

A positive and forward-looking perspective

KreativEU unites institutions that share a commitment to delivering top-notch education and recognise the vital role of research and innovation. Most importantly, these universities



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These universities have a common DNA and a genuine desire to make the world a better place.

have a common DNA – a positive, forward-looking, pioneering perspective and a genuine desire to make the world a better place.

"The goal is to collaborate ever more closely – in both education and research – building on what we've already achieved together," says Sannie. "Breda has a rich cultural heritage, and building local connections felt like the natural place to begin. We found a wonderful partner in the city's *Grote Kerk*, which has since become an honorary member of the KreativEU network. We also joined forces with the creative team behind Breda Blind Walls, an initiative that uses large-scale murals to bring the cultural heritage of Breda and its surrounding region to wider public attention. Meanwhile, our Storytelling research group is exploring potential collaborations with other cities around the theme of stumbling stones – a memorial to the victims of National Socialism."

In our partner cities, they do the same: start small, seek collaboration with local and regional businesses, and then broaden the scope to see where we, as KreativEU partners, can find common ground and strengthen one another. "This is something that needs to grow," says

Sannie, "and it starts with us sharing a great deal of our work with one another. Then we can start to see where our interests align. That's why it's so wonderful that this anniversary edition of Uncover gives us a platform to showcase some of our partners' best practices in the field of cultural heritage."

On the following pages, we'll take you through various case studies set up across Europe as part of the KreativEU initiative, illustrating the value of intangible cultural heritage. Enjoy reading and let yourself be inspired.

More information

If you have any ideas for further collaboration within the KreativEU framework, please feel free to contact Sannie van Boxtel at boxtel.s@buas.nl.



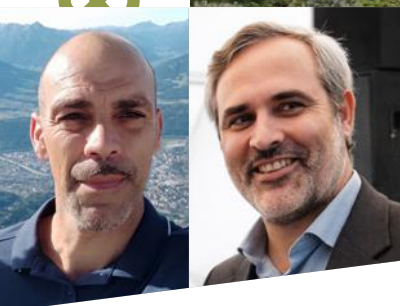
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The Limestone Tapestry

Olive oil and the eco-cultural landscape of the Serras d'Aire e Candeeiros in Portugal

Luís Santos
Luís Melo



Luís Santos in co-creation with Luís Melo. Luís Santos is a biologist, professor and researcher at the Polytechnic University of Tomar, lead partner of the KreativEU alliance, and Luís Melo is a local historian and the President of the Association for the Promotion of Olive Groves and Olive Oil in Aire and Candeeiros (Portugal).

The Serras d'Aire e Candeeiros range is Portugal's most significant limestone massif – a region historically shaped by extreme hardship. The lack of surface water and poor soil required profound human adaptation, giving rise to a defining 'trinity of stone': dry-stone masonry, extensive pastoralism, and the cultivation of the drought-resistant Galega olive tree. Together, these practices have forged a culture of resilience that transformed a hostile landscape into a productive, humanised one.

Intangible cultural heritage of humanity

Since ancient times, olive trees and olive oil have been integral to the identity of the Serra d'Aire e Candeeiros region, featuring in its economy, history, architecture, landscape, health and well-being, gastronomy, arts and crafts, beliefs, ethnography, music and literature. In fact, the practice of olive oil production defines the ecocultural identity of this mountain range as it is inextricably linked to the art of dry-stone masonry.

Olive groves, for instance, are inseparable from the vast network of *muros* (walls) built without mortar to regulate microclimates and prevent soil erosion. Recognised as intangible cultural heritage of humanity, this technique

resembles a tapestry when viewed from above. It is a masterpiece of human ingenuity in managing a harsh environment, as well as an example of traditional ecological knowledge.

Additionally, olive cultivation and the grazing of local sheep and goat breeds share a long-standing symbiotic relationship, rooted in an ancestral transhumance practice whereby livestock would roam to the coastal plains in summer. There, the animals cleared the groves of flammable material while providing natural fertilisation, creating a distinctive landscape aesthetic and a circular economy that underpins the region's Mediterranean diet.

The region's commitment to traditional production methods is further reinforced by its status as part of the Serra d'Aire e Candeeiros Natural Park, established in 1979 to protect its subterranean water resources and palaeontological heritage – including the Jurassic dinosaur footprints for which the area is renowned. As a protected area, both environmental considerations and the challenging terrain discourage intensive agricultural production.

The Liquid Gold project

As a native of the region, Luís Melo has a deep personal connection to it. When invited by municipal executives to coordinate the Liquid Gold project in 2023, he took on the challenge, working to promote the olive cluster with the precise aim of stabilising local populations and fostering balanced regional development.

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It is a masterpiece of human ingenuity in managing a harsh environment, as well as an example of traditional ecological knowledge.



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KreativEU presents itself as an excellent opportunity to develop projects in this domain given that this alliance includes Mediterranean and Near East members.

The participatory process that followed, engaging olive growers and other stakeholders, led to the establishment of APOAC – the Association for the Promotion of Olive Groves and Olive Oil in Aire and Candeeiros – in 2024. Wholeheartedly embracing this cause, Luís Melo has been actively involved in developing an ongoing collective strategy to enhance the value of the region's traditional olive groves. This encompasses raising awareness of the unique characteristics of the Aire and Candeeiros terroirs, their native varieties and extra virgin olive oil profiles, managing the 'Olivedos do Carso' collective brand, promoting technical olive oil tastings, and supporting producers in accessing new and more demanding markets.

Luís Melo's connection with this region is also evident in his role as the person responsible for inventorying the intangible heritage and classifying the olive grove landscape of Serra de Santo António, at Aire and Candeeiros Natural Park.

Olive oil's relevance to the region, the country and Europe

Despite the general abandonment of traditional olive groves in Portugal and in this region, part of the mountain landscape remains well cared for and alive, as it continues to be useful and economically sustainable for landowners given olive oil's relevance to the region, to the country and to Europe. In the specific case of Serras d'Aire e Candeeiros, their olive oil has considerable market value as it is a biocultural product, with a chemical profile directly influenced by the limestone geology and the physiological water stress of the trees.

Moreover, olive oil enjoys a good reputation for being a healthy vegetable fat, which makes it a central element of the Mediterranean diet. Additionally, and despite no longer being an exclusively Southern European product, it remains deeply rooted in European identity and is one of the EU's major exports. In a different context, it is also worth noting that its production leads to social cohesion as it generates employment in sparsely populated areas, thus preventing their total abandonment.

Ultimately, and as already mentioned, it is a cherished product due to the environmentally friendly character of its traditional production practices when compared with intensive plantations or other agricultural products. However, the continuity of traditional practices in olive oil production requires safeguarding and



enhancement strategies that reinforce their economic and environmental sustainability in the short and medium term. Safeguarding this rural landscape means recognising its ecological, cultural and productive value, not only as a heritage of the past, but as an active resource for the future.

Combining local expertise with academic knowledge

This is where academia can have a say, considering that the combination of academic expertise with that of local stakeholders can be beneficial to both. A case in point is the Highlands.3 project, in which the Polytechnic University of Tomar was an active participant in analysing several sustainability initiatives in Serra d'Aire e Candeeiros, including the combination of tourism with the conservation of the olive oil production cycle.

With that in mind, KreativEU presents itself as an excellent opportunity to develop projects in this domain given that this alliance includes Mediterranean and Near East members which share a deep and ancestral identitarian bond with the olive tree, namely the University of Camerino (Italy) and Adana Alparslan Türkeş Science and Technology University (Turkey). The Marche region, where Camerino is located, is also known for its high-quality and high-mountain olive oil. As for Adana, located in the Mediterranean region of Turkey, the olive tree is embedded in its identity as it is a major production centre of olive oil since time immemorial.

Preserving a distinctive European ecocultural landscape

All of this points to promising possibilities for cooperation. This is even more evident when you consider that all three regions have been involved in olive oil tourism initiatives. These features will certainly be considered in the EcoCultural Identity Mapping that is being done within the KreativEU alliance, one of its major outputs.

Overall, initiatives such as the ones described, as well as others that could be developed within KreativEU, are essential for preserving distinctive European ecocultural landscapes. The long-term viability of these biocultural landscapes hinges on integrating traditional ecological knowledge with contemporary conservation strategies, thereby transforming those who work the land into crucial land stewards rather than solely food producers.

Photography

- Francisco Mondragão Rodrigues (page 30 top)
- APOAC (page 30 bottom)
- Luís Melo (page 31)

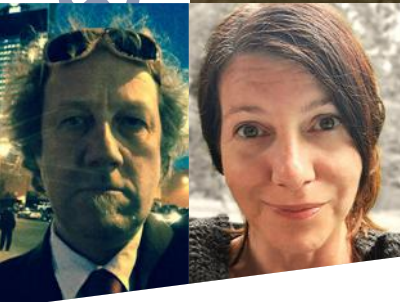
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The EcoCultural Identity Mapping, which is being done within the KreativEU alliance, is one of its major outputs.

Where Creativity Meets Heritage

Subtopia: a compelling Swedish case study in how local cultural ecosystems can evolve into international nodes of innovation

Martin Q. Larsson
&
Petra Norling



Martin Q. Larsson is Head of Katapult, catalyst for creative entrepreneurship in Stockholm, and Petra Norling is Collaboration Strategist at Södertörn University, one of the KreativEU partners.

In the Stockholm suburb of Alby, in the municipality of Botkyrka, an old industrial landscape has been transformed into something unexpected: a vibrant creative district where circus performers, filmmakers, musicians, social entrepreneurs, and cultural innovators work side by side. This is Subtopia – a 15,000 square metre cluster of studios, coworking spaces, stages, incubators, and production facilities that has become one of Sweden's most dynamic cultural hubs.

Subtopia: a broad-scoping case study

For students, researchers, policy-makers and creative professionals, Subtopia offers a compelling case study in how local cultural ecosystems can evolve into international nodes of innovation. Today, its reach extends far beyond the borders of Botkyrka thanks to a growing partnership with Södertörn University and their joint involvement in the European university alliance KreativEU.

To understand the significance of this collaboration, we start with the heart of Subtopia: its creative incubator Katapult.

Katapult: the heart of Subtopia

Katapult describes itself as a business incubator for creative startups, and the description fits. It provides aspiring cultural and social entrepreneurs with free office space, 24/7 access, creative business coaching, networking opportunities, training, subsidised studio use, support with applications and marketing, and a community of like minded creators.

Katapult is built on trust. People come up with early, fragile ideas. It is Katapult's job is to give those ideas room to grow – and to help creators see themselves as entrepreneurs, innovators and cultural leaders. There are no formal entry requirements. If you believe in your idea and want to build something in the cultural or social sectors, Katapult offers the tools and environment to help you make it real. It is part of Botkyrka's long term strategy to support

entrepreneurship and creativity – an effort that spans everything from youth leadership programmes to innovation houses such as Changers Hub or the media house Fanzingo.

Katapult doesn't just incubate businesses; it incubates people. Its programmes, such as 7 Steps 2 Bizdom, provide hands on development opportunities that help creatives strengthen their professional skills and discover sustainable pathways within the cultural industries. In pop up events at locations like Alby Square, Katapult engages directly with residents, offering idea guidance and showcasing creative career possibilities. For a municipality historically shaped by migration, social diversity, and grassroots cultural expression, Katapult's inclusive ethos resonates deeply.

Subtopia's connection to cultural heritage

Even though Subtopia looks firmly towards the future, much of its work is intertwined with cultural heritage. Creative hubs like Subtopia frequently operate in sectors such as visual arts, digital media, museums, community engagement, and craft based innovation -

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Our job is to help them to see themselves as entrepreneurs, innovators and cultural leaders.



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In Subtopia, heritage meets creativity.

fields directly linked to how societies preserve and reinterpret heritage. Subtopia's emphasis on cross innovation, where methods from the arts are applied to other industries, reflects a wider trend in Europe to rethink cultural heritage not as something fixed, but as a living, evolving resource. This aligns closely with the values of the KreativEU alliance, which places Europe's diverse cultural heritage at the centre of its teaching, research and knowledge transfer activities. Cultural heritage, in this sense, becomes a catalyst for creativity, social understanding and sustainable innovation. Its participation as an associated partner in the KreativEU alliance strengthens its influence further, positioning Subtopia within pan European networks focused on cultural heritage, creativity and sustainability.

Subtopia's involvement in the KreativEU alliance fits nicely with another Erasmus+ project: Synergy Across Sectors (SXS). Together with partners in the Czech Republic and Finland, the aim is to make museums move from just being memory institutions to become drivers on societal transformation through cross-sectoral innovation.

Södertörn: the University College in the southern suburbs

For 30 years, Södertörn University has had a mission to provide higher education in southern Stockholm, where levels of education and income are generally lower than in other parts of the capital. Bringing heritage and entrepreneurship together into the digital era corresponds well with the intercultural and cross-sectoral profile and the vision to provide critical views on contemporary issues.

Södertörn University has been a member of the KreativEU alliance since 2024, participating in a major European effort to expand transnational education and research in the field of cultural heritage. For the university, cultural heritage is not just about what Europe has been, it is about imagining what Europe can become, and ensuring that students have the creative spaces, partners and infrastructures they need to shape that future.

The university's partnership with Subtopia, the nearby municipalities of Botkyrka and Huddinge, the National Archive and the National Museum as well as the local development hub Flemingsberg Science, brings academic and creative ecosystems together, linking research with real-world artistic production and entrepreneurship.



**H&ART
Incubator**

The H&ART Incubator: a new platform for Heritage & Art Innovation

One of the KreativEU alliance's most ambitious initiatives is the launch of the H&ART (Heritage & Art) Incubator – a transnational incubator focusing on cultural heritage, artistic practice and creative entrepreneurship. Subtopia as well as Katapult will help provide a creative development environment for this incubator:

- Supporting students in translating cultural heritage concepts into creative projects with professional potential
- Offering business development, mentoring and coaching to H&ART participants
- Sharing knowledge about sustainable creative entrepreneurship
- Connecting students to Subtopia's community of creators and production experts
- Hosting cross innovation labs, residencies and showcases

The incubator represents a new type of collaboration between academic knowledge, artistic practice and local creative ecosystems.

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Katapult offers the tools and environment to help you make it real.

Conclusion: a model for Europe's creative future

In Subtopia, heritage meets creativity. At Katapult, ideas become sustainable enterprises. And through Södertörn University, the H&ART Incubator and the KreativEU alliance, these local forces connect to a European movement seeking to reimagine the role of cultural heritage in shaping our shared future.

Photography

• Subtopia

A shared philosophy

At Breda University of Applied Sciences, we also believe entrepreneurial skills – adaptability, initiative, dealing with uncertainty – are essential for everyone navigating today's rapidly changing world.

That philosophy is at the heart of BUSS, the BUAs Startup Support programme. BUSS connects students from all domains – from Creative Business, Games and Data Science & AI to Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure & Events – with coaches who help them develop their ideas and take their first real steps as creative entrepreneurs. The approach is deliberately inclusive: if you believe in your idea, there's a place for you. BUSS offers coaching, workspace, peer learning, and connections to the regional startup ecosystem in and around Breda.

When BUAs joined the KreativEU alliance, it brought that same mindset to the table. The H&ART Incubator brings it all together and is now building a transnational version of what programmes like Katapult and BUSS have been doing locally for years: creating the conditions in which people with creative ideas in the cultural and heritage sectors can grow – not just as artists or practitioners, but as entrepreneurs and innovators.

What makes the KreativEU collaboration exciting is precisely that learning happens in both directions. Sweden's Subtopia and Katapult show what's possible when a creative ecosystem is given the space to develop over time, with deep roots in a local community. For BUAs, that's both inspiration and a challenge: how do we build something similarly grounded – locally in Breda, and transnationally across eleven partner universities?

We don't have all the answers yet. But learning by doing is kind of our thing.

Tijs van Es, Innovation Square Manager at BUAs.



Romanian Clay Arts as Intangible Cultural Heritage

Living knowledge shaped in earth and fire

Silviu Miloiu

Silviu Miloiu is Professor and PhD advisor at Valahia University of Targoviste (VUT) in Romania, institutional coordinator of KreativEU at VUT, and local contact point of the UNESCO UNITWIN Network for Heritage Preservation, Science and Communication for Sustainable Communities.

Romanian clay arts are often admired for their visual appeal, yet their deeper significance lies elsewhere. A plate displayed in a cabinet or a jug admired in a museum represents only the visible outcome of a far more complex system of knowledge. At the heart of pottery stands a cultivated intelligence: the trained hand that senses the right consistency of clay, the practised eye that anticipates shrinkage and balance, and the seasoned judgement that knows when a kiln has reached its critical moment. Pottery is thus less an object than a disciplined way of thinking through material, time and collective standards of quality.

Seen in this light, Romanian clay arts constitute a form of embodied knowledge. This knowledge is not stored in texts, recipes or diagrams, but in gesture, rhythm and tactile memory. It is transmitted through repetition, correction and shared evaluation, embedded in daily workshop routines and socially regulated ideas of what is fitting and well made. As artisans themselves often remark, working with clay is a negotiation:

a sustained conversation with matter shaped by experience and restraint rather than force.

For this reason, pottery offers a particularly lucid example of intangible cultural heritage. What is inherited is not merely the finished object but the entire chain of practice: the preparation of materials, the forming of vessels, the disciplined application of decoration, the management of fire, and the social exchange through which work is recognised and valued. Workshop hierarchies, apprenticeship relations, and local aesthetic vocabularies together form a cultural ecology of making that is continually renewed through practice.

Regional worlds of clay

Horezu is the most internationally renowned centre of Romanian decorative pottery. Its distinction lies in an assured iconography governed by balance and visual discipline. Plates and bowls are organised around a strong compositional centre, with secondary elements carefully distributed so that the surface remains ordered and legible. Decorations are not applied haphazardly, but follow a stable, shared vocabulary whose authority is immediately recognisable.

At the heart of Horezu iconography stands the rooster (*Cocoșul de Hurez*), not simply as an ornament but as a compact moral and temporal symbol. As the herald of daybreak, it signifies vigilance, order and the cyclical measure of rural time. Positioned at the compositional centre, the rooster confers both visual authority and symbolic closure, as though the vessel were signed by the tradition itself. Complementing it, the spiral motif conveys movement and continuity. Often described as the spiral of life, it structures the composition through controlled dynamism, binding fragments of ornament into a coherent whole while evoking the turning of time and the rhythm of seasons.

Working with clay is a negotiation: a sustained conversation with matter shaped by experience and restraint rather than force.

The colour palette of Horezu pottery is equally intentional. Earthy tones are chosen for their harmony and legibility rather than novelty, reinforcing the impression of deliberation and judgement. Today, such ceramics continue to function as tableware in households attached to traditional aesthetics, as gifts expressing cultural affiliation, and as collected objects valued for their enduring recognisability. Marginea, by contrast, speaks in the restrained language of black ceramics. Its attraction lies in form, surface and proportion rather than colour. The resulting objects often appear strikingly modern, though their modernity derives from clarity and reduction rather than innovation. With their satin-like surfaces and sculptural silhouettes, Marginea vessels possess an architectural gravity. Decoration, when present, is subtle and textural, never competing with contour. In contemporary contexts, such pieces are favoured for understated interiors, serving ware with presence, and for visitors seeking a distinctly Romanian object free of overt ornament.





Corund represents the exuberant pole of Romania's pottery. Its painted tradition is festive, generous, and immediately hospitable. Richly decorated surfaces feature floral and zoomorphic motifs arranged with disciplined abundance. Although visually lively, the style is governed by a shared communal grammar that discourages arbitrary invention. This coherence encourages the use of sets and series, where repetition becomes part of the pleasure. Today, Corund pottery thrives as household tableware for gatherings, as souvenirs that retain craft authenticity, and as decorative collections defined by rhythmic consistency.

Beyond these centres stretches a remarkably diverse ceramic landscape. Transylvanian traditions often favour balanced ornamentation and compositional poise, while Moldavian and northern practices display a strong local character in terms of both form and motif. In Banat and western regions, historical influences shape ceramic vocabularies, and in Maramureş, pottery exists in dialogue with wood carving and textile traditions, forming part of a broader material culture rather than standing alone.

Craft, identity and social continuity

Heritage is not merely inherited; it is practised. In Romanian clay arts, continuity is maintained through repetition of studio routines, the training of apprentices, and public evaluation at fairs, markets and exhibitions. Such events act as civic stages where criteria of quality are rehearsed and reaffirmed. They are arenas not only of display but of judgement.

Safeguarding, therefore, must be understood as enabling viability rather than freezing form. Living heritage adapts to new markets, tools and tastes. The essential question is whether change remains guided by communities of practice and whether transmission is robust enough to produce competent makers rather than surface imitation. Pottery, like any skilled craft, tolerates

evolution only when it is anchored in mastery.

Contemporary challenges are familiar. Master artisans age, while apprenticeship loses appeal in comparison with more lucrative occupations. Mass-produced imitations distort public perception of skill, and tourism can tempt workshops towards performative speed at the expense of sustained training. While markets may support visibility, they can also erode standards if demand overtakes discipline.

Effective safeguarding begins with recognising craft as knowledge. Documentation alone is insufficient, since recording techniques do not transmit judgement. Research must be paired with opportunities for learning by doing, and promotion must not replace apprenticeship. Education matters most when it creates structured pathways into real workshops, under real conditions, guided by experienced practitioners who uphold demanding standards.

Museums can play a particularly constructive role when they move beyond passive collecting. By inviting artisans to demonstrate processes, teach workshops, advise on interpretation, and engage younger audiences, museums can bridge the divide between heritage as a display and heritage as a practice. In such contexts, collections cease to be static residues and instead become active teaching tools and repositories of technical memory.

Valahia University of Târgoviște and its role in intangible heritage

Within this broader landscape, Valahia University of Târgoviște, as a member of the KreativEU alliance, contributes through its doctoral programmes in history and heritage studies, developed also in the framework of the UNESCO UNITWIN Network for Heritage Preservation, Science and Communication for Sustainable Communities.

Here, intangible cultural heritage is approached as a rigorous field requiring methodological care and ethical responsibility. Partnerships with museum professionals and communities of makers help ensure that research remains grounded in living practice and that safeguarding strategies support genuine transmission rather than symbolic preservation.

Conclusion: earth, fire and the continuity of meaning

Romanian clay arts endure not merely because their objects are admired, but because they embody living systems of knowledge in which material skill, aesthetic judgement and social order converge. As intangible cultural heritage, pottery calls for safeguarding that protects the intelligence of the practice itself – apprenticeship, discipline and shared standards – so that the wheel keeps turning as a serious cultural act rather than a decorative illusion, knowledge patiently shaped in earth and fire.

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Such events are arenas not only of display but of judgement.

AI, Art and the Question of Cultural Memory

How and why a Breda collective and BUas students turned AI's inner life into immersive art

Marisa de Brito
& Licia Calvi



Marisa de Brito and Licia Calvi are lecturers and researchers at BUas. Marisa specialises in creative placemaking, cultural heritage, engagement, memory and resilience; Licia in digital storytelling and heritage studies, with a particular focus on museum studies and creative placemaking.

Step into a space where human and machine perception meet in the mirror. A gaze becomes dialogue. In Latent Space, AI observes how your eyes trace your reflection – reading rhythm, focus and drift – translating attention into a digital exchange with your algorithmic counterpart. Light shifts; patterns pulse and reform, rendering the invisible act of looking suddenly, strangely visible.

This immersive installation by Studio KASBOEK, created with Breda University of Applied Sciences (BUas), poses a deceptively simple question: when a machine reads your gaze and generates meaning, whose perception is really at work? It is a question that resonates at every scale: in a studio in Breda, across a European university alliance, and in the broadest conversation humanity is having about intelligence, culture and what it means to be human.

A collective born from shared notebooks
Studio KASBOEK is a trio of Breda-based interdisciplinary artists – Cathalijne Postma, Debbie van Berkel and Jojanneke Postma – who have worked together since 2008. The name carries the origin story: three artists from different art academies who began mailing each other *kasboek* notebooks – ledgers of ideas, sketches and half-formed thoughts – and dedicating a fixed weekly day to bringing them to life. From that ritual, a studio was born.

Their practice operates in liminal space: the threshold where the physical and the digital blur, perception is never quite fixed, and the viewer shifts from observer to participant. Working with light, colour and movement, the studio has developed a conceptual framework – R.E.T.I.N.A. (Reality, Evolving, Technological, Inner, Neural, Adaptation) – that guides their

exploration of how technology shapes the way we interpret the world.

Latent Space is the latest expression of that framework: a project in which AI functions not as a tool for producing answers, but as a reflective system that gains meaning through interaction with the viewer. The installation adapts in real time to human presence, making every encounter unique – and, deliberately, unpredictable.

The invisible made perceptible

The concept at the heart of the project is borrowed from machine learning: latent space, the invisible multidimensional structure within an AI model where concepts and relationships are encoded – not as words, but as abstract patterns of connection. When an AI processes the word 'dog', it does not retrieve a definition; it activates a web of associations: bone, bark, loyalty, mammal, pet. The system thinks, in a sense, without language.

Studio KASBOEK became fascinated by what this means for human experience. Early AI systems moved linearly – input in, output out. More recent models loop back, reconsider and self-correct: less marble run, more snooker table, every angle weighed before the shot is played. This shift is not merely technical – it is philosophical. How do we trust – and evaluate – a system whose process remains invisible? Latent Space sets out to make that invisible process perceptible – not through data visualisation or scientific explanation, but through art: the language of sensation and open interpretation. It fits naturally within Breda's ambitions as a City of Creative Talent, with art and technology at the centre of its cultural strategy for 2025–2040.

"We wanted to create an experience that sparks curiosity about AI's role in our lives,

prompting us to consider how machines might 'see' us and what that reveals about ourselves – and the nature of understanding itself."
- KASBOEK Collective

A European connection: art, heritage and creative potential

Studio KASBOEK is an Associated Partner of KreatiefEU, a European alliance that places the creative potential embedded in Europe's cultural heritage at the centre of teaching, research and knowledge exchange, exploring ecocultural identities and the relationship between communities and their heritage.

The Latent Space collaboration sits squarely within that mission. BUas students from Applied Data Science & Artificial Intelligence worked directly alongside the artists, contributing to real-time data analysis, sensor integration and the ethical dimensions of the AI systems involved.

For the Places & Flows research unit at BUas, this embodied something central to both the

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The installation adapts in real time to human presence, making every encounter unique – and, deliberately, unpredictable.

institute's educational philosophy and KreativEU's broader approach: students placed inside a live research process, navigating questions with no predetermined answers – about how AI interprets abstract input, and what ethical responsibility looks like when a machine generates meaning in real time.

As an Associated Partner, Studio KASBOEK brought the KreativEU alliance something distinctive: a model of arts practice that treats AI not as a shortcut or content generator, but as a subject for serious artistic and ethical scrutiny. In a European context shaped by the EU AI Act and growing debate about algorithmic governance, that critical artistic voice has genuine relevance.

A universal question: who is perceiving whom?

Cultural heritage has always been shaped by its tools: from oral tradition to manuscript, photograph to digital archive. AI represents a qualitatively different kind of cultural actor – one that accumulates associations, generates interpretations and, in systems like those explored in Latent Space, begins to reflect on its own outputs.

The algorithms shaping what we see online, the recommendation systems curating our cultural consumption, the generative models producing images and text now circulating widely: these are already part of the cultural fabric that will be passed on. The question Latent Space forces to the surface is whether that inheritance is one we are making consciously – or one that is simply happening to us.

Human perception has always been mediated: by language, by culture, by the technologies of a given era. AI introduces a mediator whose inner logic remains opaque even to its creators. Studio KASBOEK's instinct is that art – with its capacity for ambiguity and its invitation to experience rather than explain – may be better equipped than any other discipline to hold that complexity up to examination.

"For us as artists, it is essential to open up these systems, make them visible and show how meaning is constructed, and to invite a more critical awareness. The question is not only what we create, but what kind of conditions for seeing we leave behind."

- KASBOEK Collective

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A model of arts practice that treats AI as a subject for serious artistic and ethical scrutiny.

An open question, not a conclusion

Latent Space – combining eye-tracking, reflection, sound and real-time AI response – has now been presented to audiences. Each encounter is different, shaped by the presence and movement of whoever is in the room.

The project does not resolve the questions it raises about perception, trust and the cultural role of artificial intelligence. It makes them inhabitable – modelling something art has always known: that the most important questions are not the ones with answers, but the ones that keep generating new ways of looking.

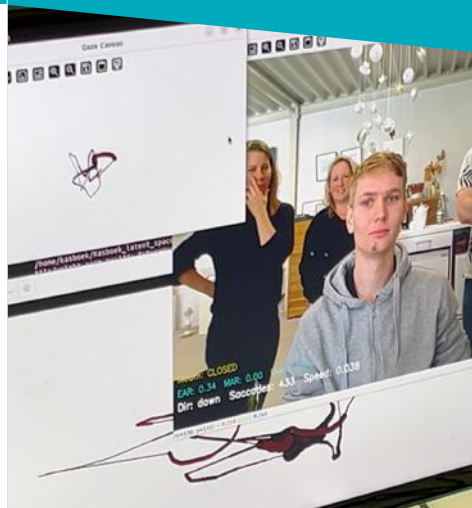
Special thanks

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Photography
• KASBOEK

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BUas students from Applied Data Science & Artificial Intelligence worked directly alongside the artists.



Preparing Leisure and Tourism for Tomorrow

How PANTOUR is reskilling and upskilling Europe's largest service sector

Corné Dijkmans

Corné Dijkmans is Research and Business Innovation Manager at Academy for Tourism at BUAs.

Think of an event manager who is insufficiently trained to measure (let alone reduce) the carbon footprint of the festivals she organises. A leisure professional who is passionate about his work but struggles to connect with increasingly diverse communities. A front desk employee who excels with guests, yet feels lost in a world of AI-driven booking systems and algorithmic pricing. These are not hypothetical cases. They point to a structural skills gap running through Europe's leisure and tourism sector, one that the PANTOUR project is designed to close.

The Leisure, Tourism and Hospitality (LTH) sector is one of Europe's largest employers, with over ten million people working across its ecosystem, from tiny guesthouses to major international airports, from festival & event organisers to online travel platforms. It is a sector that touches almost every dimension of everyday life: how we move, how we connect with other cultures, how communities earn their income, and increasingly, how we think about the environmental and social footprint of our choices as travellers.

Yet this same sector entered the 2020s in a state of disruption. COVID-19 devastated it almost overnight, wiping out jobs and revenues that took years to recover. The digital transition had already been reshaping how leisure & travel is bought and sold, but the pandemic compressed a decade of change into two years. At the same time, the urgency of the climate crisis and the EU's Green Deal began placing entirely new expectations on businesses and their workers. And through all of this, one uncomfortable truth kept surfacing: the people working in leisure and tourism (and the institutions training them) were not adequately equipped for the world that was arriving.

This is the problem that the PANTOUR project sets out to address. Not with a quick fix, but with a sustained, Europe-wide investment in the skills the sector actually needs.

What is PANTOUR aiming for?

The four-year PANTOUR project (*Pact for Next Tourism Generation Skills*) brings together leisure, hospitality & tourism employers, industry associations and universities from ten countries, along with transnational sector associations, to map digital, green, and social skills gaps in a European context. This is the first time this has been done at this scale, with solutions actively implemented. It aligns with the *European Transition Pathway strategy*, which calls on sectors, businesses and institutions to commit to upskilling and reskilling on sustainability and digitalisation. Breda University of Applied Sciences (BUAs) leads the project's research and communication activities. In this role, BUAs sits at the analytical and communicative core of PANTOUR, producing the evidence base and translating it into insights for practitioners, policy-makers, employers and educators across Europe.

The skills gap: bigger than it looks

What exactly do we mean when we speak of 'skills gaps in leisure and tourism'? The sector is sometimes caricatured as 'low-skill and high-turnover', a place people pass through rather than where they build careers in. PANTOUR challenges that perception head-on. In reality, leisure and tourism is an extraordinarily complex ecosystem. It spans accommodation, food and beverage, transport, cultural attractions, events, destination management, and increasingly, digital platforms and the collaborative economy. Each of these areas is being reshaped by three major forces: digitalisation, the sustainability transition, and broader social/cultural change.

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The sector is sometimes caricatured as 'low-skill and high-turnover', a place people pass through rather than where they build careers.

PANTOUR structures its skills agenda around three interconnected skills sets: digital, green and social.

Digital skills are perhaps the most visible pressure points. Even small tourism businesses, from local tour operators to event organisers, are now expected to manage online distribution, work with data, navigate AI-driven booking platforms, and engage customers across multiple digital channels. Yet for many workers and SMEs, especially in less-urbanised regions, even basic digital competencies remain underdeveloped. Skills in data management, augmented reality, and AI systems are no longer futuristic; they are becoming operational realities. As a result, the gap between what is needed and what the current workforce can offer continues to widen.

Green skills are where PANTOUR intersects most directly with the sustainability transition. Tourism has a significant environmental footprint, from transport-related emissions to energy and water use in hospitality, and waste generated

The changing landscape in tourism careers employment and skills



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Strong Recruitment



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PANTOUR/CELTH



visitor flows.

At the same time, the EU *Green Deal* is rapidly reshaping the regulatory landscape. Businesses increasingly need workers who understand sustainability reporting, circular practices, low-carbon service design, and how to communicate these efforts to a more environmentally conscious traveller. Crucially, green skills are not just a niche for specialists: they must be embedded across all roles, from a housekeeper dealing with linen and cleaning agents, to a destination manager designing visitor flow strategies that reduce pressure on fragile ecosystems.

Social skills might seem less urgent than digitalisation or implementing sustainable practices, but they are just as critical. In a sector built on human experience, the ability to communicate across cultures, show empathy, solve problems creatively, and collaborate in diverse teams is foundational. Paradoxically, as digital interfaces take over more interactions, the human moments that remain become more, not less, important. The emotional intelligence and intercultural competence of a frontline worker is often what turns a satisfactory visit into a memorable one.

These three skills sets do not operate in isolation. A sustainable destination depends on professionals who can interpret energy data (digital), implement waste reduction practices (green), and engage communities and visitors in ways that build local pride rather than resentment (social).

Turning insights into action

Understanding skills gaps is useful. Building the infrastructure to address them continuously is transformational. This is where PANTOUR's practical design matters.

At the heart of this design is the *Sectoral Skills Intelligence Monitor (SSIM)*, developed under the leadership of BUAs. Rather than a one-time study, it is designed as a 'living' methodology. It provides a flexible methodology toolkit

(usable at local, regional or national level) that allows stakeholders to continuously track emerging skills needs, identify shifts in occupational profiles, and adapt training accordingly. Data and insights can be compared across countries, giving European policy-makers a clear picture of where the sector's human capital needs are heading.

Feeding into the SSIM are the *National and Regional Skills Partnerships* in every country, connecting employers, training providers, and public authorities at the ground level — precisely the 'triple helix' collaboration that makes skills policy actually work in practice, rather than remaining an abstract idea in a Brussels context only.

For practitioners and training providers, PANTOUR produces concrete resources: the first *European Tourism Skills Lab*, *Skills Training Programmes* for digital, green and social skills, a *Resource Book for Trainers and Educators*, updated *Occupational Profiles*, and a comprehensive

Skills Strategy

Plan for 2026-2036. The last is particularly significant: it offers the leisure & tourism sector a horizon from which job roles will grow, which ones will transform, and which ones may disappear, giving educators and companies enough time to adapt curricula and career pathways.

PANTOUR and broad prosperity

Leisure, tourism and hospitality have the potential to contribute to broad prosperity, but only when the sector is supported by the right skills. In regions often overlooked by mainstream development, such as rural areas, coastal communities, cultural heritage sites and outermost regions, tourism can either bring opportunity and prosperity or drive extraction and degradation. The difference lies for an important part in the capabilities of the workforce.

Green skills help reduce environmental impact. Social and cultural competences ensure that tourism strengthens rather than erodes local identity. Digital skills allow small and medium-sized enterprises to compete, keeping economic value within communities instead of losing it to global platforms. In this way, skills are not just an individual asset, but a key driver for achieving more inclusive, digital and sustainable forms of tourism, leisure and hospitality.

Through its role in PANTOUR, BUAs positions itself as a driver of this transformation, linking skills development to the broader goal of creating a more resilient and equitable tourism, leisure and hospitality sector across Europe.

More information

- For all results of this project about skills development in leisure & tourism, please visit <https://nexttourismgeneration.eu/pantour>

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PANTOUR structures its skills agenda around three interconnected skills sets: digital, green and social.

Who Is Luxury for?

How Nîmes is turning high-end tourism into a local asset

Andrew Shaw
& Charlotte Dumougin



Andrew Shaw and Charlotte Dumougin are lecturers of leisure and events management at BUAs. Andrew specialises in urban leisure practices and Charlotte has a background in PR, as well as being a Nîmes native.

Visitors to the centre of Nîmes, in southern France, get to experience the very best of what the region has to offer. The city boasts an incredibly well-preserved Roman amphitheatre, indicative of the city's important historical role. Guests can dine in any number of high-end restaurants, multiple with Michelin Star status. All this in a compact, walkable and safe city, set in beautiful countryside and with charming architecture. Over the past decade, the city has deliberately chosen to try to attract fewer, but better visitors. Visitors who stay longer, spend more, eat in local restaurants, buy local wine, and visit museums on the quieter days. From the tourism office's perspective, the benefits are clear. Whether the average resident of Nîmes sees the strategy in the same positive light is more complicated.

"It's funny, because 'luxury' doesn't naturally match Nîmes in my mind. But recently, cosmetic and fashion brands have opened here, giving the city a more luxurious feel." (Local resident)

Nîmes' location means it is surrounded by some tough competition for tourist attention. Two hours from Barcelona, an hour from Marseille, and often overshadowed by Montpellier, a university town that has positioned itself as a young, creative, and digitally connected city. Avignon, just 30 kilometres east, has its long-running cultural festival and a papal palace. Arles has focused itself on contemporary art and the LUMA Foundation, attracting a wealthy international audience willing to spend money. In this competitive landscape, Nîmes has taken a different path.

The Nîmes strategy

While Nîmes is already well established as a destination with exceptional Roman heritage,

anchored by the baseline 'All Roads Lead to Nîmes', a deliberate nod to Rome, the city's strategy focuses on layering heritage, gastronomy, lifestyle, and authentic experience, combined into a proposition aimed at visitors who are not looking for a package, but for a place. The goal is not to overshadow the Roman narrative, but to enrich it and turn Nîmes from a one-day heritage stop into a full, multi-layered destination worth lingering in.

This is framed as premium leisure tourism: attracting higher-value visitors through high-quality amenities and deeper engagement with local culture. In practical terms, this means investing in the things that make tourists want to stay longer, such as a bustling and beautiful city centre, partnerships with local food and wine producers, and a calendar of events that gives visitors a reason to return.

Crucially, several of these initiatives serve residents as directly as they serve visitors. The pedestrianisation of Boulevard Victor Hugo during events, and the showcase of local

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The ambition of Nîmes is not to reduce visitors, but to reshape who comes, for how long, and how deeply they engage with the city.



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Can premium leisure tourism actually reach the neighbourhoods and residents beyond the postcard photo locations?

gastronomy through Costières de Nîmes, for example, give residents access to their own city in new ways, while simultaneously generating the kind of authentic local atmosphere that premium visitors are seeking.

Balancing premium tourism and everyday urban life

We know from established theory that when tourism is at its most sustainable, it incorporates local communities in activities and locations, rather than using local heritage as a backdrop. Researchers like Greg Richards have long argued that when tourism is anchored in genuine local culture, the economic and social returns increase (Richards, 2021). The question is whether premium leisure tourism, which is often focused on heritage zones and high-end accommodation, can actually reach the neighbourhoods and residents beyond the postcard photo locations.

In Nîmes, the results are mixed. The city's 2025 tourism figures show that nearly half of all museum visitors at sites like the Carré d'Art and the Musée de la Romanité are local residents from the city and the wider region. In this sense, cultural infrastructure built to attract international visitors is, in practice, also serving the people who live there. Other initiatives serve residents as directly as they serve visitors: pedestrianisation of the city centre, investments in renovation, cultural events during peak season. The JeuDivins partnership with Costières de Nîmes, which brings local wine producers directly into city centre events, offers an example of tourism spending connecting to the local agricultural economy rather than bypassing it.

"The city centre has revived through renovations, pedestrianisation, and better public transport, making it more accessible." (Local resident)

But premium tourism will always be driven towards the city centre. The clustering of the Roman city with the designer hotels and gastronomy tends to leave peripheral neighbourhoods untouched, or worse, under pressure from gentrification, such as increased short-term rental accommodation pushing up rental and property prices. It cannot be assumed that communities automatically benefit from high visitor spending. It requires deliberate policy choices about where revenue is reinvested and who is included in planning decisions. As Claudio Milano and others have noted, the difference between tourism

as an economic benefit and tourism as an extractive element usually comes down to good governance (Milano et al., 2019).

"Nîmes cannot do without tourism, but there shouldn't be too large a gap between the tourist centre and the outskirts, or it could create frustration." (Local resident)

An educational opportunity

BUas Urban Life & Placemaking students examined the Nîmes case as part of their Place Branding course. Invited by the tourism office, they investigated local feelings surrounding the policy and contributed to developing a strategy that maximises local benefits. The tourism office welcomed the opportunity to gain an outside perspective and a broader view.

Based on resident interviews and analysis of the city's tourism data, students identified several ways to extend premium tourism beyond the historic centre. Students recognised the importance of enhancing tourism's impact in outlying neighbourhoods by nudging visitors to explore residential areas and seek independent local experiences. Focusing on ways to include the city's existing network of municipal local markets as anchors for a more authentic (and distributed) visitor experience was seen as another helpful strategy.

Whether the city acts on the students' input remains to be seen, but the exercise itself illustrates a broader point: a premium tourism strategy needs input and support from the communities it claims to benefit.

From the lecturer's perspective, the Nîmes case offers a great opportunity to challenge students to address multiple factors in a complicated situation. Students must understand both the local context and broader themes of luxury tourism and local impact. Engaging with such challenges prepares them well for an increasingly complicated leisure and tourism environment.

"It's a path the current municipality has chosen. For me, after more than 30 years here, 'luxury' and 'Nîmes' don't fully go together yet." (Local resident)

Broader implications

The overtourism debate has largely been centred on large cities like Amsterdam, Barcelona or Venice, where visitor numbers have considerably affected the lives of locals, where residents have taken to the streets, and local governments have implemented broad policy instruments like tourist taxes, banning Airbnb or cruise ships. Nîmes is a different scale, and its luxury strategy reflects that. The ambition is not to reduce visitors, but to reshape who comes, for how long, and how deeply they engage with the city. Such a tourism strategy would serve as a lever for a more equitable redistribution of economic benefits across the local ecosystem.

Alignment between tourism development and local economic inclusion strengthens both the social case and the long-term sustainability of the strategy. The JeuDivins/Costières de Nîmes partnership is a small, but replicable example of tourism revenue finding its way to local producers, rather than international hotel chains.

For other mid-sized European cities with significant heritage assets, the potential lesson is to think of luxury not as an aesthetic, but in terms of the broader value that high-end tourism can bring.



Ultimately, this all focuses on the broader question of governance. Premium tourism strategies require active reinvestment policies, not just attractive branding. The extent to which the benefits of Nîmes' approaches are extending into neighbourhoods, local employment, and public space, remains the measurement by which any such strategy should ultimately be judged.

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Premium tourism strategies require active reinvestment policies, not just attractive branding.

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Photography

- OT Nîmes (page 40 top)
- M. Fasol (page 40 bottom)
- Charlotte Demougin (page 41)

Hidden in Plain Sight

Jewish cultural heritage, sustainable tourism, and the diversity of European memory

Licia Calvi



Licia Calvi is a senior lecturer and researcher at Breda University of Applied Sciences. She specialises in digital storytelling and heritage studies.

Cultural heritage has never been a static archive: It breathes, shifts, and acquires new meaning as the societies that carry it change. In recent decades, this understanding has moved from scholarly consensus to policy reality: the Council of Europe's Faro Convention (2005) formally repositioned heritage preservation away from objects and monuments towards the meanings they hold within a bearer community and the dialogical dynamics they enhance in it. Cultural heritage, in this framework, is not simply what survives from the past, it is what living communities choose to remember, transmit and act upon.

JEWELS TOUR

Jewish Cultural Heritage in Europe sits at a particularly charged intersection of this debate. It is an integral part of our European shared history and yet, it is one of its most endangered legacies: the tangible Jewish heritage - synagogues, cemeteries, former ghetto quarters - is under material threat across the continent, while its intangible counterpart, spanning over the practices, memories, oral traditions, and living cultural expressions of Jewish communities, remains largely invisible in mainstream tourism and heritage narratives. JEWELS TOUR (JEWish hEritage as Leverage for Sustainable TOURism) is a European project which addresses both dimensions, offering compelling case studies and inspiring good practices in what sustainable, community-centred heritage valorisation can look like in practice. Funded by Interreg Europe, the project brings together public authorities and local organisations from six European cities with a documented Jewish presence: Coimbra (Portugal), Erfurt (Germany), Ferrara (Italy), Lviv (Ukraine), Lublin (Poland), and Riga (Latvia). BUas has joined it as an advisory partner since its launch in 2024 with an interdisciplinary team.

What sustainability really means for heritage tourism

The word *sustainable* has been used so broadly in tourism discourse that it risks becoming an empty concept. In the context of JEWELS TOUR, whose full title foregrounds the term, sustainability carries a multi-layered meaning. Sustainable valorisation, as the project defines it, must generate cultural and social benefits alongside economic ones. It must be transferable: producing models and practices that can outlast project funding. And it must be *equitable*: ensuring that the communities whose heritage is being valorised have genuine agency in shaping the narratives presented to the world.

This last dimension is perhaps the most demanding one. Research has consistently shown that heritage professionals, however well-intentioned, can become what Diego Rinallo (2020) calls 'gatekeepers' - experts whose assessments inadvertently legitimise certain stories and communities while marginalising others. JEWELS TOUR responds to this risk by insisting on broad, cross-sectoral stakeholder engagement that extends well beyond the local Jewish community, tourism offices, and heritage managers to include the wider non-Jewish population, diaspora communities, and individuals reconnecting to their roots and family origins.

Sustainability, in this sense, is not only ecological or economic - it is also *narrative*: ensuring that the stories told about Jewish heritage are inclusive, contested where necessary, and capable of resonating across generations and places.

Six cities, six ecosystems

One of the most instructive aspects of JEWELS TOUR is precisely the diversity it holds together. The six participating cities span the continent geographically and politically, range widely

in the size and visibility of their historical Jewish communities, and face very different challenges in making that heritage visible and accessible. Yet, across this diversity, shared themes emerge, and the tension between the local and the common is itself one of the project's most generative dynamics.

All six cities are experiencing growth in tourism, including international visitors, which sharpens the need for a heritage offer that is both attractive and accessible to diverse audiences. For some cities, Ferrara and Riga among them, this growth in visitors runs paradoxically alongside a decline in resident population, making the question of whose heritage is being valorised, and for whom, all the more pressing.

Coimbra

Coimbra's Jewish history reaches back at least to the ninth century, making it one of the oldest documented Jewish presences in Portugal. The discovery in 2013 of a Jewish ritual purification bath - a *Mikveh* - at the edge of the old Jewish quarter, the *Judiaria*, originally located on the outskirts of the walled city, has opened up possibilities for both scholarly research and heritage tourism.

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Having a prestigious heritage asset does not automatically translate into a rich, layered tourism offer.

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Sustainable valorisation must generate cultural and social benefits alongside economic ones.

Coimbra's participation in the project has centred on the development of *competitive place-based tourism products* rooting the visitor experience in the specific texture of the city's Jewish history, like the creation of a dedicated touristic product around the recently discovered Mikveh. These products should diversify, qualify, and consolidate Jewish tourism at a moment when interest in Jewish history across the Iberian Peninsula has grown significantly following broader recognition of Sephardic heritage across Portugal and Spain. Storytelling is seen as the key element here. The municipality aims at the development of an *ad hoc* storytelling-driven training programme for guides and tourism agents.

Erfurt

Erfurt brings to the project an exceptional asset: its medieval Jewish heritage was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2023. The Old Synagogue, dating from around 1100, is one of the oldest, best-preserved and the largest surviving testimonies of Jewish presence north of the Alps.

The city's priorities within JEWELS TOUR focus on *uplifting the overall visitor experience* and improving the *visibility of the territory* by developing *digital tools* and adopting *diversified approaches* to promoting Jewish heritage. This points to a recognisable challenge: having a prestigious heritage asset does not automatically translate into a rich, layered tourism offer, even if visitor numbers have continued to rise since UNESCO inscription. But the deeper stories - the living practices, the post-war community, the contemporary Jewish presence in Erfurt - risk being overshadowed by the medieval monument.

Ferrara

Ferrara's Jewish community is one of the oldest in Italy. The city retains a substantial material legacy comprising a historic ghetto, four synagogues (one of the oldest active synagogues in Italy), two Jewish cemeteries, and the recently opened (2017) Museum of Italian Judaism and the Shoah (MEIS). Yet, despite these assets, the Jewish dimension of the city is often understated in tourism narratives that foreground its Renaissance heritage and UNESCO designation. Jewish key sites remain visually marginal: the ghetto boundaries nearly invisible, the synagogue complex sealed following earthquake damage, the cemeteries peripheral and under-signposted.

Within JEWELS TOUR, Ferrara's ambitions reach beyond the already-known: its priorities include the digitisation of the Jewish community's historical archive to document, share, and communicate local Jewish heritage, the use of AI and big data for heritage access, and the development of slow tourism itineraries for peripheral areas. A ten-episode podcast, *Discover Jewish Ferrara*, narrated by multiple voices from across the city's Jewish heritage ecosystem, exemplifies the storytelling approach the project advocates.

This dual focus on the digital and the peripheral captures something important about what sustainable valorisation might look like: not just making existing narratives more visible online, but using digital tools to surface stories that have never entered the mainstream narrative at all.

Lviv

Lviv was home to one of the largest and most vibrant Jewish communities in pre-war Central Europe. The Holocaust effectively erased that community, and decades of Soviet rule subsequently suppressed much of what remained of Jewish memory in the public space. Of what remained of the city's many synagogues and Jewish community buildings, most were destroyed during the recent war.

In this project, Lviv focuses on the *coexistence of different narratives* to strengthen the city image of a *multicultural meeting point*. The development of multicultural narratives reflects the particular complexity of this context. Telling hidden stories here involves not only accessibility and digital innovation but also confronting a deeply contested past and negotiating whose account of that past is acknowledged and legitimised. An example of this is the current *RE:FRAME LILien* poster competition open to young artists and designers, to reimagine the artistic heritage of Ephraim Moses Lilien, a prominent Jewish illustrator who reinterpreted traditional Jewish motifs as universal metaphors for national resilience.

Lublin

Lublin's Jewish history is one of the richest in Central Europe. From the fourteenth century onwards, the city became a major centre of Jewish life. Today, Lublin's Jewish community numbers only a few dozen people.

Within the project, Lublin aims at the development of an approach to the valorisation of Jewish heritage that is based on *responsible storytelling*, one where storytelling becomes the tool to strengthen connections among heritage, memory, and education by *enlarging and strengthening the ecosystem of stakeholders* (guides, educators, Jewish institutions, cultural organisations) involved in valorising it. In this respect, the Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre has become an internationally recognised model of how cultural institutions can recover and transmit memory in a participatory, community-based way, for example by cultivating traditions such as Jewish cuisine - most notably the *cebularz*, the onion bread that has become a symbol of the city's multicultural past.

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All cities are experiencing growth in tourism, which sharpens the need for a heritage offer that is both attractive and accessible to diverse audiences.

Riga

Riga's Jewish heritage spans centuries, from the formation of the city's Jewish community in the eighteenth century through to the near-total destruction of that community during the Nazi occupation. Today, Riga's Jewish community numbers over 8,000, the largest in the Baltic states. Riga has one only surviving synagogue, the Museum of the Riga Ghetto and Holocaust in Latvia and the Žanis Lipke Memorial.

Within JEWELS TOUR, Riga has prioritised *accessibility and knowledge sharing through stakeholder cooperation*, to develop a unified knowledge base to valorise Jewish heritage through a deeper community engagement strengthening the connection between tourist guides and the Jewish community. A unique example of this is the work of Rabbi Eliyohu Krumers of the Peitav Shul Synagogue, who guides tours for both tourists and locals including Kosher food tastings to promote understanding of Jewish culture and of the daily functioning of the synagogue.



Responsible storytelling and the digital turn

Across all six cities, two themes recur with particular force: the need for responsible storytelling and the potential of digital technology to support it. Storytelling, as JEWELS TOUR frames it, is not simply a communication technique, it is an ethical and a political act. Which stories get told, and by whom, in whose voice, and with what degree of critical awareness of the telling itself, determines whose heritage is recognised, whose community is legitimised, and what version of the past is passed on to future generations. The project's emphasis on *responsible* storytelling reflects an understanding that the hidden stories of Jewish heritage cannot simply be extracted and packaged for tourism consumption. They must be recovered through genuine dialogue with the communities that hold them, told within the physical and social spaces where they are rooted, and offered to audiences with enough context to be understood in their full complexity.

Digital technology is central to this work, but not as a replacement for human engagement. Rather, as Bec and colleagues (2019) have argued in the context of immersive heritage experiences, digital tools can help 'normalise dissonant memories' by supplying the context that transforms an unfamiliar or uncomfortable fragment of the past into something that can be understood, questioned and debated. Augmented reality, interactive maps, oral history archives, and AI-driven discovery tools all offer ways to populate heritage narratives with the voices and perspectives that official histories have often excluded. As Harrison, Rose, and Sterling (2024) note these technologies open up new possibilities for *reinterpretation and renegotiation* of the past in public space - shifting the question of heritage from a fixed inheritance to a living legacy whose meaning is always, in part, still being made.

A model worth considering

JEWELS TOUR is, in one sense, a project about Jewish heritage. But in a deeper sense it is a project about how Europe might learn to hold its most difficult histories.



Not by smoothing them into comfortable narratives of memory and reconciliation, but by creating the conditions under which hidden, contested, and underrepresented stories can surface and enter into genuine dialogue with dominant ones.

The six cities gathered in this project represent an extraordinary cross-section of that difficulty: from the medieval Sephardic legacy of Coimbra to the devastated Ashkenazi communities of Lublin and Lviv; from the UNESCO-listed monuments of Erfurt to the slow tourism peripheries of Ferrara; from the recovering institutional landscape of Riga to the wartime pressures of Lviv. What they share is not a common heritage, exactly, but a common challenge, and a commitment to meeting it not with expert-led heritage management alone, but with the broader, messier, more equitable engagement that responsible valorisation demands.

If that commitment holds, JEWELS TOUR may yet offer something more than a model for Jewish heritage tourism. It may offer a direction for how cultural heritage, thoughtfully valorised, can contribute to the kind of Europe that the Faro Convention imagined: one in which heritage is understood not as a possession to be protected, but as a shared resource to be actively, critically and collectively inhabited.

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Across all six cities, two themes recur with particular force: the need for responsible storytelling and the potential of digital technology to support it.

More information

- www.interregeurope.eu/jewels-tour

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Photography

- Michael Sander - Creative Commons (page 44 top)



15 Years of Collaboration with Europa-Park

Broadening the scope of challenges through time

Klaus Hoven

Klaus Hoven is a lecturer in Attractions & Theme Parks Management at Breda University of Applied Sciences.

In this festive year of celebrating 60 years of BUAs, it is great to reflect on the meaningful collaborations that have been established over the years. The Attractions & Theme Parks Management (ATPM) track has made new collaborations with many national and international industry partners. From the beginning, Europa-Park, Germany's largest park operator, has been a strong partner in education and research. In this article, we reflect on the milestones achieved, the valuable experiences gained and the new challenges ahead.

Positioning Europa-Park in the Benelux countries

In 2025, we celebrated our 15-year collaboration anniversary with Europa-Park. The partnership started with marketing-related educational projects in the former specialisation of Theme Parks Management (TPM). These projects aimed to increase brand awareness and establish a

stronger brand position in the Benelux markets, under the guidance of Europa-Park's marketing officer Henk Groenen. The very first project examined the role of social media (remember Hyves?) and the development of online fan communities. Every year, the focus shifted slightly to better align with current marketing trends or changing travel behaviour (as occurred during the Corona pandemic). With the integration of quantitative research, students were able to send out online surveys to track awareness numbers and preferred travel options. We observed a shift in preference from budget travel (campsites and nearby B&Bs) to staying at Europa-Park's resort hotels, with visits to both the theme park and the water park Rulantica, making it a complete short-stay holiday at a premium theme park destination. These projects are a good example of the mutual value that characterises the partnership.

Henk Groenen reflects on this mutual value: "We are always happy to invest the time to

bring theory to life through our practical experience. By sharing what we encounter in the field, we hope to provide context that goes beyond the classroom. At the same time, we gain just as much from the students as they do from us. Their questions and fresh perspectives often challenge us to look at familiar issues in new ways. Sometimes they even lead us to reflect on our own decisions and reconsider why we do things the way we do. That process is incredibly valuable. Students keep us sharp, inspire new ideas, and help drive continuous improvement."

In addition to the marketing projects, the collaboration deepened when we became a strategic partner in the fourth-year minors of Storytelling & Experiences and, more recently, Design & Strategies for Themed Entertainment. From the first social media projects in 2011, we learned that the results often provided different departments with new strategic insights. For example, the results of the social media project contributed to the decision to hire more online marketers for the marketing department at Europa-Park. Gradually, trust grew between BUAs and Europa-Park, resulting in more challenging projects.

Opening of the Molencafé

In academic year 2014-2015, a group of students was tasked with designing a live, Dutch-themed cooking food and beverage experience. They delivered a complete design for a 'poffertjes' outlet, including seasonal offerings, a detailed operational handbook, and a business case. Bart Stadhouders (lecturer at BUAs): "I remember that the students presented it the first time at our Sibeliuslaan location. They chose this location because of its kitchen facilities: they could serve warm 'poffertjes' with seasonal toppings during their final presentation. The result was stunning, as Henk Groenen first silently looked at us and then asked if he could go outside for ten minutes. When he returned, he asked if the students could give the same presentation at Europa-Park within two weeks!"





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Students keep us sharp, inspire new ideas, and help drive continuous improvement.

That happened, and three weeks later, we received confirmation that Europa-Park had decided to proceed with this project, albeit with changes to the design and theming. The Molencafé opened in April 2016, and the Breda students were invited to the opening. In retrospect, this proved to be a pivotal moment for the level and scale of projects we started to work on. The fact that Europa-Park dared to open this food and beverage outlet attracted a lot of attention from the broader industry. Not only did we work on similar projects, and other strategic issues for Europa-Park, but other industry partners also became interested in these kinds of collaborations, and in employing our alumni as future talent. Over the years, our relationship has grown stronger, and the bar of the project challenges was raised.

Experience Design & Sustainability

Most of the projects were related to the regeneration of attractions, themed areas, or food and beverage outlets. Examples include design challenges related to the French Quarter, the Geisterschloss, and the 4D Cinema, as well as rethinking the Camp Resort and the main entrance area based on crowd management simulations. Other projects focused on storytelling and concept creation for potential new experience products, as we did with the YULLBE VR attraction. Collaboration on these projects was primarily based on BUAs expertise and what we could deliver and expect from students. The creativity and passion of students was not only triggered by Europa-Park's brand and industry reputation, but also by the real-life components and the opportunities to conduct field research and attend dedicated workshops led by experts and employees.

In some projects, our students were challenged to consider sustainability issues alongside attraction design. For years, theme parks have not publicly communicated about sustainability towards their fans and guests. This does not mean that it is not part of their strategic agenda – quite the contrary. Europa-Park's strategy is based on all ESG pillars. For years, social charity projects have been supported to ensure that families in need can also afford to visit the park. The same goes for social organisations representing guests with special needs. Key sustainability initiatives also include the generation of large amounts of renewable energy, rigorous on-site waste recycling, eco-friendly construction materials, and integrated sustainable travel options for guests. The large solar facility in front of Rulantica and the block-heating stations across the resort, in particular, have proven to be a significant source of electricity and heating for Rulantica, the Krönasår hotel, and nearby administrative buildings.

In line with Europa-Park's sustainability efforts, we worked on two projects, the results and recommendations of which were well received. The first project related to the accessibility of the park for guests with physical, cognitive and sensory impairments. This project involved developing attraction safety definitions for these specific needs. Students conducted guest journey research and gave advice that resulted in the creation of an accessibility handbook, as well as tips to improve or create dedicated park maps and information tools for these target groups. As with previous projects, the internal project team took the input seriously. The second project focused on sustainable travel, particularly encouraging visitors from the Benelux countries to travel by train to the new Ringsheim/Europa-Park train station. In the ATPM Digital Marketing & Communication project, we researched this travel preference among Dutch consumers and developed potential travel packages and collaborations with Dutch tour operators.

Through these projects we gained a better understanding of the importance of sustainability in attractions management, and the need to integrate it more deeply into the ATPM curriculum. Under the BUAs Transversal Professorship in Sustainable Transitions, new intended learning outcomes have been formulated, which are now incorporated in the ATPM Industry Challenge. In this project, students focus on change and stakeholder management for a wide range of parks, zoos and

museums in relation to a sustainable challenge. This makes the students more aware of the strategic implications of sustainability for leisure organisations and encourages them to develop their own personal position and vision in relation to current societal issues. This contributes to their professional future orientation. It also challenges us, as BUAs educators, to envisage more long-term collaborations with European park operators in this field.

As for the projects with Europa-Park in the Design & Strategies for Future Entertainment minor, most projects nowadays are executed under strict non-disclosure agreements, while being supported internally by multidisciplinary teams. Although our focus remains on creating experiences through storytelling and theming, we are witnessing a shift towards responsible show production and interactive experiences, ideally generating sustainable business value.

Internships and graduation projects

Talented students were scouted during all these collaborations, so we also looked at opportunities for graduation projects, which are mainly carried out within Europa-Park/Benelux and Mack Emotioneers (formerly Mack Solutions), the in-house agency for show productions and theming. Bunyarit Hoff (ATPM student, Academy for Tourism) who is graduating at Mack Emotioneers: *"The practical projects at BUAs provided valuable experience in collaborating with real-world clients and industry partners. These experiences offered important insights into professional project work and stakeholder management, lessons that continue to support me in my current role and responsibilities."*

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The opening of the Molencafé proved to be a pivotal moment for the level and scale of projects we started to work on.





At the Rulantica water park, we have secured internships in operations and quality management. We are proud to see BUAs alumni developing their professional project management and experience design skills to a higher level. Others returned at a later stage in their careers and now work as team leaders in the park's day-to-day operations and on projects. BUAs alumnus Luc Denie (Theme Park Management, graduated in 2015) on why he loves his job: *"Rulantica is like a small town with different departments and disciplines. As the Quality Control Manager, I bring more structure into the organisation. One day I determine the quality standard for the hundreds of sunbeds, and the next day I implement new processes to increase capacity at the slides. It feels good when everything comes together at the right moment, and the guests can spend a carefree time at the water park."*

Value to Europa-Park

Michael Kreft von Byern: *"As Director of Rulantica, I highly value our collaboration with BUAs. Society is changing at an unprecedented pace, and our industry is evolving just as rapidly. To stay relevant, we need young, curious minds who challenge our thinking, inspire new ideas, and help us view our work from different perspectives. The students from Breda have consistently demonstrated an impressive ability to tackle complex challenges in a structured yet refreshingly creative way. They think beyond conventional solutions while grounding their ideas in sound reasoning and research. This is a combination we greatly appreciate. In day-to-day operations, it is easy to become absorbed in established routines. Working with students provides a valuable outside perspective, encouraging us to question assumptions, explore new possibilities, and continue evolving as an organisation."*

The future

We celebrate the milestones we have achieved together, at the same time we are also looking forward to what lies ahead. During a recent two-day visit to Europa-Park and Rulantica, the ATPM team and the Academy Director of Leisure & Events, Ajay Kapur, had meaningful conversations with the park directors and owner Roland Mack. We learned more about the current challenges Europa-Park faces in terms of labour recruitment and employment. The park has invested in a new international recruitment strategy that includes the Mack Academy, which offers adapted vocational training programmes,

additional housing and campus facilities for international employees, and lifestyle initiatives to improve employee well-being. We also discussed the need for programmes like ATPM to address current challenges and changes in consumption patterns and travel behaviour of European guests. There is a sense of urgency to thoroughly consider the impact on sustaining and adapting the attraction business model while incorporating immersive experiences.

We are working together to find opportunities for more BUAs students (from all domains) who would like to gain practical work experience in a dynamic, intercultural environment. One great initiative is the Eurosummer Programme, which allows students from across Europe to combine work and adventure in an international setting. They can experience working in a theme or water park and take a behind-the-scenes look at the Europa-Park Resort. Students reside in a unique camp equipped with tiny houses and facilities for hosting intercultural networking events. Such experiences can also inspire students to develop new skills and competencies, helping them to become the next generation of attraction professionals. For BUAs, this means fostering strategic partnerships, such as the one with Europa-Park, and discussing and aligning learning outcomes with desired professional profiles. It also means

involving students, letting them debate and find solutions for a constantly changing industry.

In the case of Europa-Park, it would be a great opportunity to discuss this while following EU strategies to develop European skills and translate them into strong, industry-connected educational programmes at professional bachelor's and master's level. We are grateful for Europa-Park's continued support in designing the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master's programme, IDEAS (Innovative Design for Themed Entertainment and Attractions for Sustainability), as a strategic industry partner. The IDEAS master's provides an opportunity for BUAs to become more integrated into the European academic and creative network, enabling us to conduct research and exchange strategic perspectives with the European attractions industry so it can deliver and sustain entertainment and hospitality experiences. It also provides a platform for students to develop and solve real-world challenges and shape the future of the attractions and hospitality industry.

Photography

- Europa-Park (page 45, 46 bottom, 47 top)



There is a sense of urgency to thoroughly consider the impact on sustaining and adapting the attraction business model while incorporating immersive experiences.



From Dystopia to Utopia: Designing for Sportsmanship and Respect in Sport

What sport must learn from hospitality

Bart Stadhouders is a lecturer and researcher in Sports and E-Sports at Breda University of Applied Sciences. Arun Swami Persaud is a board member at Orange Sports Forum.

How should we design and redevelop our community sports centres so they are ready for the future? What will sport look like in 2040? These questions guided the Erasmus+ NextGeneration Sport Facilities project (NGSF). At the heart of the project lies a shared European ambition: to make sport more inclusive, more sustainable and more deeply embedded in society.

Across Europe, sports facilities continue to be developed as centres of civic pride, serving their communities by promoting health, creating identity, and fostering a sense of belonging. They provide space for movement, meeting, enjoyment and competition. At the same time, these spaces must evolve — encouraging participation across all ages and backgrounds, contributing to climate resilience and

biodiversity, and strengthening the social fabric of neighbourhoods through purposeful design. Equally important is the commitment to uphold core values such as integrity, sportsmanship, fraternity and inclusion.

This article explores one crucial dimension that determines whether a sports park truly becomes a meaningful place: sportsmanship and respect in the game. An important aspect for those who design, programme and shape these environments — professionals in leisure, sport and hospitality.

From playground to battleground

Across Europe, the same scene repeats itself. On a Saturday morning, sports parks come alive. Children gather on football pitches, hockey fields and tennis courts. At first, the atmosphere is light-hearted. There is laughter, movement, and the simple joy of play.

But as the game progresses, something shifts. Parents on the sidelines begin to shout. Instructions turn into criticism. Referees, often volunteers or teenagers, are questioned or openly challenged. A foul leads to frustration; frustration escalates into confrontation. What began as a children's game starts to resemble a small battlefield, where emotions run high and boundaries blur.

Unsporting behaviour takes many forms: aggressive tackles, insults exchanged beyond the referee's view, and the refusal to shake hands after the match. On social media, players and teams continue the conflict by mocking opponents, spreading hostility, and sometimes engaging in discriminatory or racist behaviour.

The consequences are real. Children drop out of sport. Teams are disqualified. Distrust and hostility linger long after the match has ended.

What was once incidental is, in many places, becoming the norm. This growing concern has not gone unnoticed. That is why in the Netherlands, for example, Mulier Institute developed a tool to monitor sportsmanship during amateur sport matches and the Dutch Olympic Committee NOC*NSF developed a vision on Sports & Integrity.

These initiatives mark an important step forward: the issue is being recognised, measured and addressed at policy level. At the same time, there is as yet little evidence that this increased attention has led to a clear improvement in behaviour on the field. Unsporting conduct appears to be a persistent and complex challenge. One that proves difficult to resolve through policy and monitoring alone.

This raises more fundamental questions — not only about behaviour, but about how sport environments are designed and experienced. Why does a setting meant for play so often tip into conflict? Why do emotions override sportsmanship? And what does this reveal about deeper tensions within sport and society?

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Unsporting behaviour takes many forms.

Sport has always balanced between rivalry and civilisation

To understand these tensions, we must look at the origins of sport itself. Sport has always carried a dual identity: it is both a substitute for conflict and a vehicle for civilisation.

On the one hand, sport has historically functioned as ritualised competition. The ancient Greeks staged athletic contests as displays of strength and skill, but also as symbolic proxies for battle. Medieval tournaments trained knights for combat while offering public spectacle. Even today, the language of sport echoes warfare: teams 'fight', 'defend' and 'attack'. Rivalries between clubs and regions can mirror deeper social and cultural divides.

On the other hand, sport has also been imagined as a civilising force. The Olympic ideal, promoted by Pierre de Coubertin, emphasised fair play, self-control and respect. In this vision, sport was not only about winning, but about character formation and mutual recognition. Rituals such as handshakes and shared ceremonies were designed to elevate competition into a shared human experience.

Both traditions remain present today. When aggression dominates, sport reinforces us versus them thinking. When respect prevails, sport becomes a school of humanity – teaching resilience, empathy and cooperation. Sport is therefore not neutral. It is a mirror of society and a rehearsal space for it. The values we tolerate in sport shape behaviour beyond the field. When disrespect becomes normal, trust erodes. When fairness is upheld, it strengthens the foundations of democratic life.

The ethical dimension of sport is not optional. It is central. And how we design sport determines which side of this balance prevails.

Sportsmanship is not a rule, it is a design choice

At the heart of the NGSF project lies a fundamental belief: while the challenges we face are complex, they are not insurmountable. Strengthening sportsmanship requires more than rules or moral appeals. It calls for a reconsideration of how we organise sport and, crucially, how we design the environments in which it takes place – and how they are experienced.

We often assume that sportsmanship can be achieved simply by asking for respect. But what if it were designed? What if we created environments in which people experience each other as equals?

This shifts attention away from the field alone and towards what happens around it, to all the spaces where interaction unfolds. The places that build sportsmanship are not only the arenas of competition, but the spaces in between – where opponents meet, stories are shared, and rivalry dissolves into recognition and respect.

These in-between spaces – car parks, entrances, clubhouses, canteens and shared terraces – are not secondary spaces, but essential components of sports design. It is here that culture is formed and behaviour is shaped. From this perspective, hospitality offers a powerful lens – one that leisure professionals understand intuitively.

In sport, the dominant logic is clear: playing at home provides an advantage, while the away team is positioned as the outsider. Hospitality challenges this logic. It places responsibility on the host to ensure a positive and respectful experience for the guest.

What if this became a guiding value in sport? This implies a fundamental shift: not *"How do we maximise our advantage at home?"*, but: *"How do we welcome those who come to play with us?"*

Such a shift invites us to rethink both design and culture. This is not abstract – it is a concrete design challenge. These choices are not merely aesthetic; they shape behaviour. Open layouts, shared facilities and visible norms of respect can reduce anonymity and hostility, while encouraging interaction.

This creates a clear responsibility and opportunity for leisure, hospitality and design professionals. They are not only responsible for creating functional spaces, but for shaping the social environments in which sport takes place.

By integrating principles of hospitality, openness, inclusivity and encounter into sports infrastructure, they can actively foster sportsmanship. By embedding rituals of welcome and shared experience, they can transform competition into connection.

We therefore invite you, not as observers, but as creators, to rethink, experiment and design environments that actively foster sportsmanship. Every sports facility you design today is more than a place to play. It is a statement of values and a blueprint for how we choose to live together.

The NGSF Project: Designing the Future of Sport

The NGSF consortium was established to address this challenge. BUAs, IP Beja, and Istanbul Technical University collaborated with Orange Sports Forum and a wider network of partners.

The project combined design research, design thinking and futures thinking to explore how sport might evolve towards 2040.

The outcomes include case studies, future scenarios and a practical playbook, supported by concise Focus Briefs. These are not prescriptive solutions, but tools for reflection and action. Ultimately, the project is an invitation to rethink the role of sport and the environments in which it takes place.



More information

- Rethinking the Future of Sport Facilities and Experiences in Europe. Published by Trichis Publishing B.V. ISBN: 9789493421271.

Photography

- Sportbedrijf Arnhem (page 48 top, page 49 bottom)



Hospitable Transitions

Building new systems from the ground up

Stefan Hartman
&
Frans Melissen



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The leisure, tourism and hospitality (LTH) sector is at a crossroads. Which way will we go? The sector is one of the world's largest employers and touches the lives of billions. Yet the systems within which it operates remain fundamentally broken. Overtourism erodes communities. Carbon emissions keep rising. Host populations lose public space, affordable housing and quality of life. Biodiversity declines. And despite growing awareness, the sector remains locked into a model built on limitless growth, upscaling and short-term returns; a pathway with no viable future.

At the same time, pioneers across the sector are already showing that things can be different. Hotels that operate climate-neutrally. Destinations that put community well-being first. Events designed around circularity. Tourism experiences that restore rather than extract. These initiatives exist but they are scattered, often invisible, and rarely supported by the systems around them. This is where Hospitable Transitions comes in.

Who we are

Hospitable Transitions (*Gastvrije Transitie*) is a movement for systemic change in LTH,

driven by the SPRONG Hospitable Transitions group - a collaboration between NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences (lead partner), Breda University of Applied Sciences, HZ University of Applied Sciences, and Inholland University of Applied Sciences. The SPRONG group brings together eight professorships, and various industry partners ranging from entrepreneurs, businesses, public sector stakeholders, membership associations, destination marketing organisations and business support organisations.

We connect practitioners, researchers, education, policy-makers and communities to turn promising but still isolated experiments into the collective momentum needed to drive fundamental change across the sector.

Our mission is: *to accelerate sustainability transitions in LTH through a radical, futures-oriented approach.* Radical, because real transformation requires the courage to fail forward. Futures-oriented, because we are not here to optimise the old systems, we are here to help build new ones.

How we work: from the ground up

We believe that lasting change starts with the people who dare to do things differently. That is why our approach centres on *transition arenas*: regional spaces where pioneers come together, share knowledge, challenge the status quo, experiment and build momentum. These pioneers are supported by our team through reflexive monitoring – a process of continuous collective learning and adaptation.

We have established four transition arenas, each focused on a theme that is critical for the sector's future:

- Climate Neutral - led by NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences
- Broad Prosperity - led by Breda University of Applied Sciences

- Health - led by HZ University of Applied Sciences
- Regenerative Placemaking - led by Inholland University of Applied Sciences

These transition arenas act as temporary innovation networks aimed at developing and supporting radical ways of thinking and acting beyond 'business as usual' within the LTH sector. They are shaped as collective and co-creative learning processes that increase the self-organising capacity of the participants for crafting sustainable ways of operating (Notermans et al., 2022).

Each transition arena consists of one or more informal, connected groups of pioneers, facilitated by a SPRONG *transition arena manager*, who generate and test radical ideas, spark conversations, challenge entrenched norms and frameworks, and drive action. The transition arena manager encourages these groups to focus on activities that challenge the more established systems and, when supported, have the potential to trigger

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Hospitable Transitions is a movement for systemic change in Leisure, Tourism Hospitality.

large-scale systemic shifts aligned with the mission of the SPRONG Hospitable Transitions group. Furthermore, depending on challenges and opportunities identified, transition arena managers involve other people and organisations 'on demand' when they can contribute to fulfilling one or more key enabling roles.

Key roles in accelerating sustainability transitions:

The **game changer** envisions the sustainable, regenerative, distributive future.
 The **pioneer** takes the first brave steps to prove it can work.
 The **change-maker** rolls out practical solutions within communities.
 The **change agent** ensures they become standard practice.
 The **policy entrepreneur** aligns systems and incentives to sustain it.
 The **enabling partner** weaves them all together into a collaborative, resilient ecosystem.

What differentiates this transition arena approach from other participatory processes, is its focus on transformative change; challenging, altering or replacing dominant ways of doing, thinking and organising. The transition arena provides participants access to different types of (actionable) knowledge, networks and other resources (Schipper et al., 2022).

Alongside these transitions arenas, we operate a *transition forum*: a strategic platform where high-level stakeholders from policy-makers to industry leaders work to remove barriers and create the conditions that allow grassroots innovations to take root and grow. As such, these stakeholders collaboratively challenge current systems from within the dominant regime (Grin, 2020). These stakeholders thus play a crucial role in 'creating space' for innovations stemming from transition arenas and 'creating momentum' for these innovations to break through more widely. Ideally, over time, these new spaces and this momentum lead to permanent changes in relevant systems (Loorbach et al., 2017).

In other words, the transition forum proactively challenges existing regimes, increases urgency for change, destabilises counterproductive systems, and (re)builds systems that support the innovations needed for a 'truly' sustainable LTH sector, in line with the mission of the SPRONG Hospitable Transitions group.

Consequently, we consider our SPRONG group to be successful in accelerating sustainability transitions in LTH if/when we manage to:

1. Help the pioneers' (grassroots) initiatives to gain momentum;
2. Serve as a catalyst for system change (e.g. new ways of working, new business and organisation models, new institutional arrangements, new policy instruments) that is inspired by and, in turn, supports such initiatives.

In trying to realise these successes, the SPRONG group is mindful of the fact that all systems go through a period in which they rise, peak and then move into decline, while gradually being substituted by better ones. This shift from the old to the new is the critical transition process through which (human) resources start to flow towards the innovations that have proven to be effective. This allows old systems to offer their resources to help new systems emerge and develop, and then recede as the new takes hold, as highlighted in Figure 1 (Based on Wheatley & Frieze (2008), adapted by the authors).

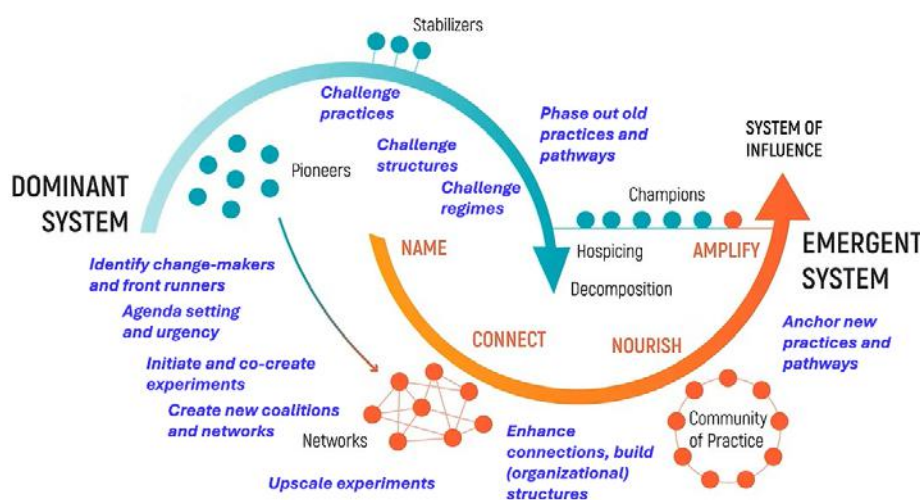


Figure 1.

Why this matters – and why now

The question is no longer whether the LTH sector needs to change. The question is who will step forward to shape what comes next. Every year of delay deepens the lock-in. Every pioneer working in isolation is a missed opportunity for systemic impact.

When pioneers connect, share and organise, something powerful happens. Alternatives gain credibility. New business models take root. Policy windows open. A new social licence to operate

emerges - one built on genuine care for people and places, on regeneration instead of extraction, on broad prosperity instead of narrow profit.

The LTH sector is uniquely positioned to become a genuine catalyst for sustainability transitions. But this will not happen by itself.

Be part of this transition

Hospitable Transitions is not a closed initiative. It is an open movement, built on the conviction that the challenges ahead are too large and too urgent for any single organisation, sector or discipline to tackle alone. Pioneers, professionals, policy-makers, researchers, educators and students who share this sense of urgency and want to contribute to building a future-proof LTH sector are encouraged to connect, collaborate and help shape what comes next.

The future of leisure, tourism and hospitality will not emerge on its own. It is co-created by those who choose to act - now, together. The next four articles of this UNCOVER edition further detail how this works in practice, for the themes of climate neutral, broad prosperity, health and regenerative placemaking.

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Our mission is to accelerate sustainability transitions in LTH through a radical, futures-oriented approach.

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Regenerative Placemaking in the Metropolitan Region of Amsterdam

Why we need to work in a place-based way

Anouschka Trauschke is the SPRONG Transition Manager for Regenerative Placemaking at Inholland University of Applied Sciences and she is a social entrepreneur that co-founded *Tours That Matter*, which designs positive impact tours.



From the canals of Amsterdam to the windmills of Zaanse Schans, the beaches of the North Sea to the reclaimed polders, the Metropolitan Region of Amsterdam is one of Europe's most attractive and diverse places to live and visit. Visitor numbers, but also residents and businesses are expected to keep growing in the upcoming years, leading to overtourism in places like Amsterdam city centre, but also recreational pressure on green spaces for residents. If we want tourism and leisure to contribute as much as possible to societal challenges and well-being within the region, we must understand that these challenges are as diverse as the region itself. The future of tourism in the Metropolitan Region of Amsterdam depends on protecting its cultural identity, maintaining a good quality of life for residents, and giving people a voice in shaping tourism's direction. This is a place-based approach where tourism and leisure are seen as means to create a healthy living environment where people, plants and animals thrive.

Regenerative placemaking

Regenerative placemaking (also referred to as regenerative tourism and leisure) is about creating a net positive impact on the destination. It doesn't have one definition as this positive impact depends on the needs of the place. It's a mindset shift on how to look at tourism, as a design approach, interconnected and locally rooted. An approach that has been explored deeply by Inholland University of Applied Sciences.

Place is one of the key foundations of regeneration, working with and caring for the uniqueness of a certain area (Roos Gerritsma, 2025).

Tourism and leisure as a force for good

Can the hospitality sector not only do less harm, but actually become a force for good? This SPRONG transition arena focuses on regenerative placemaking, to understand and develop the visitor economy in the Metropolitan Region in a way that enhances the quality of place and life. An approach that has been explored by the New Urban Tourism research group at Inholland University of Applied Sciences led by Professor Ko Koens. Rather than treating tourism separately, they focus on tourism as an integral part of the urban environment. This is done on different scales, involving a growing network of knowledge institutions, governments, businesses, residents and students through The Expertise Network Sustainable Urban Tourism (ENSUT). Activities range from international projects with European partner cities to hyper-local research in the living labs. Roos Gerritsma, Associate Professor of New Urban Tourism, is conducting research into how forms of placemaking, leisure and tourism can be developed in a living lab in Amsterdam North in the most regenerative way possible. Her PhD research focuses on the activation of regenerative urban tourism, designing practices and interventions through a lab setting in Amsterdam North. The SPRONG Hospitable Transitions programme takes the work of ENSUT further, by asking how we can systemically transform hospitality and tourism – through the approach of regenerative placemaking, while looking through a long-term, fundamental, and regional lens, and aiming to create bridges between local experimentation and systemic change.

What drives the front-runners

There are many front-runners in the region adding value to place, yet defining who truly qualifies as a regenerative pioneer is a challenge. From campsites that restore biodiversity to hotels offering permanent space for community

activities, farms where visitors pick their own food to tours that foster social awareness and cohesion. In conversations with many of these pioneers, the same drive kept coming up: working from a place of love and care for the people and nature around us. They share a strong connection to the places where they work, a long-term commitment, and processes of co-creation with local communities. Regenerative tourism is not a product; it is a journey of presence, curiosity, aiming always to give more than one takes.

The conceptual image *Exploring Regenerative Tourism*, created at our request by Bord & Stiff, reflects the design principles and practical elements of regeneration found in tourism and leisure across the Metropolitan Region Amsterdam. While the principles represent the why (the story and motivation of the owner) and the elements capture the what (values connected to place), the front-runners group will explore the how: regenerative entrepreneurship in practice.

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The lab's experiments provide a counterweight to social issues such as gentrification, loss of cohesion and belonging.



Local interventions for regeneration

Looking at the first mapping of pioneers taking a regenerative approach in tourism and leisure, there were three categories that stood out: regenerative agriculture, nature-inclusive landscapes and regenerative entrepreneurship. The first two are mainly ecological, aiming to restore nature and improve biodiversity, whereas regenerative entrepreneurship leans more towards social (and economic) motivation, focusing on people, communities, business models, and how value is created and shared. The urgency is especially highlighted in urban areas where we face many social challenges like polarisation, inequality, and loss of social cohesion.

Take Zeeburgereiland, rapidly expanding and becoming increasingly urbanised. *Camping Zeeburg*, a steward-owned campsite is a green oasis for Amsterdammers, travellers and all living things. A place where your stay is not separate from its surroundings, but contributes to them. The campsite is entering a new phase as a foundation with a social mission: strengthening connection and local culture. It aims to develop interventions that build on the identity of the place and create space for collaboration between residents, guests, and local initiatives – think a neighbourhood festival, a mini-museum, or a story walk.

Amsterdam North is also growing and changing at a rapid pace, and will continue to go through a major transition. *The Urban Leisure & Tourism Lab* is a living lab that has been around for years, using tourism and leisure activities to help people feel heard and more at home. Interventions such as tours, night markets, and a storytelling bench have been co-created and tested by lab students, with further development taking place in collaboration with local partners. The lab's experiments provide a counterweight to social issues such as gentrification, loss of cohesion and belonging.

Front-runners shaping the arena

Besides the front-runners mentioned above, more have joined the arena; Buurthotel, Tours

That Matter, The Pledge, Amsterdam&Partners, Molen de Breek, and de Ceuvél – organisations and initiatives that act as caretakers of visitors, residents and neighbourhoods, sharing the same mission to restore social ecosystems and strengthen local identity. Their stories converge around a shared understanding of what reciprocity means within tourism and leisure.

"The real challenge lies not in what we want to add, but in how we weave our social mission so that it becomes a natural part of how we work every day." (Director of Camping Zeeburg)

There is an ongoing challenge in embedding these social objectives into the daily practice of running a campsite, a hotel or a tour company, not as an add-on, but as an integral part of core operations and guest experience. Front-runners expressed a shared interest in exploring locally rooted scaling models, frameworks for co-creation with residents, and a visitor economy lab for experimentation.

What's happening next in the arena?

For the upcoming year, the transition arena will co-create a programme to share knowledge, design interventions, and inspire a wider audience to act. Three elements will be included in this programme, but more will be added based on the needs of the group:

Communities of practice: building a front-runners group to collaborate and exchange tools, experiences, stories and solutions, together building an understanding of regenerative placemaking in practice.

Inspiration programmes: co-creating inspirational programmes that can create understanding of regeneration in practice, as well as inspire a wider group of academics, students, businesses and policy-makers to act.

Building best practices: experiments and pilot projects on a hyper-local, local and even regional level, allowing us to learn by doing and increase impact. An important step in this process is sharing this knowledge, inspiration and these best practices in a playful and inviting way. Therefore, a Regenerative Tourism Festival will be organised in 2026.

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Regenerative placemaking is about creating a net positive impact on the destination.

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Photography

- De Ceuvél (page 52)
- Vincent Kuyvenhoven (page 53)



Climate-Neutral Fryslân

Moving towards a circular and sustainable sector

Jasper Heslinga

Jasper Heslinga is transition manager for a sustainable and circular Fryslân. He works as a Senior Researcher at the European Tourism Futures Institute (ETFI) at NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences.

The leisure, tourism and hospitality (LTH) sector is vital to the economy and identity of Friesland (Fryslân), but at the same time it is also highly resource-intensive and contributes significantly to environmental pressures. However, banning tourism is neither realistic nor desirable. The key issue, therefore, is not whether tourism should exist, but how to develop it in a circular and sustainable way. This transition arena within SPRONG is about making a transition towards a sector that uses less water, energy, waste, plastic, and resources.

Understanding waste, water, energy, and resource pressures on Fryslân

To get to these circular and sustainable forms, there are a few problems to overcome. Waste generation rises sharply in tourist hotspots, putting pressure on local collection systems in smaller towns and island communities. This includes large volumes of single-use plastics, such as packaging, takeaway containers, and disposable cups, which can end up in natural areas and even in sensitive ecosystems like the Wadden Sea. The sector is also energy-intensive. Hotels require heating, cooling, lighting, laundry services, and catering operations, all of which consume significant amounts of electricity and gas. Restaurants and event venues further increase seasonal energy demand. In addition, transport to and within Fryslân contributes to greenhouse gas emissions. The sector consumes a lot of water. Although availability and quality are currently high, both are coming under increasing pressure. Water use and pollution increase during peak seasons, particularly in lake districts where recreational boating can lead to fuel leakage and wastewater discharge into surface waters. Beyond this, tourism requires substantial material and natural resources. Construction of

holiday homes, marinas, and recreational infrastructure consumes land and building materials, while increased demand for food, water, and consumer goods puts additional strain on local supply systems.

What happens in Fryslân ... should not only stay in Fryslân

The good news is that a lot is already happening in Fryslân and Vereniging Circulair Fryslân (VCF) plays a pivotal role in the province. This regional association is dedicated to accelerating the transition to a circular economy. VCF started around 2015, when a group of Frisian companies realised that collaborating on circular initiatives would have more impact than acting alone. Over the years, VCF has grown into a network with over 180 members, including businesses, government bodies, and knowledge institutions.

Fryslân is globally recognised as a front-runner in circular policy, and VCF's collaborative model is shared as an example for other regions in the Netherlands and across Europe. By showing tangible results contributing to a cleaner, happy and healthy Fryslân where resources are continuously used and re-used and actively sharing knowledge, Vereniging Circulair Fryslân not only strengthens circular economy practices locally but also inspires other regions to follow suit.

As part of VCF, the Circulair Gastvrij Fryslân programme has been actively applying circular economy principles in the recreation and tourism sector over the past few years, by initiating several pilot projects that explore sustainable practices in real-world settings. Examples include bio-based construction of holiday homes (*Sliepe yn'e Takomst*), single-use plastic reduction (*Wad Gaat Om*), water reduction in hotels, local supply chains



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Waste generation rises sharply in tourist hotspots, putting pressure on local collection systems in smaller towns and island communities.

(*Broodje Boppe*), several food waste challenges, and a European project on Speeding up Sustainability Skills in Tourism (3ST) focusing on water, waste and energy.

While these pilots have demonstrated the potential of circular approaches, the main challenge now lies in scaling these initiatives from isolated experiments into a broader, systemic movement that creates measurable added value. This is where the SPRONG project comes in.

Transitions arenas explained

Based on a review of the literature and numerous discussions on the topic, a longlist of potential transition arenas was compiled. Given practical constraints, the following arenas have been prioritised for the current focus:

The circular hotel room

A circular hotel room aims to rethink how hotel interiors are updated by focusing on re-use and refurbishment rather than full replacement every five to seven years, which currently generates significant waste. By re-using existing furniture, fixtures, and materials, hotels can reduce the consumption of new materials, lower transport costs, and achieve overall cost savings. At the same time, involving local craftsmen adds value and supports the regional economy. Beyond these practical benefits, a circular approach provides guests with a unique and meaningful experience, highlighting the hotel's commitment to sustainability and creating a compelling story around their stay.

The off-grid holiday park

An off-grid holiday park explores how a vacation park can operate completely independently in terms of electricity and water. Large parks consume significant amounts of energy and water annually, but their scale also provides opportunities for extensive solar energy generation and water reuse systems. Fluctuating energy prices and changes in net metering policies make it increasingly important to optimise energy use, while water scarcity during droughts and quality pressures highlight the need for sustainable management. Implementing off-grid solutions can lead to cost savings on energy and water bills, full production of renewable energy on-site, and practical lessons for smaller parks aiming to adopt similar sustainable practices.

The airport of the future

The airport of the future envisions a facility that generates minimal emissions by integrating innovative technologies such as electric flight, battery storage, and hydrogen. Aviation remains one of the most polluting modes of transport, and demand for air travel continues to grow, making it essential to explore sustainable solutions. By experimenting with electric aircraft for short distances, on-site battery storage for energy management, and hydrogen as a clean fuel, such an airport can achieve substantial reductions in CO₂ and noise emissions, increase energy self-sufficiency, and support the development of the hydrogen economy regionally and nationally. Additionally, it can minimise noise impacts for local communities, strengthen the regional economy through investment and new jobs, and serve as an international showcase for sustainable aviation technology.

What steps to take next

Recognising that the transition cannot happen overnight, the next steps focus on taking small, incremental actions. It is crucial to identify the key barriers and opportunities that are currently hindering progress (regulatory, institutional, financial, business model, societal, cultural, and mental), and to develop tailor-made solutions that address these specific challenges. This process relies on trial-and-error and reflexive learning, allowing stakeholders to continuously adapt strategies, learn from experience, and gradually scale successful approaches. Complex challenges cannot be solved by a single actor. Transition arenas create a structured space for collaboration and shared vision-building. By bringing together a wide range of

stakeholders, such as policy-makers, businesses, NGOs, industry associations, researchers and students, and local communities. They help align interests, build commitment, and generate more robust and widely supported solutions.

Using NHL Stenden's cross-sectoral expertise

Among many stakeholders in the tourism ecosystem in Fryslân, NHL Stenden plays a central role in this transition arena. The Academy of Leisure Tourism and Hospitality is home to the European Tourism Futures Institute (ETFI) and the Academy of International Hospitality Research (AIHR). The academy consists of several professorships:

- Sustainability in Hospitality and Tourism (Elena Cavagnaro)
- Transformative Foresight in Leisure, Tourism & Hospitality (Albert Postma)
- Disruption, Innovation & New Phenomena (Ian Yeoman)

In addition, to develop circular and sustainable solutions for Fryslân's tourism sector, interdisciplinary collaboration at NHL Stenden is key. Expertise from Water Technology, Circular Plastics, Green Economics, and Transformational Media, can address water use, waste, plastics, sustainable business models, and behaviour change. Cross-academy cooperation between professorships and knowledge centres on water, waste, and plastics can deliver integrated, practical solutions that make the sector more circular and resilient.

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Fryslân is globally recognised as a front-runner in circular policy.

Photography

- Lucas Kemper (page 54 top, page 55)
- Lydia Annema (page 54 bottom)



Brabant's Plant-Based, Nature-Inclusive and Hospitable Focus

Broad prosperity as a compass for accelerating sustainability transitions



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Brabant is a province with a strong network of vibrant medium-sized cities and hospitable villages, embedded in a green landscape of natural areas, agricultural zones and recreational routes, where urban and rural qualities are interwoven in many places. In Brabant, broad prosperity is explicitly used as a compass for a liveable, inclusive and sustainable future: not only for economic growth, but also for the creation of societal, ecological and social value. For the leisure, tourism and hospitality domain (LTH), too, this perspective offers a promising direction. LTH takes on a new meaning: not only as an economic domain, but as a catalyst for change, as a space for experimentation, and as a domain that shows that recreation and consumption can also be done differently: more plant-based, more circular, more nature-inclusive, more social and more hospitable. This article describes the search for the transition themes in Brabant that offer the greatest potential for setting that acceleration in motion from LTH. For SPRONG in the Brabant region, BUas is in the lead.

Broad prosperity as a compass

At SPRONG, we use the definition of broad prosperity as formulated by Statistics Netherlands (CBS) and PON/Telos. Broad prosperity is about everything people value: not only material prosperity, but also health, education, the environment, safety, social cohesion and personal development. Moreover, the concept focuses not only on the here and now, but also on effects and impacts elsewhere and for future generations. In this way, broad prosperity aligns with the international *beyond GDP* movement, in which the focus shifts from how much we earn to whether people are healthy, safe, connected and happy.

At the same time, the current broad prosperity approach also has a blind spot. The emphasis on indicators and monitoring often makes the perspective mainly about looking back and focused on limiting negative impact. But precisely where value arises in creating meaning, experience, encounter and imagination, the terrain of LTH, indicators fall short. Outside the broad prosperity dimension of 'work and leisure' (where indicators include, for example: does someone have paid work; is someone satisfied with the available leisure time), the LTH domain remains largely implicit in the common models, while its real impact on well-being, identity, social cohesion and sustainability is significant. This makes LTH ideally suited as a catalyst within sustainability transitions: not only by reducing the sector's footprint, but also by actively strengthening broad prosperity.

Nodes in Brabant's mosaic landscape

With the broad prosperity perspective as the starting point, we explored where the most promising transition arenas lie in Brabant's mosaic landscape. The exploration involved desk research and conversations with several dozen key figures. The focus is on identifying pioneers and front-runners in sustainability

transitions, new connections between LTH and sustainability, and specific arenas that have potential in Brabant in particular to achieve acceleration.

The analysis revealed clear clusters: circular textiles and fashion around Tilburg; social and inclusive design in the Eindhoven region; festivals as temporary societies for experimenting with sustainable behaviour; a plant-based and bio-based movement in West Brabant; and nature-inclusive farmyards in the Van Gogh National Park. Two clusters stood out for this SPRONG: both have a recognisable regional profile, concrete pioneers and existing ecosystems, and in both cases LTH can play a crucial role. Below is an outline of the two prioritised transition arenas.

1. Plant-based region West Brabant

West Brabant is rapidly developing into a

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LTH is ideally suited as a catalyst within sustainability transitions: not only by reducing the sector's footprint, but also by actively strengthening broad prosperity.

distinctly plant-based region. Built on a rich food history and a strong logistics tradition, a broad movement is growing here around both plant-based food and bio-based non-food applications. The regional ecosystem offers the infrastructure within which pioneers are shaping the plant-based future. Parties such as Regio West-Brabant, REWIN, the RegioDeal WestBrabants Welvaren and the Plant-based Network are active within this theme. The Delta Agrifood Business Campus in Bergen op Zoom and the Side Stream Innovation Campus in Oosterhout, among others, have already taken shape.

Pioneers are present in abundance. Monkeys by the Sea, for example, develops sustainable food products respecting ocean and land. PrinsenZwam grows oyster mushrooms on collected coffee grounds. And Rodenburg Biopolymers turns residual streams such as potato peelings into raw materials that replace fossil materials. In that respect, the plant-based transition does not remain abstract, but is already becoming tangible through the pioneers.

The link with LTH offers major opportunities, but is still used only to a limited extent. Front-runners such as Restaurant van Nu, the only restaurant in West Brabant awarded a green Michelin star, and FrankenFruit, where picking local fruit is combined with children's parties and company outings, are already pointing in the right direction. Cultural venues are also taking part: Pop venue Poppodium Gebouw-T is experimenting with bio-based materials as a replacement for conventional plastic. Urban and regional developments strengthen this further: from the redevelopment of the site of the former CSM (Cosun) sugar factory 't Zoet in Breda and the designation of Breda as a National Park City, through to the Van Gogh Homeland events. A region is emerging where food, innovation and LTH come together and where the plant-based future is not only produced, but can also be experienced.

2. Nature-inclusive and hospitable farmyards

Nature-inclusive and hospitable farmyards form a powerful intersection where nature, health, food, recreation, care, local chains and the labour market come together. In Brabant, a movement is growing in which agricultural entrepreneurs develop their farmyards into places of experiences, education and encounters, and connect their activities to sustainability transitions.

This development is supported by a relatively strong regional regime and network, with parties such as Agrifood Capital, ZLTO, Van Gogh

National Park and Brabant Partners, which uses the Goei Leven (Good Life) strategy to focus on quality of life, landscape and hospitality. Within this network, themes such as biodiversity, water, climate, soil and animal welfare are increasingly being related to regional identity, recreation and vitality.

Front-runners are already shaping this. Initiatives such as Vaderland, a gastronomic circular farm and place of experience, show how food production, landscape and hospitality come together around a shared vision of earth and community. Land van Kien is developing as a living landscape where living, working and leisure go hand in hand with nature. Organic farm 't Schop connects nature-inclusive agriculture with meadow dinners with chefs, an organic shop, business activities and its own festivals. In this way, the farmyard grows into a multifunctional place with meaning for a wide range of users.

Programmes such as the provincial Agenda Nature-Inclusive and the Van Gogh National Park Academy facilitate development, and concepts such as Wandelstarter (part of the MONA project) and Boerenpoorten strengthen visibility, accessibility and cohesion. The transition is not limited to individual farmyards. In the integrated area-based approach around Stadsbos013 on the edge of Tilburg, for example, which emerged as a collaboration between residents, entrepreneurs and government, Landgoed Sparrenhof, where culture and nature come together, is integrated with various estates, a regenerative Lenteland farm, food forests, a range of sports facilities and a network of walking and mountain-biking routes. In this way, Stadsbos013 grows not only food, but also involvement, biodiversity and future-proof agriculture. In places such as these, broad prosperity grows from an abstract ambition into something people can actually experience.

From analysis to action: two areas, two approaches

Both areas call for their own approach. In the plant-based transition, the task lies in bringing two worlds together that still hardly meet: LTH and plant-based. At that interface, opportunities arise for new concepts, menus, events and experiments, and for developing a shared language around specific locations and programmes. At the farmyards, the connections between LTH and sustainability are already stronger; here the challenge shifts to bundling, strengthening and accelerating existing initiatives. By actively sharing successes and learning experiences, and removing obstacles such as regulations and zoning plans, this movement can be deepened and made transferable.

What this yields is visible in the landscape itself: a farmer who is also a host, a menu that tells the story of the season, and a farmyard that offers space for recreation, encounters and relaxation in nature. People are there together with one another and with the landscape, and experience playfully where food comes from. A hiker shares their path with flowering field margins, meadow birds and rows of trees, while a cultural festival lets people taste how plant-based choices can be not only good, but also attractive and connecting. Brabant as a province where sustainability is not imposed, but experienced. By residents, entrepreneurs and visitors together. In this way, both areas, each in its own way, act as drivers of broad prosperity.

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A farmer who is also a host, a menu that tells the story of the season, and a farmyard that offers space for recreation, encounters and relaxation in and with nature.

Photography

• Brabant Partners (page 57 left)



The Zeeland Movement towards a Healthy Region

Hospitality driving the shift towards local healthy, and sustainable choices.

Noëlle Verhage

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Research by the Dutch National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (RIVM) shows that leisure activities are a key source of happiness: eight out of ten Dutch people experience relaxation, going out, and holidays as a driving force behind their well-being. Zeeland offers many natural assets, including nature areas, its coastline, walking and cycling routes, alongside cultural attractions, hospitality venues, and events. Together, these provide both residents and visitors with a wide variety of leisure opportunities. The hospitality sector is therefore at the heart of the movement towards a Healthy Region. Within the SPRONG transition arena in Zeeland, this movement is being given concrete meaning and direction.

The hospitality sector

The hospitality sector is of enormous value to Zeeland, with nearly 22 million overnight stays, 12.5 million international day visits, and tens of millions of leisure activities undertaken by Zeeland residents. Restaurants, shops, museums, day-trip facilities, events, and (green) routes make the region vibrant and provide meeting places that stimulate physical activity, relaxation, and social interaction - benefiting both residents and visitors. At the same time, this strengthens both the economic and social values of the region.

The hospitality sector creates crossovers with societal challenges such as coastal reinforcement, climate adaptation, nature restoration, energy, agriculture, health, spatial development, and mobility. In this way, solutions emerge that address societal challenges while enabling new forms of local experiences. All these effects contribute to Zeeland as a healthy region and underline the key role of the hospitality sector.

Understanding a Healthy Region

With this broader perspective as a starting point, the question arises: what makes a region a 'Healthy Region'? What does theory say, and are we already doing more in practice than we realise?

Olaf Timmermans (HZ University of Applied Sciences) describes a Healthy Region as *the integration of several disciplines, including sports and physical activity, vitality, tourism, welfare, and healthcare. Entrepreneurs, policy-makers, governments, and users collaborate on initiatives around these themes that create added value for residents, guests, and the (Zeeland) economy.*

To further understand the concept of Healthy Region, international, national, and regional

sources, like Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency, Social and Economic Council of the Netherlands, SDG Netherlands, Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport, World Health Organization (WHO), Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), Institute for Positive Health (iPH) and the Province of Zeeland were also consulted to provide further interpretation and depth. It revealed that not all sources use or define the term 'Healthy Region' in the same way. Often, the concept of a 'healthy living environment' is used instead. Both concepts are strongly interconnected: they complement each other and often overlap.

A healthy living environment focuses on the immediate surroundings in which people live, work, and spend their daily lives. It encourages healthy behaviour through clean air, sufficient green space, opportunities for physical activity, and social factors such as meeting places and safety. The interpretation of this concept can depend on context and may differ between individuals.

The Healthy Region concept emphasises regional strategies, policies, collaboration, and joint initiatives to promote health on a larger scale. Topics such as a healthy economy, a balanced labour market, and accessible education also play a role. The healthy living environment is a building block within this broader concept, while the region provides the framework in which health is stimulated, for example through cooperation between (local) authorities, organisations and/or sectors.

In practice, the terms healthy living environment and Healthy Region are often used interchangeably. For example, the Province of Zeeland develops its plans and ambitions at the regional level, while referring to a healthy and safe living environment. In practice, scale levels and terminology therefore overlap. Rather than problematic, this reflects an integrated theme that cannot be captured in a single definition or scale. The shared core nevertheless provides

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Tourism and recreation can contribute to a healthier region, but they can also place pressure on health systems.



Entrepreneurs invest significant effort in short supply chains, healthy menu options, and local and sustainable products, but they also encounter challenges.



solid basis for further development within the SPRONG transition arena.

Hospitality as enabler

The hospitality sector can play a key role in realising a Healthy Region. Through its daily contact with residents and visitors and its strong connection with the living environment, it contributes directly to health, well-being, quality of life, and Zeeland's attractiveness as a place to live, work, and stay.

It is important to note that the sector extends beyond restaurants and accommodation providers, encompassing an ecosystem of leisure activities: from nature and cultural experiences to events, recreation providers, educational institutions, mobility services, and tourist information. Its uniqueness lies in translating abstract policy goals into tangible and experiential practices. This can be expressed in serving healthy, local, and sustainable products, creating meeting places, making business operations more sustainable, or raising awareness around nature, climate and lifestyle.

At the same time, Timmermans and the World Health Organization point to the sector's dual

role: tourism and recreation can contribute to a healthier region, but they can also place pressure on health systems. Tourism is seen as "a dynamic force for health promotion, health equity and health security" and plays an important role in health and well-being. Within this tension lies the opportunity for the hospitality sector to guide positive change, if shaped consciously and carefully.

Conversations with front-runners

Based on the theoretical exploration, a framework was developed to explore how the hospitality sector can contribute to a Healthy Region in Zeeland. This framework was structured around four main themes: 1) healthy and conscious recreation, 2) sustainable and innovative sector, 3) nature values in business operations and offerings, and 4) meaningful work. These themes were used during discussions with front-runners from the hospitality sector, professional experts and researchers from HZ University of Applied Sciences.

The conversations showed that many initiatives are already taking place: investments in sustainability, nature-inclusive entrepreneurship and good employment practices. At the same time, societal developments - such as increasing regulatory pressure, changing visitor flows, a rapidly evolving tourism market, and business transfers within family enterprises - are influencing the sector's choices and priorities.

Local, sustainable and healthy choices

The conversations revealed a shared interest: several entrepreneurs invest significant effort in short supply chains, healthy menu options, and local and sustainable products, but they also encounter challenges. This formed the basis for a first joint exploration: could these themes initiate a transition that contributes to a Healthy Region?

In autumn 2025, these entrepreneurs met for the first time in what is termed a 'transition arena'. During several sessions, the challenges of each participant were discussed. It soon

became clear that they could strengthen each other with knowledge and experience and were motivated to further develop their (shared) ambitions together. They expressed their commitment to actively driving the transition towards Zeeland as a Healthy Region and have continued meeting monthly ever since. Work was also carried out on a joint ambition document, based on the Co-Design Canvas by Wina Smeenk. This marked an important first step in making the issue more concrete and positioning the role of the hospitality sector more clearly:

"In 2029, Zeeland is a healthier region, where local, healthy and sustainable products find their way onto plates through Zeeland's (beach) hospitality sector, collaboration within the chain is self-evident, and the story behind the products is told."

2026 and beyond

In the coming years, the focus will be on advancing the transition. Together with entrepreneurs, collaboration will be deepened, roles defined, and work aligned more closely with the shared ambition. The ecosystem will be mapped, the definition of short supply chains refined, and front-runners in hospitality, production, transport, and logistics identified. Where possible, existing initiatives will be built upon, while remaining flexible to respond to new needs. Although Zeeland serves as a pilot region, the lessons learned will be widely shared.

Knowledge institutions in the SPRONG project will continue contributing expertise, bringing in existing knowledge, involving students in real-world challenges, and generating new insights to support the transition. The transition manager will continue to fulfil a connecting and facilitating role, steadily advancing the transition towards a Healthy Region. The SPRONG project is supported by Dr. Olaf Timmermans, Professor of the Healthy Region Research Group, and Dr. Jean Marie Buijs, Professor of the Governance Research Group, both affiliated with HZ University of Applied Sciences.



Balancing Nature, Mobility and Experience

The MONA approach

Natalie Siereveld
& Jeroen Nawijn



Natalie Siereveld is Marketing & Communication specialist at Routebureau Brabant Partners, Jeroen Nawijn is part of the Tourism Impacts on Society research group at Breda University of Applied Sciences.

On the ground, Europe's landscapes reveal a direct and vital connection between nature, cities and infrastructure. Yet, these very landscapes are under increasing pressure. Nature areas are becoming busier, parking lots are filling up, and the qualities people seek most, such as peace, space and biodiversity, are at risk.

Across North-West Europe, regions are searching for new ways to balance accessibility with preservation. One such initiative is MONA: MOfal shift, routing and nudging solutions in NATure areas – a European collaboration that does not question whether people should visit nature, but rather how they move through it.

Instead of restricting access, MONA explores a different approach: what if the sustainable choice simply became the easiest one?

A European approach to mobility and behaviour

The MONA Project brings together regions, nature parks and knowledge institutions to address a shared challenge: how to manage visitor flows in nature areas while maintaining both visitor experience and ecological balance. Its approach combines modal shift, routing and nudging. Visitors are encouraged to choose more sustainable transport options, being guided towards alternative and less crowded entry points. This process is subtly influenced through design and communication.

These principles are not theoretical. They are tested in real-life settings, where mobility is treated not just as infrastructure, but as behaviour. Every decision – how to travel, where to start, which route to take – becomes an opportunity to influence outcomes.

Brabant as a living landscape

At a smaller scale, these ideas become tangible in Van Gogh National Park in the south of the Netherlands. This is not a traditional national park, but a living landscape where nature, agriculture, villages and cities are closely intertwined. Here, sustainable tourism is not about limiting access, but about shaping how people experience the landscape.

A key tool in this approach is WandelStarter, developed by Brabant Partners in collaboration with over 50 partners. Instead of directing visitors to well-known hotspots, WandelStarter introduces alternative walking starting points, often closer to urban areas and away from the busiest locations. This seemingly simple intervention leads to a subtle but meaningful shift in behaviour. Visitors discover new places, pressure on vulnerable areas is reduced, and experiences become more local and personal.

Designing better choices

Central to MONA is the concept of nudging, an approach from behavioural science that focuses on influencing decisions without restricting freedom of choice. In practice, this means that quieter routes are presented more prominently, sustainable travel options are made more visible, and storytelling is used to strengthen the connection between visitors and the landscape.

These interventions are often small, but together they create an environment in which sustainable behaviour feels intuitive. Behaviour does not change through rules alone, but through experience.

Learning from practice and research

To understand whether these approaches are effective, MONA combines practice with research. In nature areas such as the Loonse and Drunense Duinen, surveys among visitors

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WandelStarter introduces alternative walking starting points, often closer to urban areas and away from the busiest locations.

and residents, conducted in collaboration with BUAs, provide valuable insights into behaviour, perceptions and willingness to change.

The results show clear differences between local residents and visitors from outside the region. For residents, the area is part of everyday life. A large majority visits for relaxation (88%) and exercise (79%), often engaging in familiar activities such as walking or cycling. Their visits are usually spontaneous, with only 20% preparing in advance, and most follow the existing routes. This also makes them less likely to consider alternative starting points outside the core area (26%). In addition, sustainable transport options such as public transit play only a minor role for this group, mainly due to convenience and proximity.

Visitors from outside the region show a different pattern. While they share similar motivations, such as relaxation (64%) and enjoying nature (54%), they are generally more open to new experiences and alternative ways of exploring the area. Although most still arrive by car (74%),



they indicate a greater willingness to adapt their behaviour when attractive alternatives are offered. This may involve trying alternative starting points or opting for more sustainable travel options, as long as these are easy to access and clearly communicated.

Overall, the findings suggest that influencing visitor behaviour requires a tailored approach. While local users tend to stick to familiar habits, visitors from further away are more receptive to change. This confirms the importance of tools like WandelStarter, which make sustainable and less crowded choices more visible and appealing.

In the near future, follow-up surveys will be administered to investigate how residents and visitors from outside the region experience the Loonse and Drunense Duinen. Particular attention is paid to the alternative starting points and implemented nudging strategies. This should allow for more sustainable transport and an even better visitor experience.

Recognition and international relevance

Meanwhile, the Brabant approach has gained international recognition, with the WandelStarter approach standing out as a leading example of innovative destination

management. Its impact has led to recognition by Green Destinations, an international organisation that supports and recognises sustainable tourism worldwide, in the category of sustainable destination management. This demonstrates the strength of combining mobility, visitor management and behavioural insights to balance recreation, nature and liveability. WandelStarter plays a key role in guiding visitor flows and reducing pressure on vulnerable nature areas.

In addition, Brabant Partners and collaborating parties have received recognition at the Responsible Tourism Awards and a Dutch national innovation award, reinforcing their standing as front-runners in sustainable tourism. These accolades position Brabant and The MONA Project as a reference for other regions facing similar challenges.

A shift in perspective

What makes MONA particularly relevant is not just what it does, but how it reframes tourism. The focus shifts from promotion to guidance, from growth to balance, and from managing destinations to designing experiences. Success is no longer defined by the number of visitors, but by the quality of the experience and the resilience of the landscape.

This shift requires collaboration across sectors. In Brabant, this means bringing together governments, nature organisations, mobility partners, and knowledge institutions such as BUAs, combining research with real-world application.

From global view to local impact

The challenges MONA addresses are shared across Europe. Many regions are facing increasing visitor pressure, car dependency and fragmented landscapes. The lessons emerging from MONA show that small interventions can lead to meaningful behavioural change, and that accessibility and experience are key drivers of sustainable choices.

As the perspective shifts from a global view to the ground beneath our feet, MONA's relevance becomes clear. It is not only about mobility, but about connection, about how people relate to landscapes, and how small decisions can have wider impact.

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While local users tend to stick to familiar habits, visitors from further away are more receptive to change.



In Brabant, visitors may simply choose a different starting point for a walk. Yet in doing so, they become part of a broader transition. Not through restriction, but through design. Not through obligation, but through invitation. And that is where sustainable tourism begins.



MONA is a collaborative European project co-funded by the Interreg North-West Europe Programme.

More information

- <https://mona.nweurope.eu>
- <https://www.vangoghnationalpark.com>
- <https://wandelstarter.nl>

Photography

- Brabant Partners - Bjorn Snelders

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The focus shifts from promotion to guidance, from growth to balance, and from managing destinations to designing experiences.

Live on Different Levels

Navigating between global superstars and local 'hobbyism'

Martijn Mulder

Martijn Mulder is a researcher in the fields of leisure, live music/experience and attractive cities at Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences. He published his PhD thesis 'I Was There!' about pop music venues and festivals and their value in the ecosystem of live music.

Live music takes many forms. From emerging bands in local bars to national heroes in pop music venues to global superstars in arenas. Though they exist at different scales, they are all part of the same ecosystem and thus interdependent to some degree. Yet, the dynamics facing an unknown local band differ enormously from those of a global superstar. This article focuses on the different scales of the live music system and explains how global superstars like Beyoncé and Harry Styles are connected to the other end of the spectrum, where countless aspiring artists perform for small audiences for modest pay.

Uneven playing field

The recently published Dutch Live Music Monitor (Mulder & Swartjes, 2026) confirms that the live music sector functions as a *superstar economy* (Rosen, 1981). This concerns sectors whose output can hardly be scaled up and in which substitutes are imperfect. Talent, creativity and symbolic value play a major role in these sectors. In an economy of superstars, a very small upper layer pockets a very large share of all revenues: in the US, the top 1% of pop artists earns over 60% of all artists' income from live performances (Krueger, 2019). And although the Live Music Monitor does not contain figures on artists' income, a good estimate can be made based on the size of the venue and the estimated average ticket price.

The figures for 2024 show that 44% of concerts took place in small-capacity venues (<400), while this group represents only 0.7% of all ticket revenue. 5.1% of all performances were at a capacity of more than 4,000 visitors, this group accounted for at least 73% of ticket revenues (Mulder, 2025; Mulder & Swartjes, 2026). That year, there were 30 mega-concerts (>20,000) in the Netherlands, but this

small number had an enormous impact: a concert at the Johan Cruyff Arena attracts as many visitors as medium-sized venues do in an entire year. Based on this, it can be said that the Dutch live music sector also has the typical degree of skewness of a superstar economy.

Global sellers' market

At the top of the pop music pyramid there is a small group of superstars, operating in a global market in which an extraordinary amount of money changes hands. These artists have a very strong symbolic value and there are no real substitutes. The demand for these artists is much greater than the supply on a global level. This leads to what economists call a *sellers' market*, in which the negotiating power lies entirely with the supplier: the (management of the) artist, who decides where to perform and under what conditions. If the local promoter makes an offer that is not interesting enough, the artist has enough alternatives. When superstars like Harry Styles plan a world tour, they have the power to decide where to perform and under what conditions.

In recent years, the popularity of the true elite has extended even further than before. Michael Jackson was hugely popular in his heyday, but what artists such as Styles, Swift, and Beyoncé are achieving today is many times greater, powered by (social) media. Consequently, consumers are willing to pay increasingly higher prices for these concerts. Also, global top artists increasingly prefer to do their own tour rather than play at festivals. For a long time, a festival tour in the summer season was the best model for superstars, but recently they have increasingly been opting for their own tours in the summer. A related development is that these artists are more often choosing to tour fewer cities: Harry Styles' world tour in 2026 will only visit seven cities around the world.

Local buyers' market

On the other side of the live spectrum, a large group of artists perform almost exclusively locally or regionally, navigating between music as a hobby and being a pop musician, and working extremely hard for hardly any income. Why do these artists not simply ask for higher fees from the organisers who book them?



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There is hardly any support for the grassroots from the part of the sector where most of the money is earned.

Because this part of the live sector is a typical *buyers' market*: the supply of artists exceeds the demand. So, to put it bluntly, if you ask for more, others will take your place. The laws of the superstars do not apply to these artists either. Even if the local, young band plays very well technically, they still have little or no symbolic value and, in the public's perception, there are plenty of alternatives available. A fair pay scheme is not the solution for this large group of artists either. In fact, if a fair pay obligation were to apply to this group of artists as well, far fewer small-scale concerts would be organised because they would lead to (even greater) losses for the organiser.

The Live Music Monitor shows that the number of venues for these local artists has declined in recent years, particularly the number of small-scale, informal venues. Also, studies into the development of ticket prices in both the US and the Netherlands show that prices for the 10% artists with the lowest ticket prices have risen less than inflation over the past decades. In other words, artists earn relatively less from small concerts than they did a few decades ago.

A sustainable system?

The national live music ecosystem is characterised by a small but highly influential elite and a large struggling base. Two relevant questions arise: (1) Is this a problem? (2) Hasn't it always been this way? To begin with the latter: ever since Elvis in the 1950s, there have always been wealthy superstars. And yet, a lot has changed. Superstars are becoming increasingly popular and wealthy, while the least-earning artists' income has not increased. Superstars are also increasingly making choices that primarily serve their own interests, focusing more on 'monetising fandom': superfans are willing to pay a lot, so make sure they do.

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Superstars are becoming increasingly popular and wealthy, while the least-earning artists' income has not increased.

Is this problematic? Ultimately, yes. Because although it may seem that the local singer-songwriter has nothing to do with superstars, that is indeed the case indirectly. Festivals that must pay more to their headliners can spend less on the rest of the programme; venues program less riskily in the battle for attention and ticket sales; and visitors who spend hundreds of euros on an arena concert cannot spend that same money at the local venue.

The global level of superstar concerts is flourishing and undoubtedly adds value to the Dutch live music supply. Yet, the funny thing is that although the bottom of the pyramid creates value for the top (if only because every artist started small), the top creates hardly any value for the bottom. There is little structural support for the grassroots in the part of the sector where most of the money is earned. Unlike the world of football, where financial solidarity mechanisms have long existed, this idea is still in its infancy within the music sector. In the UK, however, experiments have recently been conducted with a ticket levy on superstar concerts aimed at creating funds for venues and artists in financial distress.

The remaining question is what these developments imply for the sustainable future of the sector. Clearly, it is great that artists like Harry Styles and Taylor Swift include Amsterdam in their world tours. At the same time, one may wonder how future-oriented the sector is when rehearsal spaces are scarce, local venues are disappearing, and even talented musicians are

leaving the scene disillusioned. Meanwhile, although superstar concerts in large arenas generate significant local economic impact, they lack some of the value creation associated with the local offering: community building, residential satisfaction, talent development, and spatial impact, to name a few. Currently, initiatives are being developed across the Netherlands to create more and better facilities for touring superstars. There is nothing wrong with that, but there is a risk that market forces will dominate the sector and that only artists who sell enough tickets will be able to perform. Ultimately, that would be a disastrous scenario for the entire live music ecosystem, from local talent to superstars.

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Photography

- Bart Heemskerk (page 62 top)
- Stepen Mease (page 63 top)
- Jessie Kamp (page 62 bottom, 63 bottom)



When Students Turn Music into Meaning

Working with real venues, real audiences and real pressure



Merel Rietveld, Fereshteh Adi Saatlo Anzures, and Anastasiya Vaganova are lecturers at Live Music and Dance Events at Breda University of Applied Sciences.

In January 2026, something quite special took place at Breda University of Applied Sciences. Second-year students of Live Music and Dance Events did not just study event production. They stepped into the role of producers themselves. Not in theory, but in practice: working with real venues, real audiences and real pressure. Project partners included venues across four cities in the Netherlands: 013 Poppodium, 160K, Effenaar, Area51, Mezz, Poppodium Phoenix, Holy Moly, and BUas. In the end, eight events raised more than €10,000 to support music education in Ukraine. Along the way, students discovered that producing an event is equal parts planning, improvisation and staying calm when things do not go as expected. Most importantly, they experienced how live music can create impact at every stage of design.

Starting with purpose

At the core of this project was a clear and shared motivation. Students organised benefit events for Music Saves Ukraine, a non-profit organisation founded after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, run by concert promoters and cultural managers committed to keeping music alive in wartime.

Their work spans international partnerships with festivals like Lowlands and Sziget, collaborations with artists including Ed Sheeran, and a grant

programme supporting music schools in war-affected regions. In 2025, that programme reached 100 schools, helping them repair bomb-damaged facilities, replace lost instruments, and install power stations to keep lessons running through blackouts. The funds gathered in this project contributed to purchasing instruments and materials, helping children maintain access to music education at a time when enrolment in Ukrainian music schools is rising sharply.

The connection between the course and this organisation was intentional. The aim was not only to teach students how to produce a live music event, but also to understand why it matters and how tangible impact can be when there is a real cause behind it. Working with Music Saves Ukraine made that visible in a way no classroom exercise could.

The need turned out to be much greater than expected. More schools applied than the programme could support, showing that only part of the demand was visible. At that moment, while searching for partners to help more schools, Music Saves Ukraine and the BUas specialisation Live Music & Dance Events found each other.

The students themselves were part of the decision from the start. Presented with a shortlist of five schools in need, they collectively chose where to direct their efforts. They chose Shpaniv School of Arts, a small village school whose enrolment had grown from 50 to nearly 300 as displaced families arrived from harder-hit regions of the country. That number stayed with them throughout the project.

When there is a real cause behind an event. Decisions feel different, budgets and partnerships matter more. And the final result carries weight beyond the night itself. The intention was for

students to see themselves not only as event managers, but as people capable of creating tangible impact in difficult circumstances.

Learning by doing, and sometimes by fixing

The course is built around one central idea: you learn event production by actually producing a show. Students went through the full process, from concept development and planning to execution and evaluation. They worked in teams, collaborated with venues and stakeholders, and took responsibility for their own events.

Every decision in event production matters. It matters to someone and it has a real impact on people's experiences. For future event professionals, this also means finding purpose beyond profit and recognising the role events can play in creating meaning.

No production ever goes entirely according to plan. Timelines shift, expectations change, and unexpected challenges appear at the least convenient moments. That is not a flaw in the process; it is the process.

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Students organised benefit events for Music Saves Ukraine, a non-profit organisation founded after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Embassy of Ukraine
in The Netherlands

WELCOME TO THE STAGE THE
EMBASSY OF UKRAINE IN THE
NETHERLANDS.

Students of Live Music & Dance Events raised 10K for Music saves Ukraine

In this course, learning how to deal with uncertainty, refine and materialise ideas, and approach the right stakeholders was just as important as producing the Excel workbooks that keep everything on track. Meaningful education in this context is not always smooth. It can be messy, time-pressured and unforgiving, and that is precisely why it works.

"Café Cypher was a hip hop event that we organised as a team by trial and error. Because of our limited experience, the preparation was sometimes chaotic, but we learned a lot from it. During the event itself, unexpected situations came up, including delayed artists and missing equipment. By communicating well and staying solution-oriented, we managed to handle everything. In the end, we delivered a professional and successful event. The project was a valuable and practical preparation for our work placement." (Maybel Meijer, second-year student).

Eight events, one collective impact

With the support of supervisors and the inspiration of guest lectures from professionals in the music industry, each student team developed and delivered its own event over an eight-week period. The teams staged eight distinct productions, each with its own identity, audience, and creative direction. Jazz, hip hop, rock, punk, techno, and carnival music took the stage across four cities. Together, they formed a diverse programme, all connected by a shared purpose.

The combined result was €10,000 raised for Music Saves Ukraine, funds that are already being used to support music schools, including the provision of new instruments. The value of this project is not in what was produced, but in what students had to become to make it happen.

What makes this structure particularly valuable is the balance between independence and collaboration. Each group operated autonomously yet contributed to a larger collective outcome. It reflects how the industry often works, where multiple stakeholders and teams align around a shared goal.

"It was great to see how such a diverse group, from complete beginners to students with event experience, came together to create something we were all proud of. Everyone brought their own strengths, and that is what made it work. For me, this really shows how powerful good collaboration can be." (Renske Bloemers, second-year student).

What you do not see in the final result

The final number is clear and measurable. What is less visible is everything behind it. Designing a course like this requires long meetings where ideas slowly take shape, reaching out to partners, industry experts, and other stakeholders to ensure that the learning experience is as real as possible, while keeping it feasible within the allocated timeframe.

There are the discussions about budgets that never seem to stretch far enough. The last-minute adjustments that somehow always happen close to showtime. And then there is the moment when everything comes together, when the doors open, the audience arrives, and the event works. That is where the learning becomes tangible. Students do not just understand production. They experience it.

From student to producer

Projects like this reflect a broader shift in education, moving away from purely theoretical learning towards real-world application. Students develop both professional skills and a sense of responsibility. They learn that events are not just about logistics or entertainment, but about creating experiences that can have real impact. They begin to see themselves differently. Not just as students completing an assignment, but as people capable of turning an idea into something real.

"During production, we were given the opportunity to organise our own event. Because it was actually going to happen, it did not feel like a school assignment, but like something real that had to succeed. That made everyone extra motivated to create something meaningful. We arranged almost everything ourselves, and because of that, I learned so much about

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The value of this project is not in what was produced, but in what students had to become to make it happen.



organising a real live music event. The day of the event was the highlight for me. Everything came together, and it was amazing to see something we had worked so hard on become reality." (Maud van Turnhout, second-year student).

Perhaps this is the most important outcome. Not just the €10,000, but a group of students who now see themselves as part of an industry where ideas can become reality, and where events can contribute to something bigger than the event itself.

Photography

• Jayden Rolling (page 64 top)

The Story of Revolution Earth

The contribution of storytelling to the development of an immersive experience with impact



Moniek Hover is Professor of Storytelling. Wesley Put, Juriaan van Waalwijk and Niels Wittkampf are part of the research and development team of the professorship in Storytelling.

The quality of life on earth related to human activities: it is a theme that could not be more significant or urgent. But significant and urgent does not automatically mean compelling or impactful. How do you turn a complex, global issue into an experience that touches a ten-year-old, gets a school class thinking and inspires an adult visitor to take action? That was precisely the challenge faced by the programme development team at Discovery Museum in Kerkrade. They wanted to draw more attention to the seriousness, the impact and people's willingness to take action to make a difference themselves, without the museum coming across as patronising.

Discovery Museum connects people, science, technology, sustainability, heritage and society. The Earth Theatre (Aarde Theater) in the museum is the place where visitors can experience the overview effect. 'Revolution Earth', the new interactive and immersive walk-through experience was opened in 2023 and is about earth and the role of human beings in its own future. The professorship in Storytelling of Breda University of Applied Sciences worked with the programme development team of Discovery Museum on the development of this new experience.



Storytelling as a design tool

The team of the museum had a picture of the spatial layout of the experience, but sought support in the area of storytelling: for the story, the script and the characters. The professorship in Storytelling did not only put in theoretical knowledge, but also practical experience with developing stories in various contexts, from meaningful experiences to socially charged projects about sustainability and the future of our planet.

What made the project special right from the start was the way storytelling was used: not as an end product, but as a design tool. Instead of designing everything first and then linking a story to it afterwards, the story was developed in parallel with and in interaction with the spatial design. This requires a shared language between the designers and storytellers of the professorship. Three joint sessions formed the basis for this collaboration between BUas' professorship in Storytelling and Discovery Museum.

Building a shared picture in Kerkrade

The first session took place in Kerkrade, so the storytelling team could experience the halls where the experience had to be given a home. The Discovery Museum's team was challenged to describe the experience in what is named an 'experience logline'. This is an exercise during

which the nucleus of the experience needs to be told according to a fixed format. A simple tool, but surprisingly powerful. If the story cannot be told in one sentence, there is a good chance that it is not clear enough yet.

The Discovery Museum's development team as a team was therefore given the homework assignment to work out this experience logline into a story in one sentence and work it out into five steps at a later stage. "During this exercise we realised as a team that we were not quite on the same page yet. Drawing up the experience logline helped us understand each other's point of view and refine our story", said Mischa Horninge, Programme Development Coordinator at the museum. The experience logline they created is as follows:

In this story you find out how four pupils living in the future interrupt the museum presentation with the aid of a time machine, aiming to inform and inspire visitors to make different choices, so that a sustainability revolution can be started and the earth will also be more liveable for mankind in the future.

To work out the story, the five-step model of storytelling (Hover, 2013) was used. The set-up, the motoric moment, the turning points, the climax and the resolution provide a first sketch of a story and of the experience.

The hero/heroine in the story is you

For the second session, the team of Discovery Museum set off for Breda. The experience logline already created was the starting point for the classic, yet essential question: *who is the hero/heroine in this story?*

With the aid of the LEGO® Serious Play® method, colleagues of the professorship in Storytelling guided the development team in exploring the several issues. LEGO bricks served





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"How are we going to show the world of the future to visitors?"
(Mischa Horninge, Discovery Museum)

as a means of communication, making abstract ideas tangible. In this way, the concept of time travel was explored in greater depth, and the four characters in the story – the four pupils – were given a clearer profile.

This greater depth aligns with the character of an immersive experience such as Revolution Earth, during which visitors are no passive onlookers, but essential elements of the story. This calls for a story that leaves room for personal interpretation, encourages people to make choices, and appeals to a variety of target groups. Layering is the key here.

At the same time, the theme of the experience makes this more complicated: the quality of life on earth does not hinge on a single choice, but on many choices that occur simultaneously and in parallel, with branching effects. Interactivity is therefore not a playful bonus, but a dramatic necessity. That insight naturally led the discussion to the story conflict: what is at stake, and who ultimately determines the outcome?

Storytelling in action

The third session, in Breda too, integrated the story and physical halls into an immersive walk-through experience. In this session, the five-step

model was worked out in great detail: visitors move through a building, encountering opposing forces and building towards a climax. Each hall forms its own episode within the overarching story.

During the session, the central question was about how the story, halls and interactivity could reinforce one another. Extensive research was carried out into how visitors can engage with the story at different levels and how diverse target groups can be involved in a way that reinforces rather than excludes one another.

Based on these starting points, the walk-through experience was given a concrete spatial form in four adjacent halls. A short impression of this spatial form based on the press release about the expo opening in December 2023:

In the first hall, the story is told of the four industrial revolutions. Visitors realise how our society has drastically changed in the past few centuries, while catching a glimpse of the future at the same time.

In the second hall participants take on the role of astronauts and, standing on glass rings, they get a panoramic view of a cylinder-shaped screen measuring 16 by 13 metres. They are travelling around the world along the earth's beauty, including snow-capped mountain peaks, thundering waterfalls, and vast oceans; yet, they see the other side too: plastic pollution, deforestation and drought.

The third hall is a futuristic discovery landscape in which participants are actively facing climate change. These challenges are depicted in colourful, interactive games on wall-to-wall projections that are performed using the whole body. The better the participants work together as a group, the more the landscape comes to life.

The last hall is dedicated to tranquillity and reflection. Catchy texts and film footage bring the walk-through experience to a close, giving visitors the chance to allow the emotional understanding of this complex subject matter to sink in.

Revolution Earth: an impactful experience

The experience is accessible to a wide audience, and strikes an emotional chord with visitors. In the several halls they gain an accurate picture of the Earth's current state and a glimpse of the future. There are no passive onlookers here: the experience encourages reflection and invites them to contribute to a better world themselves.

Visitors take up the challenge and literally bring the future to life; the choices you make as a visitor really do matter. At the same time, the experience provides parents with tools to discuss this complex topic with their children, something that visitors appreciate. This is beautifully illustrated by a conversation between a child and his mother: *"I think we should live on Mars later on, mummy."* *"Well, if we look after the earth properly, there's no need for that at all, you know, son."*

The benefits of the collaboration go beyond a fully developed story or a film synopsis. It demonstrates what happens when storytelling is incorporated early on in the design process: it refines ambitions, brings implicit choices explicit, and makes a complex topic tangible, open to discussion and something visitors can experience.

For the professorship in Storytelling, this project is a concrete application of current research into telling stories about sustainability in a leisure context.

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Photography

- Discovery Museum



Breda Brings People Together

From city marketing to city making

Hildegard Assies



Hildegard Assies is director at Breda Marketing.



There is something special about Breda. It is hard to pinpoint, but you can feel it straight away. At the Valkenberg park, where a walk easily turns into a conversation. At NAC Breda, where you are not just a spectator, but part of something bigger. Or in a neighbourhood, where someone puts an idea on the table and another says: "Let's just do it." That is Breda. Not a slogan or a project, but an attitude. A deep-rooted feeling that we do things together, and that what we create together becomes greater than what anyone could have imagined alone. Breda brings people together.

That attitude has been part of the city for ages. Time and again, Breda has opened itself up to merchants, soldiers, artists, thinkers, and newcomers. Not as guests on the margins, but as co-builders of the city. The Nassaus did not settle here above the city, but in it. As leaders of a new era and as part of everyday life.

We have never lost that mentality. In 1944, Breda embraced the Polish liberators as if they were their own sons. Not acting from a sense of duty, but driven by feelings. Decades later, NAC players walk onto the pitch with their names on their shirt. And look at the Blind Walls Gallery: starting out as an art project, grown into living municipal archives in which international artists and residents tell the story of Breda together.

Today, that story continues. In residents making their neighbourhood greener. In start-ups working on smart and sustainable solutions. In educational institutions, businesses and social organisations building on talent, technology and entrepreneurship. Breda is green, welcoming and limitless: a city where technology serves people, where creativity and craftsmanship strengthen each other, and where ambition goes hand in hand with liveability.

Growing with meaning

An important assignment has been given to Breda Marketing: making the story of Breda visible, palpable and divisible. Not as an advertising agency for the city, but as a brand director, connector, driving force, and knowledge partner. Without any direction, growth becomes stacking stones. With meaning, it becomes city making.

Breda continues to grow. From about 190,000 residents today to some 220,000 residents in 2050. That step change will offer opportunities for new houses, employment, amenities, and meeting places. At the same time, the crucial question is put to the city: how do we wish to grow? Growth requires direction, choices and solving existing challenges. Otherwise the city is growing in volume, but not in meaning.

More than a cosy city

Breda has a strong image as a bon-vivant and welcoming city. Every year, around 1.8 million people visit the city, mainly to shop, eat out or spend a day out. That is valuable, but the picture is too limited for a top 10 city.

Tourism is essential to both the local economy and the quality of life in the city. That is exactly why it requires direction. Without guidance, visitors could lead to crowdedness, monoculture and nuisance. With guidance, the leisure economy contributes to economic development, quality of life and taking pride in the city.

The challenge, therefore, does not lie in more of the same, but in more quality, better spreading and appealing offerings during the whole year. Breda should not become a city for the weekend, but it should be a fully-fledged city seven days a week.

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The challenge is to turn individual strengths into one recognisable ecosystem connected to the region, Brabant and international networks.

There also lies a challenge for the future. Breda has chances to become more appealing for youngsters, international talents and new target groups. That requires space for night culture, urban culture, creators, culture, sport, nature, heritage, and innovative elements. Leisure is not a matter of secondary importance then, but an engine for urban development.

Potential is not a position yet

Economically speaking, Breda also faces a major challenge. The city has strong education, a growing innovation district and a promising ecosystem around applied technology and creativity. Yet, that potential does not always translate into a clear position within national and international networks. Students are trained here, but still leave the city too often upon completing their studies. Hence, entrepreneurship, innovative power and future earning capacity also disappear.



Breda has a lot in place: robotics, AI, games, creative tech, creators, campuses, incubators, and appealing events. Yet, the story is too fragmented. The challenge is to make one recognisable ecosystem out of separate strengths, connected with the region, Brabant and international networks.

That requires more focus, collaboration and visibility. Education, businesses, (local) authorities, and the city should not only collaborate; they should also make joint choices. Breda should not only facilitate innovation, but make it visible and experiential in areas, at events, in networks, and opportunities for talents.

A strong Breda strengthens the region, Brabant and the Netherlands. As a city acting as a liaison between Randstad, Brabant and Flanders, Breda has the possibility to play a bigger role than it claims today. The challenge is clear: continuing to grow from a city with lots of potential to a city with economic appeal.

The power of attractive places

The step change offers the opportunity to address existing challenges and make Breda's story palpable. Three areas play a major role in this: 't Zoet, the Breda Innovation District, and the city centre. These are not merely development sites, but places where culture, economy, education, leisure, and social interaction converge – not as separate, standalone functions, but as an urban mix with meaning. They cannot exist without one another. The success of an innovation district, for instance, is strongly dependent on the social infrastructure, and conversely, new amenities and a city centre need quality visitors to remain viable.

It is precisely at that intersection that the role of city marketing lies. Not only once an area is complete, but from the very beginning. By contributing ideas on identity, programming, community building, and experience, area development is getting more meaningful than just houses and square metres.

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The direction is clear:
Breda is developing
as City in the park,
City of encounters,
and City of solutions.

Breda Innovation District

The Breda Innovation District is not a classically defined area, but an urban programme in which Breda itself serves as a platform for applied technology and creativity. From the Havenkwartier, 't Zoet, and the station area to educational campuses, Triple O Campus, B'WISE, B'GAME, and the Esports Talent Hub: everywhere, education, businesses, (local) authorities, creators, and residents come

together around robotics, AI, games, and creative tech. Events such as Dutch Game Week, TURF, B'Robotics XXL, and BredaPhoto make innovation visible, experiential, and shared.

From city marketing to city making

For Breda Marketing, city marketing has long since ceased to be just a matter of promotion. The days when city marketing revolved primarily around attracting visitors, creating campaigns, and selling the city are behind us. Visibility, hospitality, and appeal naturally remain important. But the challenge has grown broader. Today it is about identity, positioning, liveability, and economic relevance. About the question of what kind of city Breda wants to be, who we want to appeal to, and how residents, entrepreneurs, students, creators, and visitors benefit from that.

That is why our role is shifting from telling to delivering. From creating campaigns about Breda, to helping shape the places, programmes, and partnerships where Breda can be experienced directly. Because a strong city brand does not emerge on paper or in a slogan. It emerges in the city itself, together with its residents: in neighbourhoods that work, in events that move people, in entrepreneurs who make a difference, in residents who get involved, and in places where the story of Breda becomes palpable. Breda brings people together.





Breda Marketing is increasingly taking up the role of brand director, connector, driving force, and knowledge partner.

City marketing has thus grown into a strategic instrument for urban development. Breda Marketing increasingly takes on the role of brand director, connector, driver, and knowledge partner. We contribute data, trends, and insights, identify opportunities, and bring parties together around a shared story. We focus on themes that are decisive for the future of Breda: talent retention, placemaking, resident engagement, international positioning, the leisure economy, and the quality of life in the city and its neighbourhoods. Naturally, we continue to support all of this with communication.

We do not develop everything ourselves – nor is that our role. Our strength lies in reinforcing what already exists and connecting what can make each other greater. We help partners communicate the story of Breda more sharply, and we ensure that initiatives do not exist in isolation but add up to a recognisable movement. In this way, city marketing is not a layer of communication applied afterwards, but a means of giving direction, coherence and meaning to the development of the city.

This is the shift from city marketing to city making. As a natural next step. City marketing gives direction to the story of Breda; city making ensures that this story becomes visible, palpable and experiential in area development, programming, partnerships, and communities. Not just telling the world what Breda is, but helping Breda become it.

That is precisely why we see area development as one of the most powerful forms of city marketing. Places like 't Zoet, the Breda Innovation District and the city centre will soon tell more about Breda than any campaign ever could. When these areas are developed in a way that is green, welcoming, creative, international and distinctive, they make the Breda brand tangible. The city's story is then not turning into a promise, but an experience.

Breda Marketing does not construct buildings itself or lay down streets. But we do help to give meaning to new places. We connect parties, safeguard the broader city narrative, activate creators and entrepreneurs, and ensure that area development not only works physically but also comes to life socially, economically and culturally. In this way, Breda is not only becoming more visible, but above all, more experiential. And so Breda is not simply growing larger – it is growing stronger as Breda.

Delivering on what Breda promises

The direction is clear: Breda is developing as a City in the park, a City of encounters and a City of solutions. This positioning calls for places,

programmes, experiences and stories in which that promise becomes palpable. Green, welcoming and limitless must not remain mere words, but become recognisable in the way people use, discover and shape the city together.

The challenge lies, on the one hand, in showcasing the stories that already carry the city's narrative forward. On the other hand, it lies in strengthening initiatives that already embody the story of Breda. Explore Breda, Breda Mix, events, routes, creators, entrepreneurs, and residents together do not form a promotional layer placed over the city, but an infrastructure that helps people experience Breda in a different and richer way.

Explore Breda brings stories, routes and places together, making room for both the familiar and the unexpected sides of Breda. Not only the city's icons are given a platform, but especially its hidden gems, emerging creators, green routes, waterways, culture and neighbourhood initiatives. In this way, the city is presented not as a destination, but as a network of experiences in which encounter, creativity and authenticity take centre stage.

With *Breda Mix* visitors and residents gain greater control over their own experience of the city. Personal routes, favourite places and shared tips ensure that Breda is not reduced to a single standard route, but can be discovered time and again. This strengthens local businesses, encourages a wider spread of visitors and invites longer stays – but above all, it makes visible just how many different layers the city has.

Events also play an important role as temporary accelerators of urban positioning. They are not just moments of attention, but places where talent, technology, creativity, audiences, and partners come together. They make the innovative and creative strength of Breda experiential and connect it to the city itself. Breda Marketing works closely with events to make both their content and their communication stronger together, and to align them with our brand narrative. In this way, visibility does not emerge as the end product of marketing, but as the result of meaningful collaboration. Breda Marketing helps to strengthen, connect and give direction to that movement. By bringing together stories, places, programmes, and partnerships, we ensure that the promise of Breda is not merely told, but truly experienced.

Partnership with backbone

Breda's step change will only be successful if parties are able to find one another

Collaboration is not a precondition, but the very core of the city's development.

Breda Marketing connects businesses, education, cultural institutions, (local authorities, residents, and regional partners around a shared story. This happens on a local level, for example, during the annual *Dag van de Stadmakers* (City Makers Day), but also on a regional, national and international level through partners such as REWIN, Landstad Baronie, Brabant Partners, Brabant Branding, and NBTIC.

Our role is shifting from 'taking care of' to 'making sure that.' Making sure that partners find one another; that stories are given coherence; that area developments contribute to the city's brand; and that residents become proud co-storytellers.

Strong partnerships go beyond visibility alone. They emerge when organisations, brands and communities build together towards social value and urban development.

Ambition and movement

The years ahead call for focus, courage and execution. Breda has everything it takes to grow from a strong regional player into a city with national and international influence.

The step change makes that challenge all the more urgent. The story of Breda must not only resonate in campaigns, but become visible in places, programmes, collaborations, and choices that truly matter.

Manifestations, theme years, innovative events, and other moonshots can serve as accelerators of a broader movement. Now more than ever, the promise 'Breda brings it together' must become visible in everything the city builds, organises and makes experiential.

Breda Marketing plays both a strategic and an executive role in this. As advisor, connector and driving force, we safeguard coherence and distinctiveness, bridge leisure and economy, make policy a lived experience, and give places meaning. In this way, we make sure Breda does not simply grow, but develops from its own identity as a city

The following pages highlight a range of projects and developments that show how diverse partners across the city are working together on Breda's most important challenges. Together, they are shaping a sustainable, creative and innovative future for the city.

More information

- See bredamarketing.nl

Photography

- Robert Aarts (page 68 author picture)
- Breda Marketing



Space for Young Creative Talent

Investing in the future of Breda's appeal

Peter van der Aalst

Peter van de Aalst is Manager of Business Relations and Internationalisation at the Academy for Leisure and Events. He is working on his Professional Doctorate project on the value of street culture for the development of cities.

In many cities, young creative talents have helped shape and colour the city over recent decades. The pop sector once began as a collection of bottom-up initiatives: some started a festival, while others squatted an empty church or factory and organised concerts there. From this drive and these activities, a fully-fledged music and festival industry and a club circuit of venues eventually blossomed. Pop venues are now institutionalised and supported organisations, but at the 'grassroots' level new community-driven initiatives, such as skate parks, have emerged again.

These initiatives give the city colour and substance and contribute to an attractive city for visitors and residents, but they are often vulnerable as well. This article is about what is needed to preserve that strength, for cities in general and for Breda in particular. It is based on literature and field research carried out as part of a professional doctorate project on the value of street culture for the development of cities.

Street culture and night-time culture: ingredients for a cool city

On 'the street', knowledge that is not found in policy documents is built with a Do It Yourself (DIY) mentality. It is the knowledge of young creatives who build their scene because there is nothing, or very little. Street culture and night-time culture, closely connected to hip-hop and electronic music, are the result of this and are in fact several sides of the same coin. These bottom-up, originally metropolitan forms of culture attract young people who feel less connected to mainstream or regulated activities and who often feel less heard. They are looking for authenticity, freedom and a way to go against the current.

Florian Kock (2021) researched the factors that determine a city's 'coolness' and identified four dimensions tourists use to decide whether a city is 'cool': authenticity (does the city feel real and genuine?), rebelliousness (is there a certain sense of going against the grain?), originality (is the city seen as unique and distinctive?) and liveliness (do people experience energy and dynamism in the city?). These are precisely the four dimensions that are also characteristic of street culture and night-time culture initiatives.

Broad prosperity and creative ecology as a lens for cities

The fact that a city is seen as cool says something about its attractiveness to potential

visitors and residents. But life in a city naturally means much more to its residents. Within that context, the concept of 'broad prosperity' is relevant. Broad prosperity is about much more than economic output; it is also measured by social cohesion, health, safety, equality of opportunity, and cultural vitality. It is a different view of development, one that puts people at the centre and takes account of its effects on future generations and on places elsewhere in the country and the world. Het PON & Telos has developed a model (Figure 1) showing that people's quality of life is embedded in their social and physical living environment. It is therefore a promising framework for looking, from a broad perspective, at creating value for a city: a pleasant, inclusive, attractive and cool city.

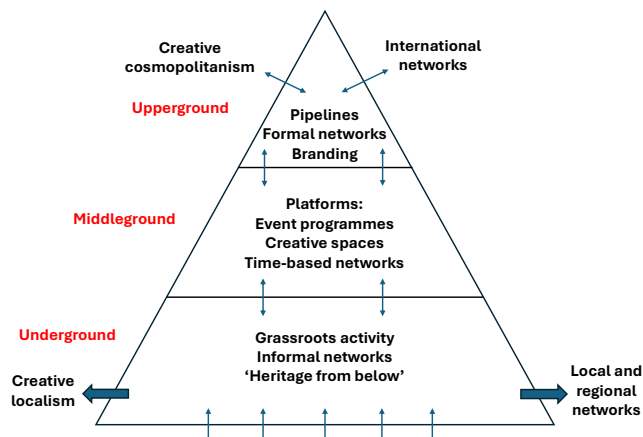


Figure 1

When looking specifically at the value the creative sector can produce for a city, this also fits exactly within that broader definition of prosperity. Alongside an attractive cultural offer, it is also about identity formation among young people, social connection across cultural boundaries, a sense of belonging, talent development outside the established educational pathways, and a living environment that ties people to a city.

Greg Richards (2025) provides a useful analytical framework for this with the model of creative ecology (Figure 2). The creative city consists of three layers: the *upperground* of formal institutions (museums, venues, funders), the *underground* of informal bottom-up communities, and the *middleground* that connects the two through events and creative hubs and within which what Richards calls 'switchers' are active: people and places that understand underground culture, often come from it themselves, and translate it into broader markets and policy.

Figure 2



Bottom-up initiatives that emerge on the street in the underground form the city's creative humus layer, the fertile ground from which innovation, identity and a lively living environment grow. In this context, factors such as affordable living and working space, gentrification, inequality of opportunity, the progression of talent and the often large gap between what happens in the city centre and in peripheral neighbourhoods are important considerations for making the most of the potential of cities' bottom-up energy.

An example from Tilburg: the night as a living laboratory

In Tilburg, pop venue 013 and youth organisation R-Newt are working together under the 'De Nieuwe Nacht' (The New Night) banner on that humus layer of the city's creative ecology, because Tilburg has a gap precisely in this fertile ground that is important for the city. The core of this experiment is that young creatives from night-time culture, who would normally not quickly find themselves at the programming table of a major cultural institution, are given a say in the night-time programming of the small club to be created in the basement of V39, the building directly opposite 013 where R-Newt is based. Not only as a target group, but as creators who can experiment in this small-capacity venue and further develop their community. In that sense, this initiative fits seamlessly with the Tilburg platform ENNU, which amplifies the voice of Tilburg's young people and gives existing movements and platforms a stage.

What makes the 'De Nieuwe Nacht' experiment interesting is not only the content, but also the process. It began with co-creation sessions with the directors and staff of 013 and R-Newt. This experiment is being supervised as part of the professional doctorate project. A Theory of Change approach is being used: what change do we want to see, how do we measure it and how do we learn along the way? In this, 013 and R-Newt explicitly position themselves as learning organisations, willing to experiment and adjust on the basis of insights. In a next phase, sessions with young creatives will follow. A Theory of Change approach will also be used with them to discuss their dreams, ambitions and plans, and the translation of those into night-time programming will likewise be monitored with them and adjusted where necessary.

The themes at the heart of these co-creation sessions connect directly with the broader prosperity questions at play in the city: accessibility (who feels welcome?), inclusion (who are we not reaching and why not?), safety (social safety as a condition for self-expression) and the value of night-time culture as an informal but powerful learning environment for young talent.

Ultimately, this experiment can have a multitude of impacts: social value for the city, the development of new concepts for the night-time culture sector and new audiences for 013 and other cultural institutions. The indicators for measuring impact are not only visitor numbers or turnover, but also softer outcomes such as personal development, social connection and the progression of talent. Precisely those softer outcomes are difficult to measure, but they form the core of the value that can be created. One of the participants in the focus groups held in Breda and Tilburg stated: "Inspiration is not measurable." This is true; it is difficult to measure, but that does not mean that it is not important.

The results of the research into night-time culture in Tilburg and other cities, also carried out as part of the professional doctorate, likewise underline the importance of small-scale, community-driven initiatives in which ownership lies with the makers and where they are supported without being taken over.



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On 'the street', knowledge that is not found in policy documents is built with a Do It Yourself (DIY) mentality.



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'Switchers' are people and places that understand underground culture, often come from it themselves, and translate it into broader markets and policy.

The potential and pain points in Breda

Anyone who looks at Breda through the lenses of broad prosperity and creative ecology sees a city with qualities, but also vulnerabilities.

The DIY qualities are visible in a place such as Pier15 on Haveneiland (Harbour Island). TURF Event also has the explicit ambition to position night-time culture and young creatives more strongly in Breda. Focus groups at Pier15 and various interviews with other stakeholders in Breda reveal what this place means. Pier15 is more than a skate park: it is a breeding ground, a safe haven for identity formation and an informal learning environment. The pain points are also clear. Pier15 has been operating on short-term permits for twelve years, and the question is what exactly the place of this initiative will be in the development of the 't Zoet area. Affordable studio space is structurally scarce. Young makers leave for Rotterdam or Amsterdam because Breda does not facilitate them sufficiently.

The fragmentation of the ecosystem is also mentioned as a point of concern. It is observed that street culture in Breda is 'hidden': the communities exist, but are hardly visible to the outside world, to policy-makers and often to one another. A twelve-year-old child from a neighbourhood such as Hoge Vucht does not go to Pier15 because it is too far away, literally and figuratively. Yet in Hoge Vucht there are basketball players, dancers and skaters in the making who have talent and want to develop, who want to be given opportunities and who can make an important contribution to a culturally vital and inclusive Breda. They do not know the way to the existing infrastructure, and that infrastructure does not know the way to them.

This is not a Breda-specific problem. It is the structural tension within every urban ecosystem: the places that bottom-up driven communities need are rarely in the neighbourhoods where those communities live. The centre absorbs the creative energy, and as soon as the land becomes valuable enough, the place is often

displaced.

That mechanism of gentrification is at work in many cities, from Berlin's RAW area to Strijp-S in Eindhoven, and it can also be seen in Breda.

Lessons for Breda

What can Breda learn from the research and from a city such as Tilburg?

The Nieuwe Nacht experiment in Tilburg shows that the potential does not lie in the formal established institutions or in the underground community separately, but in the connection between them. Breda needs people and places that can structurally fulfil that connecting role between underground and upperground: switchers who know underground talent and can connect it to the established cultural infrastructure. Breda already has a number of places, people and organisations that do this. If they are cherished and enabled to grow, the attractiveness of the city will grow with them.

Policy-makers ask for measurability. The challenge is to develop indicators that do justice to what street culture and night-time culture initiatives actually mean and add to the city. The broad prosperity concept also includes the indicators of social cohesion, health and subjective well-being and is a good starting point for developing indicators.

It is important that professional intermediaries are present in the neighbourhoods. They can create connections by ensuring that young people in Hoge Vucht and other neighbourhoods know that there is basketball, skateboarding and the possibility of developing programmes at Pier15, and that Pier15 knows there are talents in those neighbourhoods. That connecting space calls for people who consciously choose it and organisations that give them the room to do so. In that respect, the Park Haveneiland project that Pier15 is currently starting is promising. That project has the explicit aim of working on connections with target groups that Pier15 has not yet reached.

Initiatives such as Pier15, studios and affordable living and working space form the infrastructure of the underground. Many initiatives of this kind are under pressure in cities. Without physical space, there is no ecosystem. The question is not

only whether the city wants to make room for this layer of the creative ecosystem, but whether the relevant municipal domains, alongside sport and culture also property, urban development and the economy, are being involved for that purpose.

One of the findings from the research is that good cultural initiatives often arise from scarcity and necessity. That is valuable, but it does not mean that the city should maintain that scarcity. It should provide infrastructure, but keep the distinct character intact.

In conclusion

Ultimately, it is about the question of what you, as a city, want to be and for whom, now and in the future. That question touches on the core of the concept of broad prosperity. The research leads to the conclusion that a city that is built up to capacity, that sacrifices cultural space for residential tower blocks, that lets its underground communities disappear to cities with more space and less pressure to build, in fact becomes smaller. That city loses a specific power of innovation and emancipation, and potential substantive-artistic, social and commercial returns in the form of new products, services and programmes, new audiences and new networks, opportunities and careers.

'Street knowledge' is the knowledge of people who know how to make something out of nothing. That knowledge is precious. For Breda, the challenge is to see, value and facilitate it sufficiently.

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Photography

- Richard Motieram – *jinzenvisuals* (page 72)
- Rosa Meininger (page 70)
- Suzie Farcoin (page 71)

From Experience to Impact

What theatre visits really do to people

Pieter de Rooij



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In recent years, the concept of impact has moved to the centre of cultural policy discussions. Theatres and other cultural organisations are increasingly expected to demonstrate not just that visitors enjoy a performance, but that attending genuinely makes a difference in their lives - contributing to well-being, personal growth, and meaningful experiences. Chassé Theater in Breda recognises the relevance of creating visitor impact. Central to their mission is happiness and the contribution to enjoyment, a meaningful life, and togetherness. In the period 2021-2025, BUas has partnered with Chassé Theater to conduct a series of four studies into visitor experience and impact. In these studies, the visitor experience reflects what happens on stage and how the visitor responds to this immediately, or shortly after the visit. Impact is related to the mid-term or long-term effect of these experiences. Together, these four studies form a coherent and growing body of knowledge about what theatre does to people. In this article, the results of these four studies are described.

Comparing experiences and impact across three genres

The first study examined visitor experiences and impact across three performing arts genres (theatre drama, musical, and cabaret) using a quantitative survey filled in by 635 visitors within a few days after their visit (De Rooij et al., 2022). The study assessed visitor experiences across five dimensions: aesthetics, cultural enjoyment, social connectedness, intellectual stimulation, and captivation. Impact was measured across three levels in line with Duerden et al. (2018): memorable (whether visitors are touched), meaningful (leading to new personal, relevant insights), and transformative (leading or expected to lead to changes in attitudes and/or behaviour).

All genres scored highly on aesthetics. A musical is therefore experienced just as aesthetically pleasing by a musical visitor as a drama play is by a drama play visitor. Drama play visitors reported significantly higher intellectual stimulation, while musical audiences scored higher on captivation, cultural enjoyment, and social connectedness. Cabaret scores were roughly in line with musicals. In terms of impact, drama play showed stronger results than musical and cabaret, although these two genres also created visitor impact. Over 46% of drama visitors reported meaningful impact, and 24% described the experience as transformative. Musical performances also generated considerable impact, with 30% of the visitors reporting meaningful impact and 16% reporting a transformative experience. Cabaret

was most often described as memorable, with 56% of respondents feeling emotionally moved. Finally, a key finding across all genres was that intellectual stimulation showed a significant positive relationship with impact. This suggests that when performances trigger cognitive processes, the impact increases. A limitation of the study is that short-term impact was measured, while actually impact should be addressed in the medium or long term.

Visitor experiences and short-term impact in musicals

The second study also had a quantitative approach and investigated two musicals: *Come From Away* and *Diana & Zonen* (De Rooij, Van Liempt and Mertens, 2025). In this study, the relationships between specific visitor experience dimensions and levels of impact were investigated (539 participants). This study distinguished between two types of visitor experience: perceptions of production elements (such as quality of the cast, topic of the play) and outcome-based subjective experiences (such as emotional connection, cognitive stimulation, artistic experience and social connection). Impact was measured in line with the first study. The results show that two visitor experience dimensions are the primary drivers of meaningful and transformative impact: emotional connection with the characters and story, and intellectual stimulation.

Memorable and meaningful experiences told in visitors' own words

The third study took a qualitative approach (De Rooij, Bargeman and Martin, 2025). Using the Critical Incident Technique (CIT), visitors to Chassé Theater were invited to write freely about a memorable theatre experience: what happened during the performance they attended a (long) while ago (the experience), and what it brought them afterwards (the impact). This enabled us to make a clear distinction between the experience and the impact. Of 6,400 visitors who received the short

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A performing arts visit may certainly be memorable and meaningful, but it is not expected to be transformative.



questionnaire with open questions, 80 usable responses were collected and analysed thematically in line with a theoretical framework. About half of the respondents clearly described how they perceived production elements such as the quality of singing or acting, stage design and stage direction. Almost all respondents wrote about their emotions (e.g. being touched), which suggests that emotions are a precondition for a memorable experience. Cognitive stimulation was rarely mentioned as part of the description of the experience, but rather as part of the impact: gaining new insights about life, relationships, or society was reported by nearly half of the respondents. It seems that reflection after attending the performance plays a major role here. Hedonic well-being, such as feelings of happiness or comfort was mentioned by around a third. Several respondents also clearly referred to strengthening social ties with family and friends. Transformational impact (changes in attitudes, self-perceptions, or behaviour) was rarely described. Overall, these results show that attending performing arts may lead to memorable and meaningful experiences, but (in contrast to the first study) that transformation is rare.

Finding the right questions to evaluate impact in a short survey

The fourth study was conducted in collaboration with Chassé Theater and Parkstad Limburg Theaters. The common practice within these theatres is to send short surveys immediately after the visit, in order to evaluate the visit. Although it is realised that impact should actually be measured a while after the visit, such a procedure would be a bit strange for visitors. Therefore, the theatres want to use their timing of evaluation (shortly after the visit) to get an indication of the impact. The goal of this study was to find a few questions which give an indication of the impact. The study followed 563 respondents at three time points (before the performance, the day after, and two months later). No significant relationships were found between the independent variables (attention, affection, cognition) and dependent variables (well-being, life satisfaction) over the longer period (t0 to t2). However, meaningful associations did emerge in the short term (t0 to t1). Based on correlation analyses, the following two statements appear to be most suitable for inclusion in questionnaires to be sent shortly after attending a theatre performance: (1) 'The performance made me forget everything around me', and (2) 'The performance gave me new insights'.

Conclusion

Performing arts organisations create an escapist environment for visitors where they can enjoy an evening out. Especially the quality of singing or acting and building strong characters in stories supports enhancing visitor emotions. When visitors are touched, the visit becomes memorable and contributes to visitor well-being. Besides creating emotions, the visit also contributes to cognitive development. Reflection processes play an important role here and impact seems to be emergent after the performance. The results show that not only subsidised forms of arts can create lasting impact, but also non-subsidised art forms clearly

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When visitors are touched, the visit becomes memorable and contributes to visitor well-being.

contribute to visitor impact. The quantitative findings gathered directly after the performance suggest that many visitors indicate feelings of transformation. However, the qualitative study clearly points out that transformation after one performance is rare. Therefore, a performing arts visit may certainly be memorable and meaningful, but it is not expected to be transformative.

In practice, theatres should consider how to enhance cognitive development throughout the visitor journey. Theatres and performers could jointly create online content to be used in the pre- and post-performance phase, where visitors can leave feedback afterwards and find additional information about the performance. Finally, theatres can easily adopt the two items suggested in the fourth study to incorporate in their existing communication processes.

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Photography

- Wannes Cré (page 74)
- Michel Kievits (page 75)

How Blind Walls Gallery Navigates Inclusion and Co-Creation

Breda's murals as living stories and heritage



Ilja Simons, Kristel Zegers and Esther Peperkamp are lecturers and researchers connected to the Placemaking and Events research group at Academy for Leisure and Events.

When you walk through Breda, you will encounter them everywhere: large-scale murals painted on the sides of apartment blocks, parking garages and alleyways. Since 2015, Blind Walls Gallery (BWG) has created over 160 murals across Breda, each one rooted in a local story, whether it is a historical event, a neighbourhood character or a memorable moment in time. All murals are based on stories connected to the location of the painting, making the city's history visible through public art. In 2017, Blind Walls Gallery received the Brabant Heritage Price for its contemporary approach to unlocking intangible cultural heritage.

But as the city inevitably changes, the question arises: whose stories are being told, and for whom? This is the central concern of the SIA KIEM funded research project Living Stories: Co-Creation and Representation in Murals for an Inclusive Society, carried out by the authors of this article in collaboration with BWG, housing corporation Laurentius, and community organisation Buddy to Buddy.

Murals as creative placemaking tools

BWG's approach to mural making is more than commissioning art. Before realising a mural, research is conducted, often in collaboration with the Breda City Archives, but sometimes drawing directly on input from local residents. Once a story and location are identified, an

artist is selected whose style fits the specific narrative and place. Residents are involved in this process, from early neighbourhood consultations to feedback on the design. The result is a form of creative placemaking that aims to give communities a sense of ownership over their own public space.

This approach aligns with the spirit of the Faro Convention, which holds that cultural heritage derives its value from the meanings people attach to it. This participatory approach has always been BWG's starting point. Unlike murals that appear overnight on a wall in some cities to the surprise of local residents, BWG's works are developed in close co-creation with the neighbourhood.

However, co-creation and community involvement are not simple, and questions about participation and representation remain. The research project therefore focuses on two concrete questions: (1) how are residents involved in the various stages of the mural design process? (2) how do newcomers (specifically people with a different cultural background) relate to the visual and narrative aspects of these works?

Neighbourhood meetings

To explore the first question, researchers observed community meetings and neighbourhood consultations, and conducted interviews with key stakeholders including BWG staff, artists, municipal representatives, and housing corporation Laurentius. What emerged was a picture of considerable variation.

The meetings served different purposes depending on the stage of the process: some were organised to choose an artist, others to give feedback on a design. In one neighbourhood, residents gathered for a presentation in a historic building next to a prison dome to

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Murals function as surfaces onto which people project their own memories, cultural references and life experiences.

discuss design proposals for a mural inspired by escape stories from the adjacent prison. Another meeting took place at the location of the intended mural: the entrance hall of the apartment building, with design proposals displayed on panels in the space. Organising a meeting in the actual location where the mural will be placed, allowed people to feel the scale, imagine the colours on the wall, and relate the design to their everyday surroundings.

The voting system also varied. Sometimes the process was highly visible, which created a lively atmosphere but also a degree of social pressure. In other cases, residents were approached individually at their doors, allowing for a more anonymous response. Which works best depends on the goal: visibility builds collective energy, while anonymity may give quieter voices more room, including those who never make it to a meeting. But even when residents do show up, group dynamics can work against open exchange. During one meeting, a single dominant resident voiced strong objections to a planned mural, leaving little room for others to disagree.

The level of involvement offered to residents also differed from project to project. In one case, the theme and the artist had already been decided before the first community meeting. In others, residents were involved from the very beginning. This raises a key question about what co-creation actually means in practice, and how much of the process is open.

Newcomers' perspectives

To explore the second research question, focus groups were held with newcomers, in collaboration with the organisation Buddy to Buddy, as well as with international students with diverse cultural backgrounds, who were taken on a guided tour of BWG murals and then invited to reflect on what they saw.



Their responses were rich, layered and sometimes unexpected.

Some participants responded primarily to aesthetics: the colours, the composition, how a mural related to the building it was painted on. Others connected the murals to their own personal histories and memories. One participant saw Transformers characters in a painting which triggered feelings of personal nostalgia, another participant recognised symbols that reminded her of Iranian Eastern traditions. A mural depicting a woman with three arms was interpreted by a Syrian participant as a symbol of female strength, "She carries a lot." And a pattern that appeared to some participants as purely decorative, was recognised by one Iranian woman as a motif appearing on traditional Iranian tiles.

What these conversations stressed is that murals do not have fixed meanings. They function as surfaces onto which people project their own memories, cultural references and life experiences. This is what makes them powerful placemaking tools. Another observation is that the murals triggered conversations between participants. A mural about Vincent van Gogh's brother, who lived in Breda, prompted a participant to share what she had read about Van Gogh's letters, translated into Arabic. A mural about justice led to a broader exchange about the importance of justice in general. Learning about Breda's history through a guided tour sparked many different reflections about living in the city. Moreover, some of the women voiced the idea that their arrival and travel to Breda as refugees could also be portrayed in a mural one day, suggesting that the diversity of murals and stories triggered a sense of belonging to newcomers already.

At the same time, not all newcomers automatically felt addressed by murals. A German participant found Breda's murals rather polished and seemingly ordered by the municipality compared to street art and 'natural graffiti' in other cities. The opposite was voiced by a Dutch participant who noted that the murals felt more cohesive in other cities, where a unified visual language helps tell a collective story. Both these points raise questions about what it means to make a city legible and welcoming for people who arrive with different visual cultures and expectations.

Towards a toolbox

At the time of writing this article, the project was still ongoing and data was still being collected. A mapping of existing toolkits for participatory placemaking practices found that most of them are designed to evaluate single projects, rather than the kind of living, evolving process that BWG runs. That distinction is important because a mural does not stop making meaning once it is finished. New people walk past it, interpret it and bring new associations to it. The guided tours themselves generate meaning. As the researchers observed, the conversations that happen in front of murals are sometimes as important as the images themselves.

The aim of the project is to translate these insights into a practical toolkit for creative professionals: tools to reflect on and improve representation in co-creative processes, and that acknowledge mural-making as a process that continues long after the mural is finished. Because the question BWG has been asking since 2015, "how do you make a city's stories visible?", inevitably also includes: with whom and for whom. And as cities continue to change and diversify, that question will only become more relevant.

Mural Artists

- Simon Mannaerts (page 76)
- Joren Joshua (page 77)

KreativEU Walking Seminar

In February 2026, the Living Stories project hosted three days of a KreativEU Walking Seminar at BUas. Participants from European partner universities took a mural walk, discussed street art across Europe, and tested art-based tools. Finally, they visited Blind Walls Gallery FilmFest, where practitioners from across the world gathered around the theme of murals and public space.

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A mural does not stop meaning-making once it is finished. New people walk past it, interpret it and bring new associations to it.



Becoming the Most Accessible City of Europe

A journey for and with everybody

Wouter Schelvis, Peter Horsten
& Marco van Leeuwen



Wouter Schelvis is an independent entrepreneur at Access Wout, and has been an important driver towards a more accessible Breda in various roles at Breda Gelijk, Breda for Everyone, and ZET. Peter Horsten and Marco van Leeuwen are lecturers and researchers at Breda University of Applied Sciences and represented Breda at the 3rd World Summit on Accessible Tourism in Turin.

Breda aims to be an accessible and inviting city for everyone. Breda improves accessibility with and for everyone. The motto 'nothing about us, without us' means that you have to use experiential knowledge of people with limitations to find the most suitable solutions. Ideally, these solutions create value for everyone, but especially for those facing temporary limitations and for the ageing population. This successful approach not only resulted in an improved user experience and innovative solutions, but also earned the city several prestigious prizes.

From the network

Breda's journey to become a hospitable and accessible city started with the personal urgency of a hotelkeeper who proposed to use tourism tax revenues to that end. So, entrepreneurs and other stakeholders in the city had been closely involved right from the start. In 2017, there were already 100+ ambassadors (entrepreneurs, organisations) who signed a letter of intent, aiming to reach 1,000 ambassadors. This led to the emergence of a growing group full of passion and ideas, but still lacking direction.

In the Breda network structure, three organisations (see text boxes) soon assumed a leading role: 1. Breda voor Iedereen (Breda for Everyone), 2. Breda Gelijk (Breda Equal), and 3. Breda Marketing. The close cooperation between these organisations and their underlying networks has been essential to enable a broad action plan for accessibility in Breda.

Prizes

In 2019, Breda won the European Access City Award. The city was thus recognised as the most accessible city of Europe for the disabled and the elderly. Breda also won the Smart Tourism Award in the category Accessibility in 2020. And the Beter Bereikbaar Application (Better Accessible App.) has won two important prizes: a top 10 ranking as Best Government Innovation and the Living & Inclusion Award during the World Smart City Awards, both in 2023 (more about the app later). Although prizes are not an end in themselves, working towards and winning prizes proves important

in the process of fostering shared ambitions and staying on course together.

Working on the foundations

Breda began by laying the foundations, which involved both creating conditions and largely focusing on back-office activities. A great deal of attention was paid to building a diverse network of entrepreneurs, study programmes, NGOs and volunteers who wanted to be involved in making Breda more accessible. In addition, the current situation was mapped out through more than 800 surveys of local businesses and 200 inspections of public spaces and buildings. There was also a strong focus on raising awareness through workshops and annual events such as Accessibility Week and Digital Accessibility Day. Breda also trained frontline employees, such as bus drivers and hospitality staff, paying attention to hospitality and flexible support. In addition, the municipality of Breda appointed an Accessibility Advisor to assess designs and event plans, and developed Digital Twin technology to simulate the accessibility impact of urban planning decisions before they are implemented.

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Going for titles has been important for creating shared ambitions and staying on course together.



Breda Gelijk

Breda Gelijk is a knowledge centre and advocacy group for an inclusive Breda where people with limitations can participate as equals. The organisation relies on volunteers, many of whom are people with limitations who are experiential experts themselves. Their approach includes providing information, training courses, assessments, advice, and managing the accessibility fund.

"According to Breda Gelijk, everybody is equal, belongs here, and can participate. That's why accessibility must always be a priority and be incorporated into, for example event policies. We are proud that, after years of hard work, a 24/7 accessible wheelchair-accessible toilet is finally coming to the city centre. Then you can join in!"

Gwen van de Meer, coordinator.

Breda Voor Iedereen

This platform is a collaboration between the hospitality sector, retailers, the local council, healthcare providers and organisations for people with limitations. Its aim is to make Breda the most accessible urban region in the Netherlands, with a focus on inbound tourism for people with limitations, by raising awareness and recruiting ambassadors.

"It makes me proud that the European Commission is taking Breda's efforts seriously. The biggest challenge is to make all residents realise that everyone has a part to play in creating an accessible city, and also to encourage all experiential experts to work together, with a positive attitude, to make Breda the most accessible city in the Netherlands."

Jos Koniuszek, chairman.

Breda Marketing

Breda Marketing helps to make Breda more accessible by developing, advising on and promoting accessible routes, events and information for visitors and residents – via explorebreda.com, the Explore Breda app and the physical Explore Breda Store – based on the belief that everyone should feel welcome and be able to experience the city.

"I'm proud of Breda's ambition to focus even more strongly on accessibility in the coming years. Because only then will Breda be the welcoming city where everyone is truly welcome. The challenge is to get everyone on board with this and to involve experiential experts in new projects right from the initial design stage."

Marielle Houben, staff member.

Rising visitor expectations

However, as the city won awards, visitors' expectations also rose. Despite all the valuable behind-the-scenes work, visitors to Breda expected to see that 'award-winning' accessibility in practice. The fact that the Access City Award was won primarily because of the city's extensive active network in this area means little to the visitor. Moreover, it did not help that the lift at the railway station, the gateway to the city, was out of order for a long time or that all the kerbs and bumps in the historic city centre cannot simply be removed. The accessibility policy was intended to deliver more visible improvements in accessibility and, above all, more accessible experiences.

In terms of physical accessibility, a major challenge was to make the historic city centre accessible whilst preserving its character. However, interventions were certainly possible: at Grote Markt, the traditional cobblestones were levelled; obstacles along the route from the train station via Park Valkenberg to the city centre and the main attractions were removed; and tactile

paving and sensor-controlled lighting (for safety) were added. At the moment, 98% of bus stops have ramps and tactile paving; stops are announced both visually and audibly on buses. The first 'good pavement route' (accessible walking routes to central locations in residential areas) was completed in Princenhage in autumn 2025. A quick-win list was also drawn up, containing easily implementable improvements for businesses and organisations, such as ramps, markings on glass doors, access for assistance dogs, etc.

A key factor in this was the launch of the *Toegankelijkheidsfonds* (Accessibility Fund) by the local council. Through this fund (managed by Breda Gelijk), businesses and organisations can obtain funding to improve accessibility. Investments of up to €1,000 require no personal contribution; larger amounts of up to €3,000 with a 50% co-investment are also possible. The fund has already been used around 50 times, with scope for further initiatives. The improvements range from installing ramps, such as at De Krag sports centre, and applying clear markings to the windows at De Nieuwe Veste, to a wheelchair-friendly path and a multi-sensory experience at Leonie's Paradijstuin (Paradise Garden).

Focus on experience

To attract visitors, it is important that everyone, including those with special needs, feels welcome and sees that a city has plenty to offer them. Breda Marketing, for example, developed an Accessible City Route taking in the city's most beautiful spots, with a focus on accessibility for visitors in wheelchairs or with reduced mobility. Another great initiative was the wheelchair-accessible canal boat on Breda's canals, which is, unfortunately, (temporarily) out of service due to maintenance. Good examples in the fields of culture and sport include the wide range of activities offered by the Sprint Athletics Club for various groups, such as Running Blind and Clubthrow; the tactile model of Breda Castle at the KMA; and, of course, the performances by the Tiuri theatre workshop and their study programmes for people with limitations to become actors or theatre makers. Recently Breda Grote Kerk and Blind Walls Gallery started with multi-sensory tours.

Breda hosts many events where accessibility is explicitly on the agenda. The Vuelta stage in Breda in 2022 was significant due to the launch of the Beter Bereikbaar App, and the large low-stimulus zone - free of promotional vehicles or audible signals - which can now also be seen during the carnival parade in 'Kielegat'. In addition, during the Vuelta stage, there was a stand with Braille signage and specialist commentators describing both the race and the atmosphere, wheelchair-accessible areas near the big screens, and the 'Unlimited Vuelta' side event - a cycling event for people with limitations who use handcycles, tandem bikes or wheelchairs. Almost all festivals in Breda now regard accessibility as standard practice: apps providing reliable information, improved crowd management and outbound accessibility, harder surfaces on grassy areas, and a focus on active participation, such as at the Singelloop in Breda, which this year attracted nearly 1,500 athletes with limitations. It is hoped that last year's Accessibility Week set a new standard with the introduction of the mobile Changing Places toilet. Breda is currently working with Marianne Dijkshoorn to draw up the guidelines entitled 'Accessibility through hospitality at events in Breda'.

Communication & Apps

Access to reliable information is crucial. In terms of digital accessibility, municipal platforms meet





Everyone, including people with disabilities, should feel welcomed and have the sense that the city has something to offer them as well.



clear standards; tourists with limitations get support via platforms such as Zorg-voor-elkaar. In addition, Breda encourages the development of useful apps, such as the Beter Bereikbaar App. For people with limitations, this app displays essential facilities such as car parks, toilets, rest areas, drinking water points and shelters from the rain in different colours. Users can click on locations to view details such as addresses and specific available facilities; guided tours and events can also make use of this app, which has already been downloaded more than 35,000 times.

Plee list

Having easy access to publicly accessible toilets is a basic requirement for many people to take part in city life. Together with cultural and sports institutions, restaurants, shops, educational and government institutions, Breda created an appropriate 'Plee list' (*Plee* – pronounced as 'play' – means Loo). Their aim is to realise 200 toilets open to the public and 40 public wheelchair-friendly toilets in the municipality of Breda by the end of 2027. To improve findability, Breda will use the UrgentNeed app. The app shows a map with available toilets in an area, gives information about facilities and addresses, and offers directions from your current location to the toilet.

Intensive cooperation with education

In Breda, there is a widespread belief that accessibility can be taught. That's why various activities are organised at all levels of education. A good example is the Actief Tour organised by Breda Gelijk, where children from mainstream education and special education spend a day playing sports together. The cooperation with the Academy for Leisure & Events (BUas) is valuable. Since 2020, various co-creative research and design projects are organised at museums, city tours, sports facilities, events,

and attraction parks with several Sterkplaatsen (Strong Places) of LFB (the national interest organisation for and by the mentally impaired), in which students and experiential experts cooperate as equals during the entire process. In this way, students, the future professionals, are becoming more sensitive to accessibility, and are working together with the people concerned on solutions. Since 2023, experiential experts of Breda Gelijk and Breda voor Iedereen have also joined them.

In 2023, when the presidency of Breda voor Iedereen was transferred, Wilbert Willems handed over the ten-point plan entitled Manifesto for an inclusive Breda to his successor Jos Koniuszek. This manifesto sets out the ambition to make Breda Europe's most accessible city once again in 2030 – and this time, not only on the basis of the strong network, but specifically because of its exceptionally accessible infrastructure and recreational offerings. The aforementioned co-creative educational projects contribute significantly to the ambition of creating accessible, meaningful experiences for everyone, along with associated positive values such as happiness, social interaction, and personal development.

Future steps

Recently (May 2025), the local council presented the Accessibility Agenda for the period 2025-2026, outlining concrete actions to make Breda more accessible. The key priorities here are raising awareness in society, making public spaces and buildings accessible, and organising accessible events and recreational opportunities. During the presentation, municipal executive councillor Jeroen Bruijns emphasised pragmatism and realism, as well as expanding and improving upon what has already been set in motion.

Physical obstacles are still being removed in many places in the city, and recreational facilities are now undergoing a thorough review for accessibility. Levelling the cobblestones was a good start, but now attention must be paid to the joints between the stones, because wheelchair users with small front wheels get stuck. The modifications require guidelines for a more universal design, in which it must be clear that not only the beautification of the street, but also marking and safety deserve attention when constructing stairs and crossings.

The Chassé and Bloos theatres have applied to install a public Changing Places toilet. With every improvement, the awareness of all users is essential: for example, even if a location is made accessible, it becomes unusable when delivery vans block the pavements or bicycles obstruct the guide strips for the blind.

Finally

The Breda model has achieved a great deal, but remains vulnerable. Ten years after the ratification of the UN Convention in 2016, its implementation still relies primarily on the individual commitment of decision-makers and volunteers. The question looking ahead to 2030 is therefore how we can move beyond voluntary measures towards enforceable regulations with mandatory requirements and enforcement. Everyone agrees on the importance of broad social awareness. To be accessible to everyone, you have to do it together with everyone. True accessibility requires collective responsibility!

Photography

- Breda Marketing (page 78 top)
- Rosa Meininger (page 78 bottom, 79)
- Sofie Alhassan (page 80 top)



Residents Lead, Institutions Follow

How Urban Living Lab Breda puts community agency before research agendas

Diaan van der Westhuizen
& Linn Luijterink, Amber Klijn



Diaan van der Westhuizen, PhD, is a researcher and lecturer at the Academy for the Built Environment and Logistics and project leader at BUas ULLB, Linn Luijterink is a researcher and lecturer at the Academy for Leisure and Events, project leader and coordinator of BUas ULLB, Amber Klijn is a researcher and lecturer at the Academy for Leisure and Events, project leader and ULLB neighbourhood commissioner in De Heuvel.

Urban Living Labs across the world face a fundamental tension: Who sets the agenda? Researchers or residents? The standard living lab model focuses on multistakeholder experimentation with residents, municipalities and institutions working together to address urban problems (Steen & van Bueren, 2017). What often happens is that the institution sets research agendas, and residents provide the answers. However well-intentioned these efforts are, the projects rarely originate from the residents themselves. At Urban Living Lab Breda, we decided to see what happens if we do things differently. We don't bring research for testing into neighbourhoods, but we join initiatives that residents have already put energy into or want to get off the ground. This is what our foundational values are built on. The moment we impose an agenda; we lose what makes our approach impactful.

The ABCD approach

Although we work from an applied science research perspective by putting knowledge into practice in the real world, our methodology is not typical of how institutions usually engage with local communities. First and foremost, we are committed to the principles of

Asset-Based Community Development, or the ABCD approach for short, first coined by the book *Building Communities from the Inside Out* (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). Instead of starting with community deficits (what is 'wrong'), we start with what works: the community assets. It is not that we deny the challenges communities face, but we refuse to define communities by their problems. The ABCD approach first acknowledges the skills, networks, initiatives and energies that communities already have. Citizens are not framed as passive recipients but positioned as primary actors in their own change. This requires special institutional restraint, given that the first impulse of researchers and students is to make an impact in communities through their research.

Find energy from what is there, not from what is missing

Our approach builds on the pioneering work by Ger Pepels, Henk Schol and Marc Holvoet, who developed the Collaborative Space ('Samenwerkplaats') model in the Breda neighbourhood of Hoge Vucht, described in a 2021 edition of *Uncover* magazine. (Pepels et al., 2021). Their purpose was to put residents in the driver's seat to shape the future of their neighbourhood. To achieve this, a space was created within the neighbourhood where the partners came together to set priorities, build trust relationships, and define and coordinate action. ULLB facilitated this space where existing local energies could be made visible through research, experience walks, conversation tables, and co-creation with volunteers. Over time, these activities facilitated constructive links between citizens, students, the Breda-North neighbourhood council, municipal council members and Verbeter Breda. This work culminated in the opening of the Bieb Hoge Vucht (library) and a new youth centre in 2025. In that same year, ULLB solidified

its commitment to neighbourhoods with funding for the project 'Building Sustainable Communities – Energy from Below' ('Energie van Onderop') a regional partnership deal with the Province of West-Brabant based at the BUas Chair of Leisure in the Social Context led by Professor Jörn Frike.

As researchers/lecturers from BUas, together with our partner institutions (Municipality of Breda, Avans, Curio, De Rooi Pannen, and Netherlands Defence Academy), we take on the role of city makers. We walk alongside residents in a facilitative role, starting with the local commissioners who can identify the most pertinent needs and opportunities. In practice, this means our gatherings are not consultations where institutions present plans. They are dialogues where residents identify priorities, map assets and decide what matters – and the neighbourhood agenda that emerges carries equal weight alongside municipal planning documents. For example, commissioners from De Heuvel asked us how they can attract more elderly participation to De Vlieren, their local community centre. Instead of arriving with

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Citizens are not framed as passive recipients but positioned as primary actors in their own change.



surveys, ULLB invested time in expanding the events calendar by adding a soup evening and Musical Bingo as regular occurrences. In Doornbos Linie, city maker Stefanie Vermeulen joined the Buurtsalon on Edisonplein with a steady stream of students researching and exploring solutions for lighting and safety issues in the square, a challenge identified by residents and local businesses alike.

The alongsiders principle

Sometimes communities ask us to offer expertise, to make connections, execute targeted projects, and most importantly, expect us to step back when they have built sustained capacity to carry initiatives forward by themselves. We work in neighbourhoods as 'alongsiders' with our local commissioners, rather than in front of them. For some time, residents in De Heuvel have been working with the Municipality of Breda on the refurbishment of Nolensplein. To help residents visualise the proposed changes, one of our Built Environment placement students from BUas applied his skills to create 3D visualisations of the proposed changes, which were proudly displayed during a public participation event - arranged by the municipality - at the square. We are not short-term service providers or consultants but build on a long-term presence in specific areas to carry knowledge forward, invite new collaborations, and be part of the ongoing evolution of the place.

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The neighbourhood agenda that emerges carries equal weight alongside municipal planning documents.

Our role matters: conventional urban living labs bring innovation to the residents; we encourage residents to innovate with us, and as institutions, we figure out how to (creatively) support them.

Education without extraction

Students are called upon to work on resident-focused projects and push parts of a broader neighbourhood agenda forward one step at a time. Commissioners Frank Weijters and Joëlle van Loon identified intergenerational connection as a priority (De Heuvel). This led the Minor in Inclusive Placemaking students to explore elderly participation through the monthly Music Bingo. Later, Built Environment students continued working with the elderly, researching dementia-friendly wayfinding and 'ageing in place' through weekly walk-alongs that gathered insights and uncovered concerns.

ULLB staff find a home for these projects through cross-disciplinary coursework, placement and graduation assignments, or existing capacity across Leisure & Events, Built Environment & Logistics, Tourism, and Creative Business. At 't Zoet, Leisure & Events students organised and executed the programme for the summer opening of the park. Built Environment students transformed a shipping container into the 'Sugar Cube' - an exhibition box showcasing 't Zoet's history and future plans through local documents, student research and design proposals. Keeping components of the curriculum flexible, or inviting lecturers

to adopt a relevant project, helps avoid imposing work onto communities. This approach also creates its own difficulties. Community projects often do not follow the same timelines as block and semester courses. Priorities sometimes shift mid-project. Students must develop critical skills of working with uncertainty: negotiating between what communities ask of them and their own academic requirements, sometimes despite language, cultural and social barriers. These capacities - humility, adaptability and social awareness - are ingredients of genuine co-creation and form part of our hidden curriculum of critical skills. The role of the ULLB staff member is fundamental in supporting student learning within this real-world context. Rather than being sent out on scouting expeditions into neighbourhoods, students work on projects that link current priorities and students' interests with the willingness of local commissioners, who act as clients and co-mentors. As one of the commissioners, Joëlle van Loon, noted: *"Education is organised better - communities benefit from students instead of them just costing. They really contribute."*

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Students start by volunteering at local events and gain a personal understanding of the people and local opportunities.



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We work in neighbourhoods as 'alongsiders' with our local commissioners, rather than in front of them.

The ULLB began building initiatives such as a once-a-month soup evening and Musical Bingo event at De Vlieren, the local collaborative venue. Students start by volunteering at these events and gain a personal understanding of the people and local opportunities. Our capacity building across various neighbourhoods demonstrates this. In De Heuvel, an upcoming three-day art festival 'In de Kleur van de Heuvel' is coming from ongoing citizen engagement. At 't Zoet, a Built Environment graduation student redesigned the route from the city centre to the park, tested design-build moveable benches, and presented this to the municipality. And in Doornbos-Linie, under the guidance of city maker Stefanie Vermeulen, 36 students from eight programmes and four institutions organised the 'Light Up' Edison Plein festival earlier this year.

Working with the local community is always an opportunity to discover where real energy emerges, unexpectedly. In a neighbourhood like De Heuvel, ideas, talents and stories are everywhere – though they often hide in small encounters, casual conversations or shared experiences on the street: a resident mentioning a neighbour who paints during the Soup Evening, a conversation revealing hidden creative talents looking for an outlet, an artist sharing their work over coffee. This is precisely how the art festival 'In de Kleur van de Heuvel' started – with the dreams of a few residents. What makes this work special is that you (as a lecturer or researcher) do not come to deliver research; rather, you come to connect. By engaging residents, professionals and neighbourhood partners, a rich picture emerges where strength, passion and motivation reside.

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Humility, adaptability and social awareness are ingredients of genuine co-creation and form part of our hidden curriculum of critical skills.



Then we connect this energy with our students: they bring curiosity, fresh perspectives and a learning mindset – and that aligns seamlessly with the dynamics of the neighbourhood. When they work alongside people in neighbourhoods and focus on what is genuinely needed, a mutually meaningful exchange arises. Students learn in a real context, experience impact and build confidence; the community, in turn, gains new ideas and support, and sees their wishes realised through the collaboration.

Transdisciplinary placemaking

At ULLB, we bring together community assets with expertise from different academies, most notably, the Academy for Leisure and Events, the Academy for Built Environment and Logistics, the Academy for Tourism, and the Academy for AI, Games and Media. With communities as co-creators and municipalities as collaborators, we can transcend academy silos in favour of authentic transdisciplinary teaching and learning. We organise our involvement in the overlapping subject areas: Built Environment students creating an info box exhibition, and Leisure and Events students drawing the crowd through an event.

We keep citizens engaged by offering a diverse skillset of bringing people together – first connecting with people, then making plans for what could be done. For example, *Club van Ons* started as the story bus run by Stefanie Vermeulen (Avans) and Anne van Den Broek (BUAs); a parked campervan in local neighbourhoods for passers-by to join them for a cup of coffee and record their stories in an on-board podcast. Now, the travelling bus has expanded into an open-mic stage with collaborating artists, voice coaches and storytellers helping citizens find their unique voice.

For example, an activation might amplify an existing neighbourhood activity such as the Music Bingo, introduce new networks like De Heuvel art festival, or gather community input through walks with the elderly. A short-term intervention of an underutilised space can

be transformed into an event venue, like at 't Zoet temporary park. Citizen ideas, such as the Nolensplein square redesign, can be tested visually and relayed to the municipality. Residents experience neighbourhoods holistically: their physical spaces, social networks and activities all together: ULLB's approach mirrors this reality by putting education into the real world. We would like to thank BUAs, our partners, and the Municipality of Breda, for seeing our vision and entrusting us with another four years of funding until 2029. In the words of the Executive Municipal Councillor for Education, Arjen van Drunen (Gemeente Breda, 2026):

"Students [at Urban Living Lab] work on real community challenges, and residents think alongside them from the start".

More information:

- <https://urbanlivinglabbreda.nl>

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Photography

- Gabby Ermstrang (page 81)
- Gemma Vriens (page 82)
- Sofie Alhassan (page 80 top)

Urban
Living Lab
Breda



REGIO DEAL
WEST-BRABANT

The Places and Flows Lab

Where people, places and data come together

Ondrej Mitas
& Sait Durgun



Dr Ondrej Mitas and Dr Sait Durgun are researchers at the Places and Flows Lab, Breda University of Applied Sciences.

Imagine standing over a physical model of Breda's inner city, running your fingers across the contours of the Grote Markt, the Valkenberg park, the winding streets of the historic centre. Now imagine that as you reshape the terrain with your hands, the system responds in real time: crowd patterns shift, sightlines recalculate, and the emotional experience of future visitors updates before your eyes. This is not science fiction. This is what happens every day in the Places and Flows Lab at Breda University of Applied Sciences.

A lab born from a simple insight

Cities, landscapes and destinations are never static. People, goods, services and information flow through them continuously, shaping experiences and creating the conditions for both flourishing and friction. To design places that are truly sustainable, attractive and resilient, we need to understand these flows, not just as abstract data points on a spreadsheet, but as lived spatial realities that can be seen, touched and debated collectively.

That conviction is at the heart of the Places and Flows Lab, a research and innovation facility where researchers, students and external partners come together to explore spatial challenges using cutting-edge geospatial tools. The lab sits within BUas's broader commitment to creating meaningful experiences, but it approaches that mission from a distinctive angle: rather than asking only what people feel, it asks *where* they feel it, why people go *where* they go, and how design choices can redirect them.

The tangible landscape helps turning complex data into tangible insights

The centrepiece of the lab is the Tangible Landscape, an interactive system that feels as intuitive as shaping sand on a beach, yet is powered by sophisticated spatial analysis in the software GRASS running beneath the surface. A physical terrain model sits on a table; above it, a projector and scanner work in concert to capture every change you make and project updated insights back onto the model within seconds. Sculpt a small hill to understand sightlines from a proposed event stage. Place a few markers to watch how festival crowds might flow through a city square. The tool responds to your intuition and imagination, not your technical expertise, which is precisely what makes it so powerful in rooms full of people with different backgrounds and agendas.

The system supports collaborative exploration. Multiple people can work on the model simultaneously, making it an ideal tool not just for researchers but for participatory planning sessions involving local residents, policy-makers, event organisers and urban designers. The experience of physically touching a place while simultaneously engaging with data elevates the conversation around it. As the lab's motto puts it: "better places emerge when data becomes tangible."

Feeling the city: emotion mapping and emotion prediction

The Tangible Landscape is powerful, but the lab's ambitions extend beyond spatial visualisation into analysing the emotional dimension of place. Through emotion mapping, the lab captures how people actually feel as they move through real environments, not how they report feeling

The experience of physically touching a place while simultaneously engaging with data elevates the conversation around it.

in a survey, but how their bodies respond in the moment.

Using the Shimmer GSR+, a wearable wrist device with finger sensors, researchers record subtle changes in perspiration, one of the most sensitive physiological indicators of emotional arousal. Combined with GPS tracking, these signals are geocoded and visualised, creating emotion maps that reveal where people felt tense, calm, excited or overwhelmed along a given route or within a given space.

In the SIA-KIEM Forts in Transition project, the method was put to work at green forts, sites that combine military heritage with rich natural landscapes, in the Netherlands and Belgium. Visitors wore the Shimmer device while exploring, generating detailed records of

emotional responses across the terrain. In the picture you can see the Tangible Landscape of Fort Sabina: visitor emotion data projected onto a physical sand model, where warm colours reveal moments of high arousal and cooler tones show calmer areas of the site.

What made this project particularly groundbreaking, however, was the next step: rather than simply mapping what visitors had felt, our team of Places and Flows researchers and Data Science and AI students used these datasets to build a predictive model. By understanding the relationship between landscape features, the shape of the land, the type of vegetation, the presence of water or open fields, as well as contextual factors like time of day and weather conditions, and the emotional responses these tend to produce, the lab can now anticipate how a proposed change *could* be experienced *before* euros are spent and digging starts in the real world.

This prediction capability is directly connected to the Tangible Landscape. When a workshop participant shapes the landscape model to simulate planting a tree line, lowering a rampart wall, or opening up a new viewing point, the system does not just show the spatial change. It projects an updated picture of how those modifications would likely affect the emotional experience of future visitors. The loop between design intervention and human experience, which is normally impossible to close without costly and time-consuming field trials, is suddenly available in the room, in real time, on a tabletop.

Breda as a Living Laboratory

This brings us to Breda itself, and to what may be the most exciting frontier of the lab's work.

Breda is a city with remarkable leisure ambitions. It hosts Jazz Festival Breda, one of the Netherlands' most beloved urban festivals, drawing tens of thousands of visitors into the inner city each year. It is home to West-Brabant Gastronomic Week, the annual Nassaudag celebrations, a thriving cycling culture, and to a historic centre that is simultaneously a living neighbourhood, a tourist destination, and a commercial hub. Managing the flows of people, emotions and activities across all of these overlapping layers is a genuinely complex challenge, and one that the Places and Flows Lab is ideally positioned to support.

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The lab sees potential in using its tools to support Breda's ambition to become an Access City, inclusive, welcoming and navigable for people of all abilities.

For Jazz Festival Breda, a Tangible Landscape model of the inner city could allow festival organisers, residents, and the municipality to explore together how different stage configurations, entry points, and routing options affect crowd distribution, and to do so in a way that is visually immediate and collectively owned. Emotion mapping along key festival routes could reveal which transitions between venues are calm, and which create unnecessary stress. And with the lab's predictive capability, proposed changes to the festival layout could be tested for their likely emotional impact before a single barrier is placed.

More broadly, the lab sees potential in using its tools to support Breda's ambition to become an Access City, inclusive, welcoming and navigable for people of all abilities. Overlaying mobility data, infrastructure quality, and emotional response data onto a tangible model of the city could help planners and community organisations identify where the gaps are and what interventions would have the greatest impact. Similarly, we could support the initiative to become a City in a Park, uncovering distances and sightlines to urban natural environments for all citizens, regardless of their residence type or location.



From data to dialogue

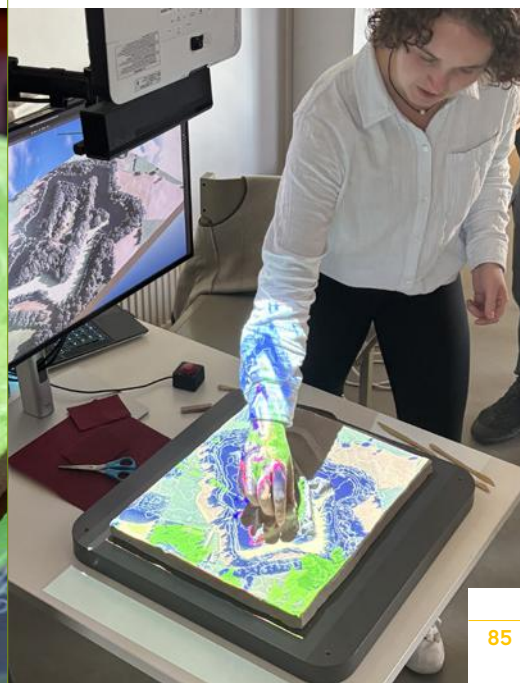
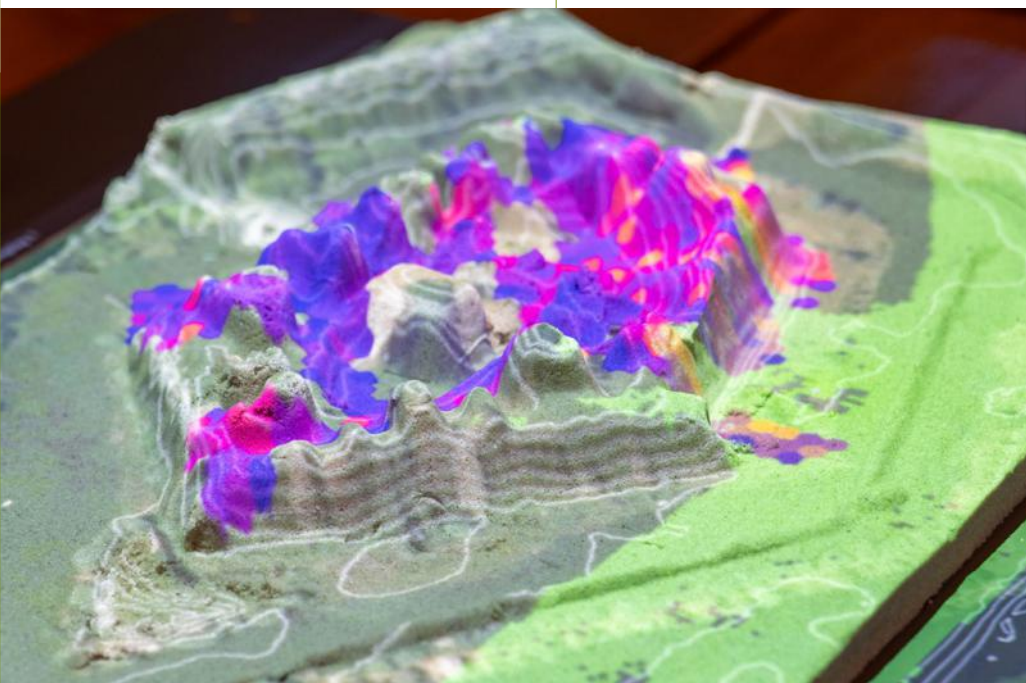
What unites all of these applications is a conviction that runs through everything the Places and Flows Lab does: that the most important function of data is not to replace human judgement, but to enrich the conversations through which human judgement is formed.

A crowd flow model means little until people with different interests and perspectives gather around it and begin to argue about what it means and what should be done. An emotion prediction changes from a technical output into a genuine planning tool the moment a festival organiser, a local resident and a city official all stand around the same table and ask: "what if we tried it this way instead?"

For a city like Breda, which is actively building its identity as both a leisure destination and a liveable community, that kind of shared spatial intelligence is not a luxury. It is, arguably, exactly what is needed to ensure that the flows of the future serve everyone who calls this city home.

More information

- The Places and Flows Lab is located in the Frontier Building (Fe0.016) at BUas. Contact: placesandflows@buas.nl



The Joint Strategic Ambition of TURF Event and Breda

Becoming more than an event

Peter van der Aalst

Peter van der Aalst is manager of business relations and internationalisation at the Academy for Leisure and Events, BUas.

With TURF, Breda gained a new multi-day event focusing on innovation and creativity, in line with the ambition to position the city as an international hub for applied technology and creativity. This article examines TURF's strategic value and potential.

Breda's ambition

Breda is a pleasant city with a historic city centre, but it also has the ambition to be a city of applied technology and creativity. With the development of, for instance, 't Zoet in the railway area, the city will be growing to 230,000 residents. 't Zoet should become a highly urbanised district with an ecosystem of applied technology and creativity.

Breda is committed to attracting and retaining creative and technological talented individuals and related business activity. There is a strong basis with businesses such as CM.com and Handpicked, initiatives like Dutch Game Week and Breda Robotics and several study programmes. In December 2025, the Ambition Document Innovation District Breda was presented, 'an invitation to entrepreneurs, educational institutes, social organisations and residents to build an innovative and future-proof city together.'

A conscious decision was made to focus on the Robotics & AI and Games & Creative Technology clusters. "These domains attract talented individuals and investments and encourage innovation in sectors such as healthcare, defence, agri-food, logistics, and education, leading to a broad, future-proof economy from which all Breda residents profit."

The ambition of TURF Event

The first TURF edition took place in 2024. The Breda cultural, event and tech organisations

Mezz, Pier15, Kairos Events, CM.com, Handpicked, 360 Experience Group, and Breda Beats pooled their resources and networks for this edition. This aligned perfectly with Breda's ambition, so the local council decided to support the initiative.

TURF comprises TURF talks, live gigs and a diverse nightlife programme, spread across numerous venues throughout the city. Crossovers and connections between businesses, the new generations of creatives, creators, and collectives and education are encouraged. It aims to position Breda as an international hub of applied technology and creativity. TURF aims to offer a platform for experiments, creativity and inclusion, and lay the foundations for future generations.

"TURF is based on three elements that stand out in and around the city: many talented individuals, a lot of ambition and space for development. Breda trains students for the creative sector: events, arts, tech, leisure, innovation, but we also excel in music & arts in certain parts of the creative field, both nationally and internationally. But Breda serves merely as a stepping stone in this process. We provide training, but we don't yet offer enough support for talented individuals, which is why they leave the city. There is little room for experimentation, creative hubs, and venues, even as we work towards building the city of the future. Nightlife culture is an essential element of this. The founders of TURF have identified these elements and addressed them at their core to make and keep the city attractive to talented individuals, the cultural sector, and the business community. TURF serves as fuel, as a means to grow," says artistic director Noa Hermans.

Rik Peters, executive director of Mezz: "There are several cities with similar events. I think that what makes TURF unique is the momentum in

Breda; to bridge the night with the evening and the day, and its distinct tech focus. I feel that ESNS and ADE are still somewhat limited in that regard. And the fact that it's outside the Randstad."

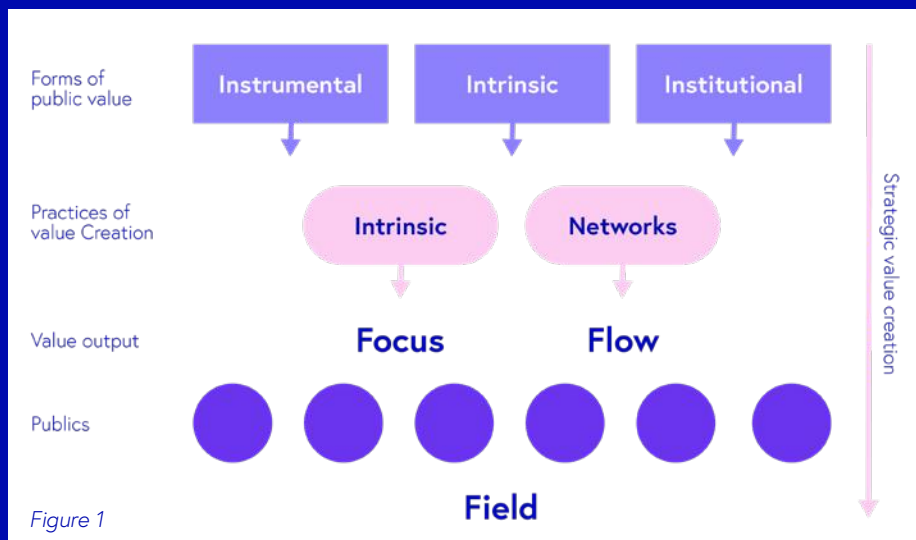
Strategic value of event networks and platforms for a city

Greg Richards (2020) analysed on the basis of the Jheronimus Bosch 500 programme in 's Hertogenbosch how event-related networks and platforms took shape within the programme and what strategic value this generated for the city (see Figure 1). The results indicated that networks served to generate flows of resources, while programming helped develop platforms such as events (focus) for generating and disseminating knowledge, thereby drawing attention to the city. The Bosch 500 Foundation, which led the programme, played an effective part in developing and supporting networks, which in turn yielded significant instrumental (e.g. positioning the city) and intrinsic (substantive) value in the short term.

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TURF aspires to offer a platform for experimentation, creativity and inclusion and lay the foundations for future generations.

However, the fact that no sustainable city-wide platform related to the Bosch programme was established led to the destruction of institutional value, which was seen as a missed opportunity. What lessons can Breda learn from this?



potential of TURF Event to contribute to Breda's ambition

TURF could become a key link in Breda's ecosystem for applied technology and creativity by connecting and strengthening networks and attracting and retaining talent and businesses. Breda has great potential: in addition to a strong legacy in electronic music with Tiësto and Hardwell, there is room for new talent. The cultural infrastructure is robust, with initiatives such as Blind Walls Gallery, Graphic Matters, Breda Photo, Chassé Theater, Stedelijk Museum, and Pier15. Programmes such as those offered by Sint Joost (Avans), De Rooi Pannen and BUAs have been producing professionals for the arts, culture, leisure, events, hospitality, and gaming industry for decades. In addition, companies such as CM.com and Handpicked are leading innovators in technology. "With TURF, Breda showcases what we stand for: a city buzzing with creativity and innovation. As a signature festival, TURF brings creators, residents and visitors together and puts Breda on the national and international map," says Hildegard Assies, Executive Director of Breda Marketing.

"Through their organisation, the founders strongly embody the pillars of art, electronic music and tech, and have been working at the intersection of these fields for years. By bringing these elements together, they have formed the DNA of TURF, which is thus rooted in its origins. TURF was formed by Breda-based parties out of a love for the city, but also driven by the vision and ambition to demonstrate that we as TURF can create something that might even be considered typical of Breda. By thinking and acting on a larger scale and by joining forces, we try to create something greater than what we typically see in Breda," says Rob Peters, founder and chair of the board of Handpicked.

Willem Loos, founder of 360 Experience Group, adds: "Actually, TURF isn't typically Breda-style, and yet it is. The initiative comes from local creatives; the format isn't typical of Breda, but it's infused with ingredients of what Breda has to offer."

A bright future for Breda and TURF?

TURF showcases a young, progressive, tech-savvy, and creative Breda. The local council recognises the importance of a vibrant nightlife and strong collaboration between the business world and the education sector in attracting (young) talent and business activity. Breda Marketing promotes the city's story to the wider world, whilst the Brabant C cultural fund supports creators in realising projects during TURF, thereby generating regional impact. This also makes it possible to attract bigger national and international artists.

Yet there are challenges too. Breda is a growing city, many undeveloped areas in the Havenkwartier district are being transformed into housing. Affordable living and working spaces, as well as the availability and retention of spaces for experimentation, are under pressure from gentrification. These are key factors in attracting and retaining young creative talent and innovative businesses.

Based on Richards' analysis it can be concluded that a long-term approach and investments on a structural basis in event-related networks and platforms can be valuable in generating strategic value for the city. TURF can be a key link in this ecosystem, but building a sustainable TURF organisation is a challenge at a time when the events sector is having a hard time.

"As far as I'm concerned, the event is growing organically and attracting many people from outside the city and even internationally. All of this depends on financial resources, which in turn depend on factors such as subsidies and whether the city will help support and encourage this growth," says Rik Peters. "We're on our way," notes Rob Peters. "You can see that TURF is hugely popular with stakeholders in Breda and we're managing to attract more and more people. My dream is that we'll grow into a national and then an international festival, with a solid revenue stream to realise that ambition. On the other hand, there's a fear that we won't be able to raise sufficient funds to continue growing. Over the past two years, thanks to the efforts of many volunteers, management, partners and founders, we've achieved something that was actually beyond our budget. To continue at the same level, we already need an extra financial boost, let alone to realise our ambition of scaling up to an international festival."

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We provide training, but we still offer too little support for talented individuals, which is why they are leaving the city.

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Photography

- Stephen van Bokhoven (page 86)
- Stevy Vergouwen (page 87)



From Planetary Boundaries to beneath Our Soil

The multi-level approach to sustainability transitions



Frans Melissen is Transversal Professor of Sustainability Transitions at BUas, Anna Koens-Waddilove is Sustainability Policy Advisor at BUas, Marit Kamp is topic lead for Biodiversity and Outdoor Nature Connection at BUas.

Sustainability transitions are, at their core, about reimagining how we organise life on this planet. They are about fundamentally rethinking how we produce and consume energy, how we move, how we grow food, how we build – and, crucially, how we learn and think about all of this. These are not simple adjustments to existing systems. They require us to question deeply held assumptions, to navigate complexity and uncertainty, and to accept that the changes needed are systemic, interconnected and often profoundly uncomfortable.

The challenge is as vast as the planet itself. The science is unambiguous: we are transgressing critical planetary boundaries, destabilising the very systems upon which all life depends. And yet, knowing this has proven insufficient to drive the transformations that are needed. This is perhaps the most fascinating – and frustrating – aspect of sustainability transitions: the persistent gap between what we know and what we do. A gap shaped not by ignorance, but by the sheer complexity of changing interconnected systems, by conflicting interests, by the discomfort of questioning established ways of doing things, and by the very human tendency to assume that someone else will act first.

Where does BUas fit into all of this?

At Breda University of Applied Sciences (BUas), sustainability transitions is one of two transversal themes – alongside artificial intelligence – that run across everything we do. Not as a separate discipline, but as a lens through which all our domains – from Built Environment to Tourism, from Hotel to Logistics, from Games and Media to Data Science and AI, Facility and Leisure and Events – are challenged to rethink their futures. This deliberate choice reflects a conviction: if sustainability is truly systemic, then engaging with it cannot be confined to one department or research group. It needs to permeate.

BUas education

In education, this translates into a commitment that goes beyond teaching students about sustainability. Two dedicated Intended Learning Outcomes, embedded across all BUas curricula, are designed to help students not only develop knowledge and skills related to sustainability

challenges and solutions, but also – and perhaps more importantly – to develop their own perspective on sustainability and their personal contribution to it. The ambition is transformative: education not merely about sustainability, but education as sustainability – fostering the critical thinking, the capacity to navigate moral complexity, and the courage to act even in the face of uncertainty that these transitions demand.

BUas research

In research, a dedicated transversal professorship in Sustainability Transitions works to stimulate and accelerate these transitions across all domains that BUas serves. But its role goes beyond generating and connecting knowledge. At its heart, the professorship is about orchestrating the conversations that matter – helping people across divides of perspective, discipline and opinion to recognise that, ultimately, we want the same things. Nobody sets out to deliberately destroy the planet or make life impossible for others. Yet polarisation, mistrust and a sense of helplessness can make it feel as though we are worlds apart. Bridging that distance – helping people see their shared aspirations beneath the surface disagreements – is not a soft addition to the work of sustainability transitions. It is a precondition.

And perhaps that is also why sustainability transitions are not only about big systems and strategic ambitions. They are equally about the tangible, the local, the ground beneath your feet – sometimes quite literally. It is in the small, concrete, shared spaces where people begin to experience that common ground. And this is where the story becomes most concrete: on the BUas campus itself.

BUas community

Complementing this focus on sustainability within our education and research, sustainability is also central to how we interact with each

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Climate-positive action should become embedded throughout the organisation and beyond the campus borders.



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Breda aims to become one of Europe's most nature-rich cities by 2030, and the BUas campus intends to play its part.

other within the BUas *community* (for example, the emphasis on student and staff well-being, social safety and internationalisation at home) and the way the campus is managed. Sustainability has always been a key element in the construction and renovation of the campus. Now that the campus has been fully operational for several years, it remains the guiding principle for upkeep and daily use – reinforced by BUAs' ambition to become a climate-positive organisation. This ambition provides a unified framework for operations-focused sustainability, weaving together a whole series of interconnected themes.

Climate positive organisation

Becoming climate-positive goes beyond reducing environmental impact. The goal is to actively contribute to the health and vitality of all life. BUAs has adopted a regenerative approach, recognising that true sustainability means restoring and enhancing the living systems we depend upon, not simply doing less harm. Building capability and empowering staff, students and wider stakeholders is central to this: climate-positive action should become embedded throughout the organisation and beyond the campus borders.

The scope of BUAs' climate-positive ambition encompasses all campus operations: energy, material inflow, waste, mobility, health, nature and climate adaptation. One particularly distinctive element is the integration of Zoöp governance principles. A Zoöp (from the Greek 'zoë', meaning 'life') is an innovative governance model that grants a voice to other-than-human life forms. In practice, this means partnering with a dedicated 'Speaker for the Living' – an external representative who brings the perspectives of plants, animals and soil organisms into organisational decision-making. It is a concrete step towards acknowledging that human flourishing is inseparable from ecological flourishing.

The ambition is expansive but, by taking a phased approach – initially prioritising energy efficiency, indoor climate comfort, sustainable

procurement and campus biodiversity – BUAs can maintain momentum while building towards longer-term transformation. Clear milestones every four years guide progress, while the strategy is subject to continuous refinement as new insights emerge and legislation evolves.

Beyond efficiency and cost savings, this climate-positive ambition seeks to position BUAs as an exemplar in higher education, strengthening our reputation and building resilience, whilst growing valuable knowledge and expertise in sustainability practices and inspiring current and future generations. Nowhere is this more visible than in the living fabric of the campus itself, where biodiversity and our connection to nature are focal points.

A greener and nature-enriched campus

When BUAs staff and students were asked to define what climate-positive should mean for the campus, a greener, more nature-enriched environment was among their clearest priorities. This resonates deeply since the more life a campus supports, the healthier the environment becomes for all who inhabit it. BUAs' ambition is to create biodiverse ecosystems that strengthen Breda's ecological network, whilst deepening the community's connection to nature – recognising this as essential for both well-being and environmental stewardship.

A first important step is an ecological baseline assessment (spring 2026), which identifies targeted measures to increase biodiversity. These are expected to include expanding wildflower meadows, planting additional trees and flower bulbs, and installing wildlife infrastructure such as bird boxes and bee hotels.

Community garden and food forest

Meanwhile, the BUAs Community Garden is already demonstrating what is possible. Citizen research carried out by staff and students in 2025 found soil biodiversity in the garden to be two to three times richer than elsewhere on campus – more species and greater variety. The practices behind this result are careful

soil management (limiting digging), a wide diversity of plant species, compost application, and ground cover plants. Building on this foundation, a small food forest is planned for the campus. Unlike a conventional vegetable garden, a food forest mimics natural woodland structure across multiple layers – from canopy trees to ground cover – creating self-sustaining, low-maintenance ecosystems that support biodiversity, improve soil health and climate adaptation, and produce food year-round.

Connecting people more meaningfully to nature runs through all of these initiatives. From biophilic design elements indoors and out – living walls, natural materials, nature-inspired interior design and greenery – to opportunities for spending time outside, the campus itself becomes a teacher and a space to experiment. A student-developed mindfulness audio tour of the campus, completed last year, and a Campus Botanicals series of artworks displayed inside the Horizon Building, are just a few examples of what this can look like in practice.

Letting sustainability blossom

These efforts connect to a wider ambition: Breda aims to become one of Europe's most nature-rich cities by 2030, and the BUas campus intends to play its part. In this way, the campus itself becomes a living demonstration of what sustainability transitions can look like when they take root – quite literally – from the ground up.

From planetary boundaries to soil organisms, from systemic complexity to a handful of compost – the distance is vast and intimate at once. What connects them is the same conviction: that transitions begin wherever you are willing to look closely, connect to each other, dig deep, and let something new blossom.

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The campus itself becomes a living demonstration of what sustainability transitions can look like when they take root – quite literally – from the ground up.

Column

The zoom that never quite lands

Ajay Kapur



Ajay Kapur is Director of the Academy for Leisure & Events at Breda University of Applied Sciences.

While geopolitics fractures supply chains and artificial intelligence rewires entire industries, it is tempting to treat climate change as yesterday's urgency – the crisis that was already on the agenda before the newer, louder ones arrived. I want to resist that temptation here, and ask you to resist it too. Climate change has not paused to wait for our attention to return. It remains the defining stress on every system our field studies – mobility, land use, the viability of destinations, and what it will mean to offer people a good time on a warming planet. The other disruptions are real. But this one is systemic, and it runs directly through leisure and events in ways we are only beginning to take seriously.

I find my position in this conversation both inspiring and faintly ironic. I lead an academy dedicated to leisure and events – one of the largest contributors to global carbon emissions, land use, water consumption and social inequality, depending on which indicators you apply. It is also one of the most powerful domains for reimagining what a good life looks like, which is equally important. This tension is not a problem to be managed. It is the very heart of our work.

Complexity science is useful here – not merely as a rhetorical flourish, but as a genuine diagnostic tool. Sustainability transitions are complex phenomena involving the co-evolution of diverse actors and components, where path dependency means that minor events can lead to major consequences. In plainer language: the system we are trying to change is the same system we are embedded in, and the tools we reach for are largely those provided by that system. This is sometimes called a 'wicked problem' – not as an expression of frustration, but as a technical designation. Traditional scientific and policy approaches are increasingly seen as inadequate, or even counterproductive, for problems of this kind, where societal systems are inherently complex. Curriculum

reform, a new research centre and a circular procurement policy are all reasonable interventions, but none of them, alone or together, resolve the underlying tension.

What does begin to resolve it, in my experience, is surprise. Not the manufactured surprise of a provocative lecture, but the genuine kind – the moment when a student's working assumptions turn out to be instructively wrong.

I see this most clearly when students engage with event organisers navigating current sustainability regulation. Many of our students arrive without strong environmental convictions. They are pragmatic, professionally oriented, not especially idealistic – which is fine, and honest. What they do not expect is to discover that the industry has already made significant strides without them. Dutch event organisers today operate under a growing framework of municipal sustainability requirements, permit conditions tied to energy use and waste management, and procurement criteria that increasingly demand measurable environmental accountability. Compliance is not simple. It requires documentation, supplier audits, logistical redesign and genuine expertise. Students who assumed sustainability was a values question – optional, aspirational, belonging to a particular type of person – find themselves looking at a skills gap. The sector does not need them to be idealists. It needs them to be competent in a domain they had not taken seriously. That realisation lands differently, and more durably, than any amount of persuasion.

This is, I think, what complexity science means when it points away from optimal solutions and towards the conditions for emergence. Networked actors can display adaptive learning and emergent self-organisation, with innovation arising not from a central plan but from a plurality of experimental approaches. Regulation, in this framing, is not the enemy of creativity – it is one of the pressures that forces adaptation. And education's role is not to hand students a framework for a stable world, but to build their capacity to navigate one that keeps

shifting beneath them. That means consciously developing students' capacity for solutions to complex and wicked problems – which looks rather different from training them to apply existing models to predictable conditions.

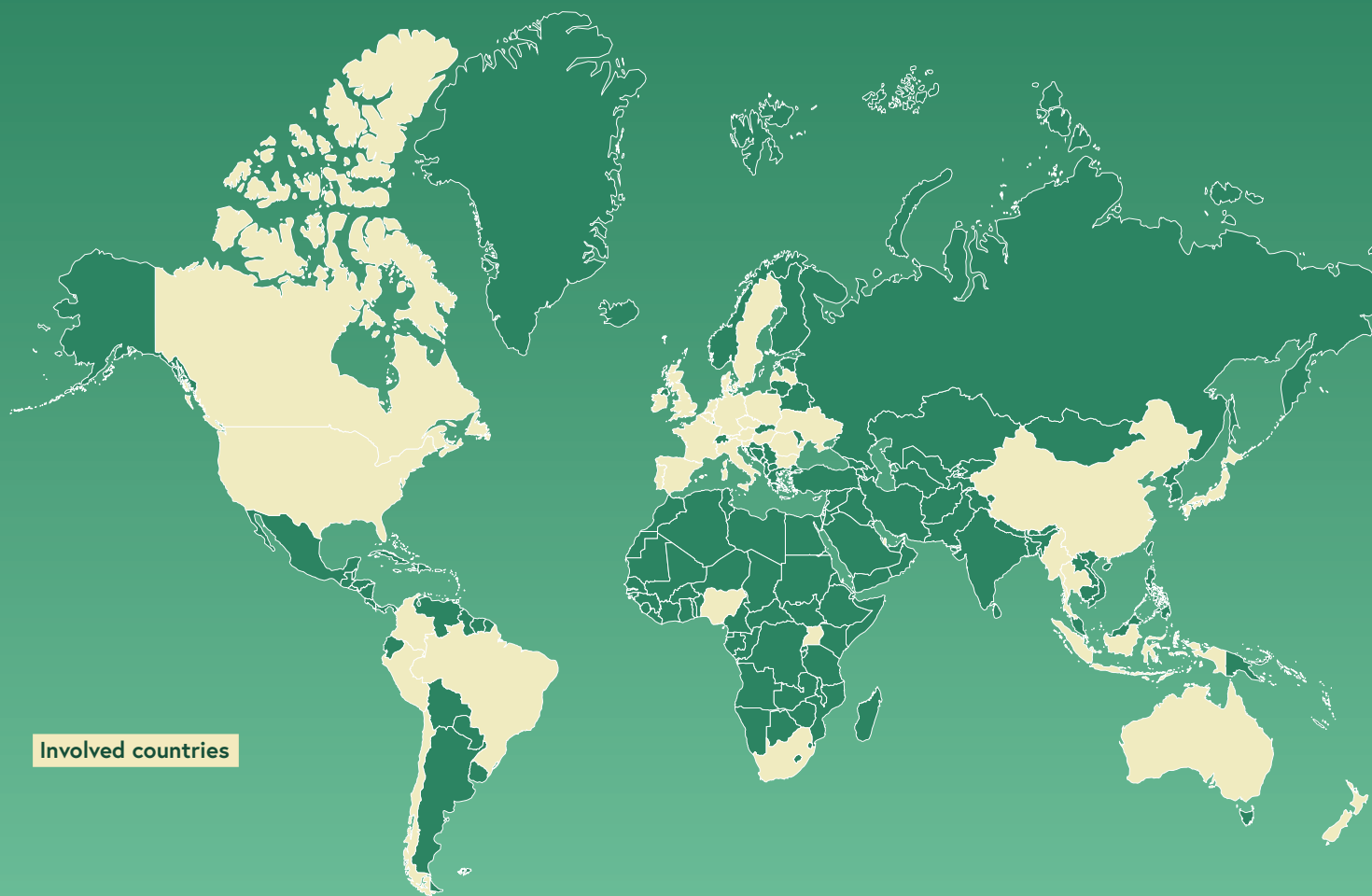
I am struck, reading through this edition, by how many of the contributors have chosen to stand in exactly this uncomfortable position – bringing rigorous thinking to questions that resist clean answers, sharing work in progress rather than only polished conclusions. From regenerative placemaking in Amsterdam to music that matters in Ukraine, from plant-based and hospitable Brabant to the creative economies and cultural heritages of KreativEU, what I see is not just intellectual quality but a disposition: the willingness to engage publicly with difficulty. That willingness is itself a form of contribution, and it should not go unremarked.

I am less consistently good at this than I would like to be – in my own institute, in my own decisions. The campus that aspires to planetary responsibility still runs on familiar procurement logic, familiar travel budgets, familiar incentive structures (but we are trying!). This is not a reason for despair. It is, in complexity terms, the current state of a system that is, in principle, capable of tipping. And systems tip, more often than we expect, because enough people across enough nodes quietly decide to behave differently. The contributors to this magazine are among those people. I hope our students are too – once the surprise has done its work.

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On the strange privilege and persistent failure of being close to the problem.

Mapping 10 Years of Uncover Engagement



Keynote Interviews

2017	—	Tony Blackshaw
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2019	—	Hans Mommaas Hugo van der Poel
2020	—	Greg Richards
2021	—	Kristian Koreman Keith Still
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