

UNIQUE OVER



Meaningful
Leisure
Experiences

MEANING
IN LIFE

HOSPITALITY

INTRINSIC SATISFACTION
SENSE OF BELONGING

INTERGENERATIONAL EMPOWERMENT

PROTECTION OF NATURAL LANDSCAPES
ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

NEW REALITY

STORY-BASED ROUTES

SUSTAINABILITY TRANSITIONS

LIFESAVER

BUILDING COMMUNITY COHESION

REGENERATIVE DEVELOPMENT

SHAPING IDENTITY, GOALS, AND OVERALL WELL-BEING

CO-CREATION WITH EXPERIENCE EXPERTS
SPORTS AND SPORTS COMMUNITIES

WARTIME ENTERTAINMENT

**LIVEABLE AND
LOVEABLE CITIES**

ACCESS FOR EVERYONE
RISE OF SPIRITUALITY
RETAIL THERAPY
PROCESSES OF CHANGE
SELF-EXPRESSION
PERSONAL GROWTH
ECOLOGICAL IMPACT

WORLD LEISURE ORGANIZATION

**SOCIAL INTERVENTIONS
FOR A BETTER SOCIETY**

LEISURE AS AN END OR A MEANS
PLACEMAKING

**JOYFUL RESILIENCE
EQUITY**

EVENTFULNESS
INTERCULTURAL EXCHANGE

TALENT DEVELOPMENT
MEANINGLESSNESS

IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCES

TRANSFORMATION ECONOMY

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

IMPROVE URBAN LIFE
LGBTQIA2S+ INCLUSION

**WORLD LEISURE
ORGANIZATION**

VOLUNTEERING
FUTURES LITERACY

OFFERING POSITIVE EMOTIONS
STREET CULTURE

The World Leisure Congress brings together global voices to address pressing societal issues through the lens of leisure. ● Where the spheres of health and well-being, wealth and prosperity, knowledge and wisdom, and purpose and meaning overlap, human flourishing occurs. ● Tourism affects not only entrepreneurs and visitors, but also local residents and the quality of life at destinations. ● The truly meaningful aspects of life emerge in creative or intellectual pursuits, in moments of joy and rest – in leisure. ● A memorable experience becomes meaningful when we reflect on it and learn something that connects to what matters to us. ●

UN SDGS

Edition 09

August 2025

Uncover is a publication of the domain of Leisure & Events of Breda University of Applied Sciences.

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Uncover

Uncover stands for discovering things together. This magazine offers Breda University of Applied Sciences 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. In addition to the publication of Uncover magazines, Uncover meetings are also organised under the heading of 'Future Perspectives on Leisure & Events'.

Domain of Leisure & Events

The domain of Leisure & Events offers the HBO (professional) bachelor's programme of Leisure & Events Management (taught in English and in Dutch), with study tracks in the fields of Leisure, Events, Social Innovation, Attractions and Theme Parks, (E)sports, and Urban Life and Placemaking. Additional course offerings include WO (academic) degree programmes - the Bachelor Leisure Studies and Master of Science Leisure and Tourism Studies - and master's programmes in Imagineering and Strategic Event Management. Within the domain of Leisure & Events, research is carried out into Leisure and Tourism Experiences, Leisure in a social context, Placemaking and Events, and Storytelling.

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Design

studio CEL - creators of valuable visual communication

www.studiocel.nl

Printer

De Bondt Grafimedia Communicatie

Arnhemseweg 2-6

2994 LA Barendrecht

www.de-bondt.nl

Print quantity

1,250 copies

Images

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Future outlook	03	Introduction
	04	Business exists to help people flourish as human beings
	08	Resilient tourism
	10	Fringe benefits
	12	Leisure in (un)sustainable times
Professorship perspectives	14	Creating meaningful experiences
	17	Creating story-based concepts, storylines and storytelling products
	18	Social tapestry
	21	Bridging heritage and innovation
	22	Professorship in Events and Placemaking
	24	Shaping AI the European way
	26	Creative and Entertainment Games
	27	Transitioning tourism mobility
	28	Digital Media Concepts
ALE stories & projects	29	Coping with war in Kyiv
	32	The case of the Dancing Cats
	34	Hip-hop as a naturally inclusive space for leisure activities
	36	Why "not designing for meaning" might be just as meaningful
	38	The end of retail therapy?
	40	Why investing in street culture and sports pays
	43	Helping to build the 'new economy'
	46	Beyond applause
World Leisure Organization	48	Impact of social interventions
	50	World Leisure Organization
	52	The Otago approach for shaping sustainable tourism futures
	54	Qatar advances towards Vision 2030
	56	Leisure Experience Research Opportunity South Africa
	58	Learning by living in Thailand's coastal communities
	60	The World Leisure Field School 2025
CELTH projects	62	Building bridges between science and industry
	64	Hearing everyone
	66	Volunteering in Dutch leisure, tourism and hospitality organisations
	68	Tourists go to the place they know
	70	Tourism-driven resident benefits beyond the surface
	72	Healthy placemaking
	74	Creating equitable destinations
ALE specialisations	76	Events as a tool for driving social change
	78	Making a meaningful change to the future of theme parks and attractions
	80	Contributing to liveable and loveable cities
	82	Resilience LABs
	84	Leisure for change
	86	From grassroots to the top
	88	MBA Imagineering present future directions
	91	Column

Introduction Meaningful leisure experiences

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

Creating meaningful experiences is firmly rooted in the core of Breda University of Applied Sciences. We live in an experience economy which goes beyond relaxation, excitement, and pleasure. We want to use experiences to have a positive long-term impact, come up with resilient solutions, let people flourish and make sustainable change. We built meaningful, or even transformational experiences for a better world. The heart of our business and existence is in helping people to fulfil aspirations, to make people healthy, wealthy and wise, and even let nature and the world itself benefit. Big words, huge ambitions, which sound empty and hollow if we cannot deliver them in practice. This ninth edition of Uncover magazine features stories from education, industry and society, and research. Separate chapters are included on the future, professorship perspectives, stories, projects and specialisations from Academy for Leisure & Events (ALE), World Leisure Organization, and CELTH.

For the chapter **Future outlook** we interviewed Joe Pine, organised a conversation with BUas professors about Leisure in (un)sustainable times, and invited some keynote speakers from the World Leisure Congress, during which this Uncover will be launched for the first time, to deliver an article. With this first chapter, we set the tone for the other stories.

Breda University of Applied Sciences (BUas) hosts a diverse range of professorships and with a chapter on **Professorship perspectives** we first lay a theoretical foundation under creating meaningful experiences. Then we explore pressing topics including artificial intelligence, digital innovation, virtual humans, sustainable tourism (mobility), and placemaking within local communities. Through an interdisciplinary approach, BUas bridges academia and practice, fostering innovation and addressing global challenges. The collaborative environment encourages impactful research that helps shape a more inclusive, sustainable, and technologically advanced future for the leisure sector and beyond.

With the chapter **ALE stories and projects**, we explore leisure as a powerful tool for personal and social development and well-being. We highlight projects including story-based tourism routes, impact of theatres, social interventions in public space, and cultural expressions such as hip-hop, illustrating leisure's role in identity, fashion, and community. Leisure emerges as a lifesaver in wartime, a vehicle for street culture, and a meaningful expression of doing 'nothing.' ALE also reflects a broader vision of higher education as an active player in societal ecosystems, using leisure to inspire transformation, stimulate dialogue, and provide inclusive spaces for expression.

A key milestone is the upcoming World Leisure Congress, set to take place in Breda in August 2025. Therefore we have included a **World Leisure Organization** (WLO) chapter. WLO is a global network committed to promoting leisure for a better society. With an ever-expanding presence across all continents. There is a story from Otago, which has been involved from the beginning, but there are also stories from new regions like Thailand, the Middle East, and South Africa. WLO serves as a catalyst for dialogue, collaboration, and innovation. Its guiding principle is that leisure contributes significantly to individual and societal well-being. During the congress in Breda WLO brings together academics, practitioners, and policymakers to exchange ideas and co-create sustainable, inclusive solutions that improve quality of life through leisure.

Then there is a **CELTH** chapter. The Centre of Expertise for Leisure, Tourism and Hospitality (CELTH) builds bridges between science and industry, supporting sustainable innovation through collaborative research. CELTH studies therefore focus on three overarching themes: conscious destinations, sustainability transitions, and leisure for a better society. In this magazine six projects facilitated by CELTH are presented that span critical themes such as accessibility, impact of (over)tourism, placemaking and volunteering.

The **ALE specialisations** chapter is all about both current and emerging issues in the ALE

programmes and in their connected leisure subsectors. Each programme explores sector-specific trends, challenges, and opportunities while engaging with broader themes such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), community identity, and ecosystem dynamics. Students work alongside experts and industry and society partners to envision multiple futures - probable, desirable, and even disruptive. Through this collaborative learning process, ALE cultivates key competencies in leisure management, with a strong focus on leisure as a driver for social change, resilience, sustainability, and innovation.

Be inspired and reflect

Meaningful leisure experiences do not have a single definition. It can be as simple as a moment of stillness or as ambitious as a movement for social transformation. In a world marked by increasing polarisation, global instability, and competing values, the role of leisure becomes more layered and contested. As this magazine reveals, meaningful leisure experiences sit at the crossroads of personal fulfilment, societal impact, and systemic change. Rather than prescribing what it should be, we invite readers to engage with its evolving meanings - understanding that in the vast spectrum from 'doing nothing' to 'bettering the world', every leisure experience holds the potential for being meaningful.

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Meaningful leisure experiences sit at the crossroads of personal fulfilment, societal impact, and systemic change.

Business exists to help people flourish as human beings

Interview with Joe Pine about the rise of the Transformation Economy

Simon de Wijs
Peter Horsten



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

Uncover had a conversation about meaningful experiences with internationally recognised business thought leader Joe Pine. He is the (co)author of some best-selling business books about the Experience Economy, authenticity, and customer value. In 2020, he cofounded the World Experiences Organization (WXO). At the moment, he is working on his next book which will be about the Transformation Economy. You can follow and join the process via the Substack platform on <https://transformationsbook.substack.com>.

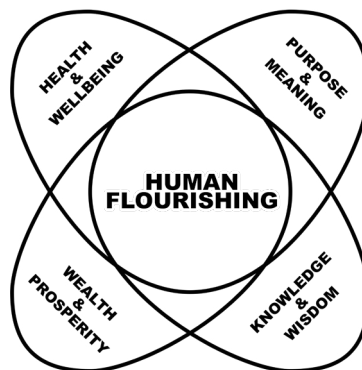
To kick off, could you give some examples of how and where we are in the movement from the experience economy towards the transformation economy?

We are deep into the experience economy. Experiences are a big part of GDP, employment, growth, innovation, and everything. It's clear that the students you have today in Breda have grown up in the experience economy, but the transformation economy is actually hot on its heels. Transformations help customers achieve their aspirations and are built on top of experiences and both are closely intertwined. Every experience changes you and any experience has that potential of being a life-changing experience, as we are all the products of our experiences.

A transformation business is any business that, to paraphrase Ben Franklin, helps people be healthy, wealthy and wise. Healthcare is one of the largest sectors of the economy in the developed world. Education and financial firms are huge sectors as well; they each dwarf manufacturing. I avoid the term 'industry' for these kinds of companies and use the term 'spheres'. It is not just about being healthy,

but it is about having health and well-being. Well-being is the end to which healthcare is the means. It's not just about being wealthy, but wealth and prosperity. We can have prosperous lives without being wealthy, but the more wealth we have, the more we can do with that. And it's not just about being wise, but having knowledge and wisdom. Education lets us gain knowledge, with practical wisdom that we can apply in our lives. And finally, the one that Ben Franklin missed, is that we need purpose and meaning to live as human beings. In fact, meaning is at the bottom of Maslow's hierarchy. Even if we have no shelter, no food or clothing, we can survive if we have meaning.

Where the spheres of health and well-being, wealth and prosperity, knowledge and wisdom, and purpose and meaning overlap, there is human flourishing (see Model 1).



Model 1 © 2025 Strategic Horizons LLP

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A transformation business is any business that helps people be healthy, wealthy and wise.



How does this relate to businesses in this transformation economy?

In my forthcoming book I show that business exists to help people flourish as human beings. People flourish through transformation, by becoming who they aspire to be. With commodities, customers are markets. With goods, customers are users. With services, customers are clients. With experiences, customers are guests. With transformations, customers are aspirants. Businesses need to adapt to this and recognise the diverse aspirations and capacities of individuals. Increasingly, we want companies to assist us with transformations because change is incredibly hard. The better we stage transformations as a distinct economic offering, the more effectively aspirants will transform. They will become who they want to become, who they are meant to be, and thus flourish.

Can you say that leisure is a better fit to aspiration than other sectors?

We only ever transform by the experiences we have, and leisure comprises experiences. Obviously, some types of leisure are going to be more amenable to transformations than others. For example, sports are very transforming, particularly when younger. How we learn comes out of playing. We learn how to compete and how to cooperate. For example, I have an aspiration to get better at golf, I hire new clubs (physical goods) to make that happen, I hire videos (services) to learn, and I hire a coach (experiences) that spends time with me and helps me get better. But I also go to a company called GolfTEC, which is more explicitly in the transformation business. Its goal is actually to make me hit the ball more like a pro.

Other kinds of leisure activities help us transform. Reading for

instance; almost without exception I changed something in my thinking with every book that I read. Or the leisure of being in a park and having time to unwind helps to get out of the normal fast-paced routine, helping to reflect. Reflection is a fundamental element for transformation.

Do you think that the transformation economy is accessible for everybody?

Yes, and it will even be much more beneficial for forgotten groups. Particularly as we bring down the cost of things it will be accessible for the lower socio-economic levels too. Since the Industrial Revolution and the system of mass production, we understand that one of the greatest benefits is that the wealthy develop markets for offerings that later on become mass markets, reaching down to the lower socio-economic levels. Henry Ford figured out how to lower the price of cars so the middle class could afford them. And these cars became second-hand cars that the lower class could afford and so on. That happened good after good after good, and does the same with services, experiences, and transformations.

Think about leisure in the 1800s with Grand Tours where the English elite went into all parts of Europe to see the land over there. Thomas Cook paved the way and started to create tours that the middle class could go on. And now, Ryanair allows anybody for a hundred bucks or less to go anywhere. Or think about the apps that we use, which are better than most personal trainers. There are specific apps to gain good habits and a number of these are very transformational. Nowadays almost everyone, even the poorest people in developing countries, has a smartphone. More and more people are going to figure out how to make an app out of what everybody is doing and aspiring to. And AI will do the rest and customise it for individuals.

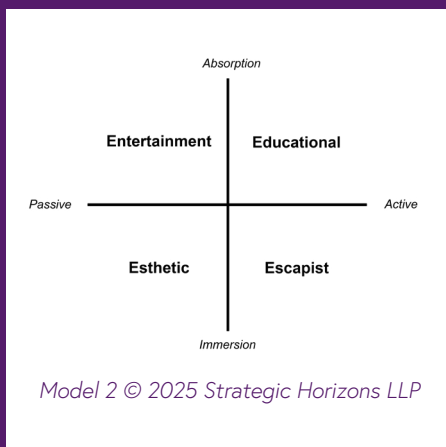
You seem to be saying that what starts at the top will be aspired to by others and will trickle down. Isn't that also dangerous because it only confirms the status quo or gives power to a small elite to set the agenda of what is a better life?

Certainly, but there isn't any innovation in the world that doesn't involve dangers. So it is good we try to identify what they are. I think what you say is a danger, but I also think that the level of customisation that's possible with technology and AI today helps lessen that danger. The biggest thing in that regard though is that not the rich per se are the top, but it's more the style makers, the ones who determine what's cool in the world, who really have the power.

When discussing immersive technologies, what will the next phase look like? Are there potential downsides we should be aware of?

The ultimate immersion is the Matrix, where you're jacked in and you know it. I see a large focus on immersive experiences as if this is all that we want. My book Infinite Possibility has a framework, the Multiverse, that talks about purely virtual and purely physical experiences at both ends and all experiences in between. The best experiences fuse the real and the virtual. Those include purpose-built places for immersion as opposed to just wearing VR goggles. Reality will now and forever more provide the richest of experiences. It is totally immersive. When I go for a walk in the park or play a game of golf, I am more immersed than in the greatest artificially immersive experience you can point to. I think we'll come to realise that in our 4E model (entertainment, educational, esthetic, escapist realms of experiences) the best, most robust experiences are those that hit the sweet spot, that are (looking at the axes) both absorptive and immersive and both active and passive at the same time (see Model 2).





Do you see a shift in how we perceive the importance of authenticity in an era where the distinction between real and fake is constantly debated? How can we ensure experiences remain authentic?

Especially in times where consumers are increasingly sceptical and struggle between fake and real, authenticity is an important value. There are shifts going on constantly and every shift produces its own countertrend as people respond and disagree. The fact is that we can now fake anything, photographically or video-wise. I'm surprised it hasn't already come to the point of people no longer believing anything. It is a major shift from 50 years ago, where you had video evidence and thought that it must be true. There is going to be a more sceptical eye on things in general. It's hard to tell the difference between fake and real anymore, particularly as AI gets better and better.

As Jim Gilmore and I pointed out in our book *Authenticity*, the two big standards of authenticity are being true to self and what

you say to be to others. Disney, for example, is a fake reality - not what it says it is, but marvelously true to self. The first time I went to Venice, before our book was going to come out, we had a whole section on the Venice versus The Venetian in Las Vegas. And the upshot of that was that the Venetian is fake, but the real Venice is also artificially kept in the past. The ratio of tourists to residents is much higher in Venice than in Las Vegas. Without tourists Venice would be a ghost town. And yet it can be a wonderful experience to go there because it has this sort of authentic old world charm; it's a real fake.

In the end, authenticity is personally determined. Two people in the same place at the same time can have different views of how authentic it is based on who they are and what their background is. And what is considered authentic is also changing over time, particularly when virtual reality is becoming a more normal part of life.

The rise of the experience and leisure economies parallels globalisation, allowing us to explore both physical and virtual spaces. However, there's also a trend towards local and smaller initiatives, like the 15-minute city. What does this mean for the experience and transformation economies?

I don't think it means that much at a macro-economic level. You will just have more smaller experiences within 15 minutes of walking or driving. What often happens is that both the local stuff and the spectacular stuff will become paramount and the stuff in between is in danger and gets squeezed out. More local and smaller maybe even increases the power of the spectacle. This is the case for things like the Sphere in Las Vegas, which are so good and distinctive (and expensive). The big thing is that people love being with other people. As opposed to watching sports on TV, places like the Sphere allow you to feel surrounded by

other people. And the number of people when you go beyond 15 minutes is a lot! So those spectacular events with a lot of people are very expensive and will become even more important if they become less frequent.

I also think that the focus on the local isn't a new thing. It is part of the human condition. Many people like nothing better than being back in their familiar surroundings where they have the routines they go through. But without ever leaving these familiar surroundings you don't appreciate it. It is the experiences you have elsewhere that allow you to appreciate the routines you have locally.

You shared a publication about transporting experiences, which seem like escapism similar to LARP parties, but also connected to religion and mystical elements. Are these transporting experiences becoming more important than just a means to escape?

There is a shift in society towards wanting more of those experiences. The normal brings merely memorable experiences and you want something more that makes a difference. You see the rise of spirituality, which is often made up stuff as opposed to real religion. It is like a drug where you need more of a dose of drugs to get the same high. Plus, companies are better at creating transporting experiences than they used to and the availability of them is higher, and so the value is greater and more people will want to have them.

As the world becomes more complex, this transformation economy might lead to feelings of inadequacy?

Alvin Toffler wrote the book *Future Shock* describing this situation in 1970. He's basically saying the future is coming so fast it's causing a shockwave. Whatever he wrote about is now a million times more, and for the larger part we have handled it. It's not an issue of the human brain or inability to handle it, for most of us



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Even if we have no shelter, no food or clothing, we can survive if we have meaning.

faster it comes, the number of people that can't handle it will grow.

This issue has been around for a long time. You can make the same statement when Gutenberg (15th century) invented the printing press and people said we can't handle all this information. With the orders of magnitude more information being created today, we mostly manage to handle it and adapt. Leonardo da Vinci basically knew almost everything that was going on in the world in terms of technology and so forth. That is not possible today, which means we need let things go and do what we can. This is difficult with our fear of missing out, which applies not just to experiences but to everything that's going on in the world.

Young people today have the chance to become wealthier, healthier, and wiser, but many struggle with mental health issues. Could the imbalance between skills and challenges be a problem?

Not sure to what extent, but I'd have to say yes. One of the things I see is that a lot of the anxiety and depression in young people's lives today is not just because of the government becoming what we call a 'nanny state', but also because of parents and the way we raise kids differently today. Everything has to be programmed out. You have to know exactly where your kids are. There's not a minute of the day that isn't on the schedule. There's no free time anymore. I think there's a lot of blame that goes straight on parents. I do think social media is also a large part of the problem of why we have more anxiety and depression today among young people. We compare ourselves to the ideal figures of others and our daily reality doesn't compare. In my opinion, there are many societal problems that business reflects more than it creates and tries to help solve the problems rather than create them, while it is society that creates these problems today.

Which ethical considerations should we keep in mind for the future?

There is an ethical issue with transformations, anytime you muck around inside of people. And thus there is a fiduciary responsibility of business for individuals and society. This term we use for banks and financial advisors, meaning that you have to be loyal to customer needs above your own. You don't do things solely to make money; you have to do things on behalf of the client. So there's this fiduciary responsibility for transformation guidance where you have to do what is best for them, even if it means you make less money.

Another ethical issue is particularly around responsibility for the places you visit. That you are not harming the flourishing of communities and people when you are amongst them. What I hope in the next 15 to 25 years is that businesses embrace the notion that their *raison d'être*, their reason of existence, is human flourishing. And if they embrace that notion, you don't have to command and control your people. You don't have to have as many regulations. If we get the mindset in business to change and to think long-term rather than short-term, then we've got a chance of being much less of a problem in that regard.

Do you already see some good examples where this is happening?

You can see the rise of B-corp as a way of working and you also see the rise of companies that explicitly have a meaningful purpose. A specific example is the transformational travel movement. Here it's not just a focus on the traveller but also on the people at destinations. Central to it is being a force of good for destinations and not just for travellers. Look at the Progression of Economic Value through travel, showing all five levels of economic value. Travel was originally about going to land where land is the commodity of travel. Then people

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There isn't any innovation in the world that doesn't involve dangers.

started building hotels and so forth. Then they started adding services and amenities. And then it became all about the experiences, on how it's time well spent. This is where it really goes beyond just having a place to stay, but the entire experience of a destination. And finally transformational travel that can change your life while you're there.

Imagine stepping into 20 or 30 years from now, what could be the next big shift in the leisure industries?

Charging admission for non-business experiences, such as visiting Venice, will become more explicit. This shift, already seen in tourist and hotel taxes, aims to sustain communities and counteract overtourism. Admission fees can balance visitor numbers and generate investment funds. We're already seeing the beginnings of this trend.

I also think that in 30 years we will be much deeper into the transformation economy and people will not have so much serendipity with their leisure experiences. People will be more consciously busy with an overall life programme and the things they need to have to be able to become what they want to become.

Lastly, I do believe there will be much more leisure time. People feel like they are time crunched, but they have more time for leisure today than they have ever had in the entire history of the world. And we will even have more time in the future as AI and other technologies will take over part of our work.

Photography

- Rod Evans (page 4 below)
- Hans Gerritsen (page 6)

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Businesses need to recognise the diverse aspirations and capacities of individuals and to adapt to this.



Resilient tourism

Taking control and cooperating

Yvonne Nassar



Yvonne Nassar is the CEO of the Netherlands Board of Tourism & Conventions (NBTC).

The hospitality industry plays an important role in broader societal and economic developments. How do we ensure that tourism in the Netherlands continues to have a positive impact? In this article, Yvonne Nassar, CEO of the Netherlands Board of Tourism & Conventions (NBTC), shares her vision of the impact of trends and developments within the hospitality industry.

Looking ahead is important for tourism in the Netherlands

The hospitality industry does not stand alone but is intertwined with broader societal and economic developments. Just think of the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, geopolitical tensions, economic fluctuations and climate change. Some trends are clearly visible, while others are more subtle and touch on socio-cultural behaviour, for example. Not everything can be influenced: we have control over some developments, but not over others. When the sun shines, more people naturally go out. Economic downturns lead to a decline in purchasing power and changes in travel behaviour. Precisely because we cannot influence everything, it is essential to look ahead.

Looking ahead helps destinations and businesses to make strategic choices. Early this year, NBTC and CELTH released the Forecast 2035 publication, with expectations for domestic and inbound tourism up to and including 2035 at national and provincial levels. Forecast

2035 shows what developments are likely, based on data on macro-economic developments and demographic trends. It is one of the many tools that can be used to lay the foundation for policy and plans. Insights gained from such tools help destinations to, among other things:

- better control visitor flows: not only considering how many visitors there are, but also who they are and what their impact is.
- plan ahead in supply and product development: a city that expects, for example, more visitors from Germany can anticipate this by offering amenities and language courses for entrepreneurs.
- define a forward-looking ambition: what does a destination need? More jobs? A livelier city centre? Or perhaps more balance and tranquillity?

If considered in a timely manner, tourism and recreation can contribute to a valuable, liveable and sustainable environment. The challenge is not only to anticipate well in time, but also to actively direct a sector that contributes economically and socially while it is aware of its ecological impact.

Perspective 2030: the outcome of a forward-looking vision

In 2018, the hospitality industry released the national vision Perspective 2030. In recent years, this long-term approach has led to significant progress in how we direct and organise tourism in the Netherlands. Thinking about tourism has now evolved: from numbers to impact, from growth to broad values, and from a stand-alone sector to an integrated part of broader social and spatial developments.

Due to Perspective 2030, more and better data are available and monitoring has become

simpler. As a result, more insight has been gained into the impact of visits. NBTC, for instance, published the renewed impact monitor last year. By using it, we are trying to not only strive for growth, but also for the right balance: how do you ensure that tourism contributes to general welfare, without putting pressure on destinations, nature and societies. More and more municipalities and regions are developing strategies that put this broader societal value of tourism central. We are proud of that.

Furthermore, Perspective 2030 shifted the tourism focus from a promotional challenge to a matter that touches on spatial planning, mobility and quality of life. New partnerships ensure that destinations look at not only how many visitors they attract, but also which visitors they want to welcome at what time and how they can organise that in a responsible manner. This means that tourism is no longer considered solely as a sector attracting visitors, but also as a system in which residents, entrepreneurs and policymakers collaborate on a sustainable future.

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Tourism and recreation account for 3.8% of the Dutch economy and 6.7% of total employment.



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Tourism affects not only entrepreneurs and visitors, but also residents and the quality of life at destinations.

This change raises questions. Managing tourism more cleverly does not mean that promotion is unnecessary. Its economic value remains high: tourism and recreation account for 3.8% of the Dutch economy and 6.7% of total employment. Yet, the focus is shifting to the question for whom this growth is successful and under what conditions. The challenge is to make choices that benefit not only visitors and match a short-term perspective, but also contribute to residents' well-being and the quality of life at destinations.

Major challenges for the coming years

We are already seeing that hotter summers and more extreme weather conditions affect both visitors' travel behaviour and the quality of life at destinations. While higher temperatures offer opportunities for the Netherlands as a summer destination, extreme rainfall and heatwaves elsewhere in Europe may cause problems. The tourism industry must be better prepared for this new reality, which calls for close cooperation between (local) authorities,

entrepreneurs, knowledge institutes, and other civil organisations.

The speed of digital and technological developments, such as generative AI, is also having an increasing impact – both on the traveller experience and behind the scenes at companies. Some major players are already well advanced in their digital transformation, but smaller entrepreneurs also need to be able to keep up. This will ensure that their offerings remain competitive and that the Dutch hospitality industry as a whole does not fall behind. AI is already widely used in many sectors, while the hospitality industry still lags behind. A boost in momentum is needed, and that requires cooperation. With the Digital Expedition – the industry's joint vision for digital transformation – we are accelerating the use of data and technology. Not as an end in itself, but to contribute to valuable visitor experiences and to the agility, competitiveness and sustainable growth of the hospitality industry.

Furthermore, geopolitical developments and polarisation in society pose major challenges. Scenarios enable us to better prepare for what may lie ahead. At NBTC, we continuously monitor developments and share trend insights and developments with recommendations with the sector.

Making tourism truly sustainable for the future

An ambitious vision is valuable, but will only become meaningful through targeted actions and concrete results. In recent years, good process has been made to better direct tourism and recreation in the Netherlands and to make the sector future-proof. Still, the question remains: how do we translate ambitions into practice and how can we move forward quickly together?

Firstly, it is essential that authorities at all levels pursue active policies on tourism and recreation. Tourism affects not only entrepreneurs and visitors, but also residents and the quality of life at destinations. It is therefore important that (local) authorities and other stakeholders consciously take control of the development of

tourism and its contribution to the environment. Additionally, we will have to keep investing in knowledge and data. Not only in sharing them, but also in optimising algorithms and in sustainable use of data: what really needs to be stored? After all, it is about data that matters. By better understanding who visits the Netherlands, how visitors behave and what their impact is, we can manage tourism more effectively. Insight into the supply side is also important, of course. Think of the number of beds or seats per type of accommodation and per region. This requires cooperation between public and private sectors, translating insights from data into concrete policy.

Entrepreneurs also play a crucial role. They must be given the opportunity to adapt to changing circumstances, such as climate change and digitalisation. Initiatives such as Vitale Vakantieparken (Vital Holiday Resorts) show how cooperation within the sector can contribute to future-proof offerings. It is also important that businesses – including small and medium-sized ones – are supported in the adoption of AI and digital tools to keep the entire sector competitive.

Finally: moving forward together

The future of tourism and recreation lies not in isolated initiatives, but in taking ownership and working together in an integrated way. It requires strategic choices – based on scenarios where necessary – and implementation power. In short: action. That power grows through experimentation and scaling up based on the results. To make this possible, we need a culture in which learning is central, mistakes are allowed, and different perspectives are utilised. In other words, giving each other space. This precisely aligns with the three core values of the Netherlands: open, inclusive and inventive. By working together towards a resilient approach both within the sector and across sectors, we will ensure that tourism and recreation continue to make a positive contribution to the Netherlands. For residents, entrepreneurs and visitors. Now and for future generations.

Photography

- Niels Blekemolen (portrait author)
- NBTC - Olivier Groot Hexashots (page 8 top)
- NBTC - Sjoerd Bracke & Cuno de Bruin (page 9 top)

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More and more municipalities and regions are developing strategies that places the broader societal value of tourism at the centre.

Fringe benefits

How the Edinburgh Festivals make the city a better place to live, work and play in

Jane Ali-Knight



Dr Jane Ali-Knight is a professor in Festival and Event Management at Edinburgh Napier University.

Edinburgh is synonymous with innovation and excellence and many aspiring actors and producers have cut their teeth in the city. Phoebe Waller-Bridge, the creator and star of 'Fleabag' and now the honorary president of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society premiered her one-woman play at the 2013 Fringe. The show earned her an Olivier Award nomination and was then adapted into a hit TV series for BBC 3/Amazon.

Commenting on the Edinburgh Fringe, Waller-Bridge said that it is "at the beating heart" of the industry and in 2023 she launched a new £100k fund to support artists in bringing work to the festival. This is an excellent example of how the festival is intrinsically linked to and is a key part of the fabric of the city. So much so that its yearly cycle of activity means Edinburgh sees itself as a "festival city" (Ali-Knight, cited in Wade, 2020).

Fringe festivals

Fringe festivals are a particular type of arts festival committed to providing emerging artists with opportunities to present original, innovative, and experimental work (Frew & Ali-Knight, 2010). The 'fringe' originated in Edinburgh 78 years ago as a protest by a group of performers who had been excluded from joining the inaugural Edinburgh Arts Festival and so set up on the 'fringe' of the festival. This fringe model has been a model and inspiration for a proliferation of fringe movements around the world.

Every summer, Edinburgh hosts the world's biggest arts festival which showcases theatre, film, books, visual art, and the military tattoo. It is a little-known fact that the August festivals combined are the world's third largest ticketed

event, just behind the Olympics and men's football World Cup, selling millions of tickets each year, though operating on a fraction of the budget of those global sporting events.

Rapid growth

Together, the five August festivals comprise over 5,000 events across Scotland's capital, welcoming an audience of 4.4 million and over 25,000 artists, writers, and performers from 70 countries and transforming Edinburgh into a vibrant cultural capital every summer (Edinburgh Festivals City, 2020).

However, the festivals are also no stranger to adversity and there has been significant criticism of the festivals' rapid growth, with "the festivals themselves caught in the curious trap of endless expansionism: the notion that each year's ought somehow to be bigger than the last" (The Guardian, 2018). The onset of the global pandemic in 2020 and subsequent lockdowns also required festivals to innovate to survive, creating new, digital modes of delivery and other more diverse income streams and their realisation of the need to be more embedded in the local community (Holmes & Ali-Knight, 2017).

Impact

There is little doubt that the festivals significantly contribute to making Edinburgh a better place to live, both culturally and economically. They bring in visitors, boost local businesses, create jobs, and enhance the city's global reputation which in turn generates soft power. The festivals also offer residents a variety of cultural experiences and contribute to their quality of life. Festivals also have a positive social impact on local communities: building community cohesion, offering positive emotions and shared connections, promoting social interaction and cultural exchange, and contributing to a general sense of well-being,

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It is a little-known fact that the August festivals combined are the world's third largest ticketed event, just behind the Olympics and men's football World Cup.



especially in turbulent times (Yolal et al., 2016). One example is the collaboration between EIFs Festival Fridays and Tonic Arts (Lothian Health Arts Trust) to create a series of world-class monthly performances in NHS Lothian settings. The festivals are a showcase of both local and international artistic talent that promotes cultural exchange. The 2024 Edinburgh Fringe hosted 25,000 artists from 60 countries and the Edinburgh International Festival featured over 2,000 artists from 42 countries, including a quarter from Scotland.

A recent report by umbrella organisation Festivals Edinburgh outlined their vision for Edinburgh to be a world-leading sustainable festival city by 2030, with six shared ambitions for the festivals: global solidarity; valuable skills and work; connected local communities; vibrant, sustainable gathering places; net zero carbon future; and increased resilience, partnership, and investment. Initiated during the pandemic, the project aims to understand how the city and its festivals could rebuild and support wider renewal and innovation in a changed festival environment that is "globally minded, rooted and creatively led" (Edinburgh Festivals City, 2022).

Live

It is a myth that Edinburgh's residents are against the festivals. More residents support than oppose them, with large numbers actively participating in and/or attending events. The latest study by BOP Consulting (2023), which surveyed 22,000 people, shows that the Edinburgh Festivals continue to be Scotland's world-leading cultural brands. Recent studies show that a substantial percentage of residents believe the festivals make Edinburgh a better place to live and are "loved by locals". Around 1.5 million festival attendees are local residents (which is about 50% of total audience) while 89% of Edinburgh residents say that the festivals increase local pride in their home city. One of the key benefits, when managed efficiently and responsibly, is the money they bring into the local economy. Used effectively, it can be diverted into infrastructure developments, street dressing, and creating better facilities for those who live in the city. For artists, attending the festivals may be a financial risk given spiralling costs, but their contribution to the Scottish economy is undeniable generating over £260m yearly.

Work

The UK music, performing and visual arts sectors lost 30% of total jobs because of the pandemic, with young people worst affected, and many have not returned to the sector. Beyond direct



employment, festivals play a critical role in supporting many thousands of jobs for wider service businesses and local traders. The festivals alone create the full-time equivalent of 5,850 jobs in Edinburgh. This sector together with arts, entertainment, recreation and other services are significant employers in the city, accounting for 44,000 jobs between them (Edinburgh Festival City, 2022). Although the sector faces many employment challenges and can be seen to be fragmented, seasonal, poorly paid and reliant on volunteer staff, research by Edinburgh's Fringe in 2018 revealed that over 90% of respondents would still work at the Fringe again. All of the Festivals Edinburgh members pay at least the real living wage, have a code of practice on volunteering, and are keen to rebuild and maximise access to the skills, employment and development opportunities the festivals create.

Networks and interpersonal connections matter to festivals, the people involved, the organisations that produce them, and the communities that support them. In a recent project by the author using the lens of social network theory, we investigated festival networks, examining the interpersonal networks of core staff across the three largest global Fringe Festivals: Edinburgh, Adelaide and Perth. From an organisational perspective, we wanted to investigate the extent to which international and interstate connections help in achieving desired outcomes, impacts and results. From a personal perspective, we wanted to tell the stories of festival people and how they have developed, nurtured and used international networks in their careers. Fringe staff continually emphasised the challenge of festival work, where it is hard to maintain a work-life balance, and staff are often underpaid but our findings confirm the importance of networks in providing transformative career opportunities and ongoing development support for fringe staff.

Play

Finally, festivals are playful. One month of the year the city takes on a joyous carnival atmosphere which tens of thousands of locals join in. They are escapist and bring joy and laughter to communities, and the places in which they reside. It is a privilege having so much world-class, innovative art on our doorstep and the locals clearly love being part of it. One common observation during Covid was how quiet and lacklustre Edinburgh felt without its festivals, no matter how frustrating

they can sometimes be. Festivals can help to break down silos and bring people together in a fun and relaxed environment to learn, challenge their thinking and gain insight, and are a huge distraction from the big issues facing the world today.

Conclusion

So, as the planning cycle for the 2025 festivals begins, amid a background of public funding cuts and drops in sponsorship revenue, rising inflation and production costs, cost-of-living challenges, and shortages of skilled labour and materials, the organisers of Edinburgh's world-leading events will have to assert the contribution of its festivals to making Edinburgh a better place to live. Echoing a The Guardian writer's opinion: "Cultural institutions like the Fringe are about more than making money and stars. In our age of disinformation, artificial intelligence and alienation, such gatherings of people, talent and ideas are more vital than ever" (2025).

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Leisure in (un)sustainable times

An exploration of the role of leisure in sustainability transitions

Frans Melissen

Frans Melissen is transversal professor of Sustainability Transitions at Breda University of Applied Sciences.

What does leisure mean in an age of planetary crisis? And how might it contribute to shaping a more sustainable future? These questions were at the heart of a lively conversation I recently hosted in my role as transversal professor of Sustainability Transitions at Breda University of Applied Sciences (BUas). I was joined by four BUas professors - Marcel Bastiaansen, Mata Haggis-Burridge, Jörn Fricke, and Jeroen Klijs - and two editors of UNCOVER magazine, Peter Horsten and Simon de Wijs. All are deeply engaged with the concept of leisure and its implications for society, the economy, and the planet.

Together, we explored how leisure has shaped the world we live in today - sometimes for better, often for worse - and what role it could and should play in transitioning towards a more sustainable future. What emerged was a critical yet hopeful reflection on how we might reclaim leisure as a space for connection, creativity, and care, rather than a byproduct of consumption and productivity.

Leisure at the heart of being human

Our conversation began by examining the role leisure has played in the development of modern society and, simultaneously, in the emergence of today's sustainability challenges. From climate change to biodiversity loss, pollution to inequality, many of these issues are in some way linked to leisure activities and the negative impacts of leisure are both social and environmental in nature.

There is much more to it than direct social and environmental impacts, though. Early on, Mata put forward a profound statement: "Leisure is kind of the point of being alive". In a culture increasingly dominated by work,

achievement, and economic output, this may seem radical. Yet, it rings true. We do not live to work. And while work can be a source of meaning for some, very few people find all of their fulfilment, social connection, and sense of purpose through their jobs alone. For most of us, the truly meaningful aspects of life emerge elsewhere: in relationships, in creative or intellectual pursuits, in moments of joy and rest; in leisure.

Any world worth living in must therefore have leisure at its core. And any world worth living in must also be sustainable - a world in which everyone not only has a home, food and safety, but also the opportunity to engage in leisure activities that nourish them, on a planet that can continue to support life today, tomorrow, and into the future.

But we seem to have lost this balance. As societies, we were once better at maintaining a proper balance between work and rest, between productivity and pleasure, between human activity and the rhythms of the natural world. Over the past few centuries, however, we have steadily shifted towards an extractive mindset - one that prioritises maximising economic growth, productivity and material wealth over well-being and meaning.

As a result, leisure has been gradually co-opted by the very systems it could help us transcend. It has become commodified, commercialised, and increasingly shaped by market logic. We no longer simply enjoy leisure; we buy it, schedule it, and consume it. We have allowed it to become just another piece of a system built on profit, competition, and performance.

This shift has far-reaching consequences. As leisure becomes more commercial, it loses its potential to support mental well-being, social cohesion, and equity. Environmentally, it

contributes to the very crises we face - through overconsumption, pollution, carbon emissions, and the depletion of natural resources.

"Leisure is now more and more something that we need to recover from work and to prepare us for work", one of us noted. "It is almost as if we have started treating leisure as things we do to allow us to be even more productive". In that sense, leisure has become a prisoner of our socio-economic system.

Reclaiming leisure as a force for good

Despite this sobering diagnosis, our conversation was far from cynical. We turned to the question of how leisure might evolve in a more sustainable world. What would it look like if leisure became part of the solution?

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A sustainable vision of leisure prioritises quality over quantity. It focuses on the richness of local experiences, meaningful relationships, and low-impact activities.

The first shift, we agreed, would be away from leisure as a commodity. In a sustainable society, leisure would be less structured, less commercially driven, and far less resource-intensive. Jeroen made a pointed observation: "It is quite vital that people will not travel as far and as frequently as they do now". Tourism, after all, is just one dimension of leisure, but an emblematic one – and it has become deeply unsustainable in many ways.

A sustainable vision of leisure prioritises quality over quantity. It focuses on the richness of local experiences, meaningful relationships, and low-impact activities. It embraces the 'strength of the local' and rethinks what fulfilment really means. It blends online and offline in ways that support well-being rather than distract from it.

Here, Mata introduced a fascinating perspective by referring to the hierarchy of needs as interpreted by the Blackfoot Indians: self-actualisation, social actualisation, and intergenerational actualisation:

- **Self-actualisation:** the sense of agency and control over one's own life.
- **Social actualisation:** the sense of fulfilment that comes from community and shared experience.
- **Intergenerational actualisation:** the commitment to leaving a thriving, nourishing world for future generations.

These principles offer a powerful lens for reimagining leisure. In this vision, leisure is not a luxury. It is a human need, a vital part of how we connect with others, express ourselves, and build a better future.

Leisure as a catalyst for change

The final stage of our conversation turned to the future: How might leisure actively support sustainability transitions?

Jörn framed it beautifully: "Leisure can help us rediscover what life is truly about. It allows us to meet, connect, and simply be human – without the pressure to generate economic value or exploit the earth". This potential is not theoretical; it is tangible. Mata brought up the example of video games. Often dismissed as

frivolous, games actually offer rich opportunities for reflection, connection, and education. When designed well, they can highlight the consequences of exploitation, help players appreciate alternative ways of living, and even imagine new social systems. Games with thoughtful design can instill a sense of hope. They can teach, inspire, and provide tools for transformation. They can offer glimpses into futures that are more cooperative, inclusive, and sustainable. And this is not limited to gaming.

Other leisure activities – from arts to nature walks, from storytelling to collective cooking – also have the power to help us explore values beyond material success. When leisure is focused on connection, self-expression, and non-exploitative joy, it naturally supports both social and environmental sustainability. Jörn put it this way: meaningful leisure helps us to "connect with the right people in the right way, within networks and places that support these kinds of connections".

Of course, enabling these forms of leisure requires design and intention. Marcel pointed out that this is where our roles as researchers and educators come in. We can experiment with creating leisure experiences outside commercial contexts. We can study what works and what does not. We can co-create new models with communities. By doing so, we can nudge people and societies towards alternative ways of living and being – ways that are less exploitative, more equitable, and ultimately more fulfilling.

A critical but hopeful path forwards

This conversation did not offer easy answers. Nor did it end with unrealistic optimism. We acknowledged that transitioning to a sustainable model of leisure will not be easy. It will require cultural shifts, economic restructuring, and individual reflection. It will demand courage and creativity. But we also agreed: it is possible. And it is necessary.

Leisure, far from being a passive escape, can be an active force for transformation. It can help us question the systems we have inherited and imagine the ones we

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Leisure is not a luxury. It is a human need, a vital part of how we connect with others, express ourselves, and build a better future.

want to build. It can guide us towards lives that are not only more enjoyable, but more just and sustainable. "About fulfilment, social connections and contributing and being part of something bigger than yourself", as Marcel puts it.

As professors at BUAs, we will continue to explore how leisure can play this role. Through research, education, and experimentation, we hope to contribute to a world where leisure is no longer part of the problem but a key part of the solution. A world in which leisure helps us become better, more connected, more hopeful versions of ourselves. And perhaps, a world in which leisure once again becomes 'the point of being alive'.

Photography

- Peter de Jong (page 12 top)



Creating meaningful experiences

Theoretical foundations and design strategies

Marcel Bastiaansen



Marcel Bastiaansen is professor of Leisure and Tourism Experiences and director of the BUas Experience Lab.

Human life consists of a dynamic, continuous and ongoing sequence of experiences. From the mundane routines of daily living to once-in-a-lifetime events, individuals are continually exposed to stimuli that may or may not leave lasting impressions. While most experiences quickly fade from memory, a select few become memorable, meaningful or even transformative, shaping identity, goals, and overall well-being.

What makes experiences memorable has been the subject of both theoretical thinking and empirical research (Bastiaansen et al., 2019; Duerden et al., 2018). However, much less is known about what makes experiences meaningful. A recent publication (Bastiaansen & Duerden, 2024) theoretically digs into the concept of meaningful experiences, and proposes a number of targeted design strategies for creating meaningful experiences. Here we provide an overview of the theoretical proposal and the ensuing empirical agenda developed in that publication.

Memorable experiences

Bastiaansen et al. (2019) articulated the process whereby individuals activate existing mental models to segment their stream of consciousness into experiential episodes. While most of these episodes are perceived as ordinary and therefore have no long-term impacts on individuals' lives, a smaller subset of experiences produces specific impacts. Research suggests that the most immediate impact of such extraordinary experiences is memorability (Bastiaansen et al., 2019; Duerden et al., 2018). Memories of experiences that accrue over time become part of an individual's autobiographical episodic memory. However, it is important to distinguish between the mere remembering of an experience and the memorability of it; while an

experience may be remembered by an individual, the experience only becomes truly memorable when it is accompanied by strong emotions (Duerden et al., 2018). A variety of factors may contribute to an experience producing emotion in an individual, including novelty (Mitas & Bastiaansen, 2018). Crucially, then, in addition to a process (remembering the experience), a certain *experiential quality* (the strong emotions which are remembered) is required for an experience to become memorable.

Sources of meaning in life

However, experiencing and remembering strong emotions in itself is necessary but not sufficient for meaning to arise. While philosophers often ask questions pertaining to the meaning of life, questions about meaning *in* life (put differently - what makes life meaningful and worth living) are typically addressed by psychologists. A review of the scientific psychological literature of the past 20 years on what brings meaning to life reveals that there is considerable conceptual consistency across the different works (e.g. Martela and Steger, 2016). To summarise this consensus, we identify four sources of meaning in life that are quite consistently distinguished:

1. Social connection

Social connection is an important source of meaning, as it represents a fundamental and pervasive human need. Having strong relationships with family, friends, and loved ones provides a sense of belonging and support, feeding into the meaning aspects of coherence and significance. Having shared experiences, sharing individually lived experiences, or socially constructing meaning through shared narratives at the level of close relatives or communities are all examples of how sharing and establishing social connection with relevant others create meaning. Shared experiences often lead to the development of shared meaning and

result in what has been described as *communitas* or sense of community. It has been proposed that *communitas* is most likely to emerge in shared rituals and traditions that existed in liminal spaces outside of everyday contexts like work and home life. Due to the liminal nature of most tourism and leisure experiences, *communitas* that arises from such shared experiences has received significant attention from scholars studying leisure and tourism.

2. Fulfilment

Connected to the more abstract notion of purpose as defined by Martela and Steger (2016), we see the fulfilment of both short-term and long-term goals, and the fulfilment of ambitions, wishes, or desires as more concrete sources or domains of meaning in life. Reaching pre-set goals is intrinsically rewarding, leading to positive effects and a clear sense of meaning in life. While some authors equate goal pursuit with meaning in life, others distinguish between goals and fulfilment, arguing that the objective pursuit of goals gives purpose and direction in one's life but that the actual subjective experience of fulfilment is what provides a sense of meaning.

3. Contribution

Contribution, or the feeling of making a difference in the world is a third and well-established source of meaning. It involves doing something beyond your self-interest, like helping others, doing volunteer work or engaging in other forms of social service. As such, this source of meaning in life is closely connected to the positive psychology concept of *eudaimonia*.

4. Growth

Growth is the fourth and final source of meaning in life - striving to become a better person and to learn new things. Dating back to the original notion of self-actualisation put forward by Maslow, personal growth, including related concepts such as curiosity, identity



The experience only becomes truly memorable when it is accompanied by strong emotions.

development, and growth mindset, has been consistently identified as providing a sense of meaning in life. Note that although growth is sometimes confounded with goal setting and goal fulfilment, there is a wide variety of goals that do not necessarily entail any personal growth, and vice versa – personal growth is certainly not always goal-driven.

Reflection as meaning-making process

As said, the memorability of an experience is necessary but not sufficient for meaning to be extracted from the experience. A memorable experience is simply remembered and associated with strong emotions. By contrast, *reflection* involves a more intentional cognitive unpacking of an experience, which often leads to the articulation of lessons and insights. Lessons are narrowly focused on specific actions that should take place in specific settings (e.g. you should turn off the light when you leave the room) whereas insights tend to apply more broadly and be more self-relevant. Insights are more directly associated with meaning-making than lessons are.

We draw upon existing conceptualisations of reflection as a process of meaning-making from experience over time. Reflection can occur prior to an experience (i.e. 'preflection'), during an experience (i.e. reflection-in-action) and after an experience (i.e. reflection-on-action). Reflection, whether before, during or after an experience, allows individuals to remember memories of the experience and extract insights from those memories. Crucially, if individuals connect these insights to one or several of these sources of meaning, they perceive the experience as meaningful.

In sum, for a memorable experience to become meaningful, it requires a process (reflection) and an *experiential quality* (the reflection leading to insights that are connected to one or several sources of meaning). Again, it follows that meaningful experiences emerge from a larger pool of memorable experiences. We therefore see a temporal progression from extraordinary experiences to become memorable and then meaningful, as visualised in Figure 1.

Designing for meaningful experiences

However, reflective thinking is not an automatic

psychological function. It has been argued that deliberate reflection is a relatively recent cognitive adaptation rather than an ingrained evolutionary trait. Many individuals pass through emotionally intense experiences without extracting meaning because they fail to engage in the reflective processing necessary to transform raw memory into integrated narrative. Notably, everyday experiences can be fertile ground for meaning if approached reflectively. A family dinner, for example, may seem routine. Yet, if participants are encouraged to reflect on the bonds being reinforced, traditions being honoured, or growth being witnessed, such experiences can assume profound significance. The extraordinary potential of ordinary moments highlights the potential power of reflection in meaning-making. This insight has critical implications for fields such as tourism, education, healthcare, and management, where experience design can intentionally scaffold reflection to enhance meaningfulness.

Given this theoretical foundation, practical strategies can be developed to enhance the meaningfulness of designed experiences. These strategies can be deployed at three distinct moments in time. *Prior* to the experience, 'preflection' activities – such as goal setting, value clarification exercises, or expectation discussions – prime participants to engage more deeply. *During* the experience, facilitators can promote savouring, mindfulness, and intentional engagement to heighten emotional activation. *Following* the experience, structured reflection activities – such as storytelling, group debriefs,

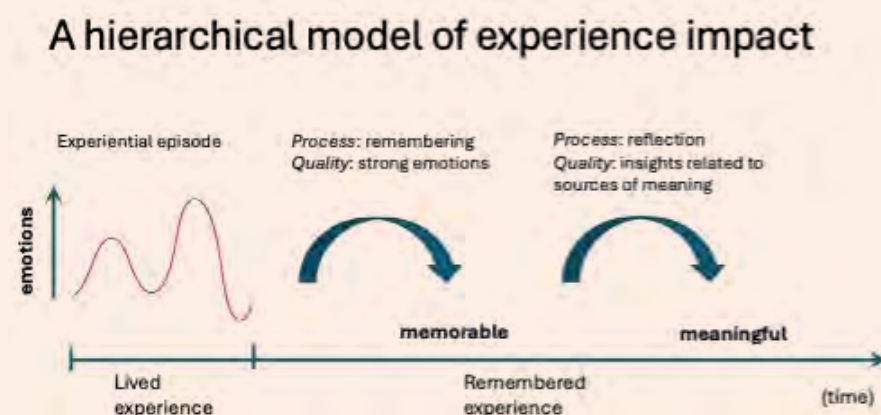


Figure 1

During an experiential episode, strong emotions are felt. These emotions come and go throughout the episode. Strong emotions increase the likelihood that this episode will be stored in memory. After the end of this lived experience, the process of remembering, combined with the experiential quality of remembering and/or reliving these strong emotions, make experiences memorable. When individuals reflect upon these memorable experiences (process), and this reflection leads to new insights connected to one or several sources of meaning (experiential quality) the experience becomes meaningful.

	Before Experience	During Experience	After Experience
Social Connection	Shared anticipation	Shared savouring; joint experience	Shared-narrative construction
Goals and Fulfillment	Value-aligned priming cues and mastery- goal formation	Goal-related feedback, situational factors, goal sequencing	Goal feedback, value connection, storytelling and sharing
Contribution	Value-informed interpretation Materials	Social development model strategies	Contribution narratives
Growth	Self-efficacy; intake assessment	Flow states; self-efficacy; task competence development	Self-assessment, assessment

Table 1

The table provides example experience design strategies aimed at creating meaningful experiences by promoting reflection on the four sources of meaning. Such reflection-inducing strategies can be implemented before, during or after the experience takes place. Note that many more such strategies can be designed, the current table just serves as a starting point and example. If individual design strategies are used as interventions in empirical studies, their effectiveness in making experiences (more) meaningful can be validated.

journalling, or creative expression – enable participants to articulate and integrate their insights. Examples of targeted design strategies for creating meaningful experiences are given in Table 1 – but many more such strategies can be considered.

For instance, in tourism, designing journeys with curated moments for introspection – such as guided walks, narrative-sharing circles, or personal challenge activities – can increase

the likelihood that travellers extract meaning from their adventures. Educational programmes can incorporate reflective writing assignments, portfolio development, and mentorship relationships to transform coursework into personally meaningful milestones. Healthcare experiences, particularly in chronic care settings, can integrate narrative medicine approaches, inviting patients to construct meaning from their health journeys.

Evidence supports the effectiveness of these strategies. Duerden et al. (2023) found that experiences intentionally designed to evoke emotion, prompt reflection, and/or facilitate personal narrative construction were significantly more likely to be rated as meaningful by participants. Moreover, participants reported enhanced life satisfaction, resilience, and engagement following such experiences, underscoring the enduring benefits of meaning-making.

The meaning of meaning

Meaning provides an existential framework that sustains motivation, acts as a buffer against despair, and anchors personal and social identity. Experiences that cultivate meaning thus contribute directly to individual thriving. But the implications of our theory and the research agenda that results from it extends beyond individual well-being. Societies that facilitate opportunities for meaningful experiences – through education, community engagement, work design, and leisure activities – are likely to foster citizens with greater psychological resilience, civic engagement, and life satisfaction. In an era characterised by technological distraction and superficial engagement, the deliberate cultivation of depth and reflection in experience design represents both a moral imperative and a strategic opportunity.

In conclusion, while emotion makes experiences memorable, reflection makes them meaningful. By linking experiences to core human needs – for connection, growth, achievement, and contribution – individuals weave the fabric of a life imbued with coherence, purpose, and significance. Intentional experience design, grounded in empirical evidence and psychological theory, holds the power to transform transient moments into enduring milestones of personal and collective meaning. In doing so, we honour not only the richness of human experience but also the potential for individual and societal flourishing.

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Photography

- Brabant Partners - The Red Yarn (page 15)



The extraordinary potential of ordinary moments highlights the potential power of reflection in meaning-making.

Creating story-based concepts, storylines and storytelling products

Enhancing leisure and tourism experiences

Moniek Hover

Moniek Hover is professor of Storytelling at Breda University of Applied Sciences.

At BUas, the professorship of Storytelling focuses on both research and design/development. We aim to explore the connections between storytelling in leisure, tourism, and hospitality, and visitor experiences. The professorship also designs story-based concepts and creates storytelling products for the leisure and tourism industry, as well as the cultural heritage field. In all our research and design projects, our goal is to evoke meaningful and valuable experiences for visitors, residents, and industry partners. Through storytelling, people can 'learn without being taught', as stories transmit emotional and symbolic values, helping people attach meaning to places, images or objects. We follow Lukas (The Immersive Worlds Handbook, 2013) in focusing on 'evoking emotions, memories, feelings, and sentiments that all people can enjoy or appreciate, regardless of their backgrounds'. Several of our projects involve interactive digital storytelling, allowing users to influence the flow or content of the story.

Ranging from World War II to cycling routes

To bring World War II heritage from the 's-Hertogenbosch archives to life, we developed 'Encounters in Wartime' with the creative company Wijdoendingen and 's-Hertogenbosch Heritage. This mobile, interactive exhibit uses speech recognition technology to enable visitors to engage with three WWII-era characters through interactive dialogues. Our role was to develop all storytelling aspects, including research, character development, scripts, and dialogues, while WDD handled the technology, design, and realization of the exhibit.

The province of Noord-Brabant (the Netherlands) is renowned for its excellent bicycle

infrastructure, picturesque countryside, and numerous attractions. VisitBrabant Routebureau aims to enhance the province's recreational offerings through routes based on local and regional stories. Since 2019, experts from the Storytelling professorship and VisitBrabant (the Netherlands) have created approximately 12 bicycle routes based on local folktales and legends, three routes themed around Made In Brabant (industrial heritage), and three routes centred around the Dutch-Belgian border. These routes enhance the visitor experience, strengthen the tourism profile, increase visitor spending, and contribute to a vibrant living environment for residents. Story-based routes also help develop networks between entrepreneurs and local stakeholders, ensuring a flow of additional ideas and resources.

Dealing with 'fake' and 'real'

The most urgent challenge for all creative professionals is the rise of AI, particularly large language models (LLMs) like ChatGPT, in generating text and images. The professorship in Storytelling has experimented with AI, such as in the 'Encounters' project, and found that LLMs cannot yet create subtext - the underlying meanings and feelings that evoke emotional responses in people. This intangible spark is what makes storytelling deeply human.

The traditional distinction between 'narrative' (aimed at objective information) and 'story' (aimed at evoking emotional meaning) is becoming blurred. Storytelling can be powerful but also dangerous when being misused. As the online world becomes more 'fake', there is a counter-effect where people seek 'real' experiences, especially during leisure activities.

We sometimes use fiction in our design projects. For example, 'The Photo Album of

Marie and Stefan' is an interactive digital exhibit with fictional characters. It is crucial, especially in museums, to clarify the degree of fiction. At the Maczek Memorial in Breda we ensured this by adding: 'This album could have belonged to a family in Breda'. The stories in the album are based on the true accounts of volunteers at the Maczek Memorial, often children of the Polish soldiers honoured in the museum. In this sense, what we created is 'truthful'. We checked with historians and volunteers whether what we created could have happened in this way.

Educating storytellers

Our students learn storytelling principles and techniques through education and practice, from our own experience of storytelling projects, but also by watching series, reading books, and listening to podcasts. However, becoming a good storyteller requires putting your heart and soul into it. It is often a matter of 99 percent perspiration and 1 percent inspiration. Not all students have the innate imagination and creativity required, but our storytelling projects are always team efforts. Those who research, manage, and facilitate the creative process are just as important as the storytellers themselves.

Involving stakeholders

We always involve clients and other stakeholders in our storytelling projects through co-creative sessions. We also run storytelling workshops for leisure and tourism professionals to help them strengthen their own stories, such as tourism entrepreneurs in the Achterhoek region. It is crucial that the local community embraces what we develop, feeling ownership and the ability to further the project. We see great examples in the spin-offs from, for example, story-based routes. Entrepreneurs create food and beverage concepts aligned with the stories, like Black Kate beer and Black Kate pancakes, while municipalities facilitate local events for both visitors and residents, like the Gang of the White Feather open-air theatre show.

Social tapestry

Weaving resilience from
diverse threads

Jörn Fricke



Jörn Fricke is professor of Leisure in a Social Context at Breda University of Applied Sciences.

We all have an innate desire to lead lives that are rich with meaning and fulfilment. As Eagleton (2007) beautifully puts it, the essence of life is its meaning, suggesting that our lives gain significance through their inherent purpose. Cottingham (2003) echoes this sentiment, describing a meaningful life as one filled with genuinely worthwhile activities that foster a sense of flourishing. Often, we think of leisure as simply a break from our busy schedules - to relax and unwind. But leisure can and should be so much more than that. It can play a crucial role in shaping our experiences and overall well-being. This article explores the concept of 'meaningful leisure' diving into various facets and examining how leisure impacts resilience and diversity within specific contexts. The aim of this article is to provide an understanding of how leisure activities can promote personal growth, social cohesion, and overall well-being.

Defining meaningful leisure

Meaningful leisure refers to activities that provide individuals with a sense of purpose, fulfilment, and intrinsic satisfaction. Unlike casual or passive leisure, meaningful leisure involves active engagement and often aligns with personal values and goals. It is characterised by experiences that contribute to one's sense of identity, community, and life satisfaction.

The concept of meaningful leisure is rooted in various theoretical perspectives, particularly the discussions in the field of psychology. According to Bastiaansen and Duerden (2024), meaningful experiences in leisure are those that lead to personal insights and connect with core sources of meaning in life, such as social connections, goal fulfilment, personal growth, and contribution to others. These experiences can even potentially reach beyond being simply memorable to become transformative, leading to long-lasting changes in attitudes, beliefs, or behaviours.

Resilience through leisure

Resilience, the ability to adapt and thrive in the face of adversity, is closely linked to meaningful leisure. Engaging in leisure activities that are personally significant can enhance resilience by providing individuals with coping mechanisms, emotional support, and opportunities for self-expression. For instance, participating in community-based leisure activities can help in building social support networks, which are crucial for resilience.

One of the aims of the new BUas professorship in Leisure in a Social Context is to highlight the role of leisure in building resilience. Activities that promote social interaction, physical activity, and creative expression can help individuals manage stress, recover from setbacks, and maintain a positive outlook on life. These activities provide a sense of normalcy and continuity, which are essential for psychological resilience.

Diversity in leisure

Diversity in leisure refers to the inclusion of various cultural, social, and individual perspectives in leisure activities. It emphasises the importance of creating inclusive leisure

environments that cater to diverse populations. Diversity in leisure not only enriches the experiences of individuals but also promotes social cohesion and mutual understanding.

In addition to the topic of resilience, the professorship will underscore the significance of diversity in leisure, advocating for leisure practices that respect and celebrate cultural differences. Inclusive leisure activities can bridge social divides, reduce prejudices, and help to build a sense of belonging among participants from different backgrounds.

Practical applications

To translate the theoretical concepts of meaningful leisure into practice, leisure scientists and practitioners can adopt several strategies:

1. Personalisation of leisure activities

Personalisation involves tailoring leisure activities to align with individual interests, values, and

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By engaging in activities that promote social connections, individuals experience greater purpose and fulfilment.

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Community gardening is a prime example of meaningful leisure, blending physical activity, social interaction, and environmental stewardship.

goals. This approach recognises that leisure is not one-size-fits-all; what fulfils one person may not satisfy another. By understanding personal preferences, practitioners can create more engaging experiences.

Practitioners may employ assessments and interviews to gather information about participants' preferences, hobbies, and aspirations. For example, if an assessment reveals a participant values environmental conservation, a practitioner might suggest community gardening or nature hikes incorporating environmental stewardship.

Interviews provide deeper insights into participants' motivations through open-ended questions and active listening. This allows for the creation of experiences that are not only enjoyable but also meaningful and aligned with personal growth. Personalisation ensures individuals engage in activities that reflect their interests and values, leading to greater satisfaction and fulfilment.

2. Promoting social connections

Meaningful leisure can facilitate social bonds and emotional support through group activities and community-based programmes. These connections are essential for building resilience and creating enriching experiences.

Group activities, such as team sports, fitness classes, or collaborative art projects, enable participants to interact and work towards common goals. These shared experiences build trust, camaraderie, and belonging. A community sports league, for instance, promotes both physical fitness and social interaction, creating a supportive peer network.

Community-based programmes like neighbourhood clean-ups, cultural festivals, or volunteer initiatives bring people together for a common cause. These programmes link to the development of community pride and collective responsibility, enhancing social cohesion. Participants often form lasting friendships and support networks crucial for emotional well-being and resilience.

By engaging in activities that promote social connections, individuals experience greater purpose and fulfilment. These connections provide emotional support during challenges and contribute to overall mental health. Practitioners play a vital role in designing inclusive, accessible activities that create a more connected, resilient society.

3. Encouraging reflective practices

Reflective practices like journaling, group discussions, and personal contemplation help individuals derive deeper meaning from leisure activities. These practices help develop self-awareness and connect experiences to broader life themes and personal growth.

Journaling allows individuals to document thoughts, feelings, and insights gained during leisure activities. By regularly writing about experiences, participants can identify patterns, recognise achievements, and articulate personal goals, enhancing understanding of how leisure contributes to their well-being.

Group discussions add a social dimension to reflection, enabling participants to share experiences and perspectives. These conversations can lead to new insights, mutual support, and community building. Discussing leisure experiences in groups encourages consideration of different viewpoints and deepens understanding.

Personal contemplation, such as meditation or quiet reflection, helps process experiences internally. This practice connects leisure activities to values, aspirations, and life purpose, providing clarity and informing decisions about leisure pursuits.

Incorporating reflective practices ensures that individuals not only enjoy their free time but also engage in meaningful self-discovery and growth, making leisure experiences more impactful and transformative.

4. The importance of inclusiveness

Inclusive leisure programmes accommodate diverse cultural and social backgrounds, promoting equity and mutual respect. These activities ensure everyone feels welcomed and valued regardless of their background.

Practitioners must be mindful of cultural sensitivities and create environments where all participants can engage comfortably. This involves understanding and respecting cultural norms, values, and traditions of different groups. Offering activities that reflect diverse cultural practices makes participants feel seen and appreciated.

Creating inclusive programmes also means addressing participation barriers, such as providing language support for non-native speakers, ensuring accessibility for individuals with disabilities, and offering activities at different times to accommodate various schedules.

Building inclusiveness requires ongoing dialogue and feedback from participants. Practitioners should actively seek input from diverse groups to better understand their needs and preferences. This collaborative approach ensures programmes remain relevant and responsive to the community's evolving dynamics.

Promoting inclusivity not only enriches individual experiences but also strengthens community bonds, helping build a more inclusive society.

5. Integrating technology

Incorporating technology enhances leisure experiences by creating new avenues for engagement and personalisation. Virtual reality (VR), for instance, creates immersive experiences that transport individuals to different environments, allowing them to explore new worlds and engage in interactive activities.

VR can simulate outdoor adventures, historical tours, or artistic performances, providing a sense of presence traditional leisure activities may not offer. A VR hiking experience allows individuals to traverse scenic landscapes from home, making leisure accessible to those with physical limitations while offering unique, enriching experiences.

Technology also facilitates personalised leisure through data-driven insights. Wearable devices and mobile apps can track individual preferences, activity levels, and health metrics, enabling practitioners to design tailored programmes that align with participants' needs and goals. For example, a fitness app can recommend personalised workout routines based on a user's activity history and fitness objectives.

By integrating technology, practitioners create more engaging, personalised, and meaningful experiences that are accessible to wider audiences, promoting inclusivity and well-being.

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Virtual adventures not only satisfy the desire to explore but also serve as educational resources, bringing to life the geography and cultures of various locations.



Examples of meaningful leisure

Community gardening programmes

Community gardening programmes are a prime example of meaningful leisure, blending physical activity, social interaction, and environmental stewardship. Participants engage in gardening activities that not only promote well-being but also provide a sense of accomplishment and foster community ties. These programmes enhance resilience by offering a supportive network and a constructive outlet for stress.

Cultural festivals

Cultural festivals celebrate diversity and offer opportunities for meaningful leisure through the exploration of various cultural traditions. These events bring together individuals from different backgrounds, promoting mutual understanding and social cohesion. Participants experience a sense of belonging and pride in their cultural heritage, which contributes significantly to their overall well-being.

Intergenerational storytelling workshops

Storytelling workshops create space for people of all ages to share personal experiences and cultural narratives. Older participants often contribute traditions, memories, and life lessons, while younger voices bring new perspectives and questions that enrich the exchange. The dialogue that emerges helps build meaningful relationships across generations, supports the preservation of cultural heritage, and encourages mutual understanding and respect. By recording these stories - whether through writing, audio, or digital media - participants produce valuable resources that reinforce community identity. The process also strengthens communication skills and emotional insight. Designed with flexibility in mind, these workshops can be tailored to accommodate a wide range of abilities and language backgrounds.

Adaptive sports programmes

Adaptive sports programmes rework traditional athletic activities to ensure that individuals with diverse physical and cognitive abilities can take part, regardless of

disability. Examples include wheelchair basketball, seated volleyball, and goalball - a sport designed for athletes with visual impairments. These programmes support physical well-being while also helping participants build confidence, develop problem-solving skills, and connect with others in a welcoming environment. By emphasising inclusion and ability, adaptive sports challenge common misconceptions about disability and encourage participants to overcome challenges and take pride in their accomplishments.

Virtual reality tools

Virtual reality tools offer another innovative example of meaningful leisure. VR technology can create immersive experiences that transport individuals to different environments, allowing them to explore new worlds and engage in interactive activities. For instance, VR travel experiences can simulate walking through distant cities, climbing famous mountains, or diving into underwater reefs. These virtual adventures not only satisfy the desire to explore but also serve as educational resources, bringing to life the geography and cultures of various locations. By tapping into the potential of VR, participants can enjoy meaningful leisure that is both engaging and accessible, regardless of physical limitations or geographic constraints.

Digital storytelling and media creation collectives

These collectives offer training, tools, and support to help marginalised communities produce their own media - such as podcasts, short films, photography exhibits, and blogs. By taking ownership of their narratives, participants not only learn valuable technical skills but also engage with issues that matter deeply to them. Designed with accessibility in mind, these projects support a wide range of abilities and encourage collaboration through varied roles. The creative process promotes self-confidence, sharpens critical thinking, and strengthens a sense of personal and collective agency. In addition to offering fulfilling creative outlets, the content produced contributes to greater visibility and representation of diverse voices in the cultural mainstream.

Challenges and considerations

While the benefits of meaningful leisure are well-documented, the professorship in Leisure in a Social Context addresses several challenges to maximise its impact:

- 1. Accessibility:** Ensuring that leisure activities are accessible to all individuals, regardless of socio-economic status, physical ability, or geographic location, is crucial. Researchers and practitioners must work together to remove barriers and create inclusive opportunities for participation.
- 2. Sustainability:** Designing leisure programmes that are sustainable and can be maintained in the long term is essential. This includes securing funding, training staff, and developing community support.
- 3. Evaluation:** Implementing effective evaluation methods to assess the impact of leisure activities on participants' well-being and resilience is necessary. Continuous feedback and improvement can help refine programmes and ensure they meet the needs of diverse populations.
- 4. Cultural sensitivity:** Practitioners must be culturally sensitive and aware of the diverse backgrounds of participants. This involves understanding cultural norms, values, and traditions and incorporating them into leisure activities.

Conclusion

Meaningful leisure is a powerful tool for enhancing well-being, to help build resilience, and promote diversity. By understanding its theoretical foundations and practical applications, leisure scientists and practitioners can design and implement programmes that provide individuals with fulfilling and transformative experiences. The research and development agenda of the professorship in Leisure in a Social Context at BUas Academy for Leisure & Events strives to explore the potential of leisure in such a way, and we see it as essential to prioritise inclusivity, accessibility, and sustainability to ensure that everyone can benefit from the profound impacts of leisure activities.

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Meaningful leisure is a powerful tool for enhancing well-being, to help build resilience, and promote diversity.



Bridging heritage and innovation

The role of digital transformation in cultural tourism

Jessika Weber



Jessika Weber is professor of Digital Transformation in Cultural Tourism at Breda University of Applied Sciences.

Embracing Digital Transformation in Cultural Tourism shapes our identity, unites communities, and carries the weight of history. It is both a reflection of our past and a foundation for our future. The professorship in Digital Transformation in Cultural Tourism at BUas stands at the crossroads of cultural heritage and digital innovation, aiming to make history tangible, relevant, and engaging in the modern world.

As a research group, our role aligns closely with BUas' ambition of creating meaningful experiences and having a lasting impact on society. By integrating technology into cultural tourism, we strive to preserve heritage while making it more accessible and interactive. One of our early projects, the European Cultural Heritage Route of St. Martin, exemplifies this vision. In collaboration with bachelor's students of AI & Data Science, Tourism, and Games, we have used digital storytelling and location-based gaming to breathe life into shared European values, ensuring cultural heritage is not just preserved but actively experienced.

Challenges and opportunities in a changing landscape

However, this journey is not without challenges. One pressing concern is the diminishing financial support for cultural institutions across Europe, threatening the preservation and dissemination of heritage. Reduced budgets for cultural heritage institutes and the cultural sites pose significant risks to the cultural sector. Additionally, the increasing politicization of culture adds complexity to heritage management. Museums and historical sites are no longer neutral spaces; they have become arenas for ideological contestation, raising questions about representation, inclusivity, and authenticity.

Yet, within these challenges lie opportunities.

The rapid advancement of digital tools - such as AI, VR, and 3D modelling - presents new ways to engage with heritage. The shift towards digital cultural education and immersive storytelling opens up possibilities to reach broader audiences and foster deeper cultural connections. Our research explores these avenues, ensuring that technology enhances, rather than replaces, authentic cultural experiences. Our research focus is threefold and addresses digital transformation in the context of cultural tourism on different levels:

Step 1: Empowering cultural engagement through digital literacy - equipping people with the skills to navigate and interpret digital experiences.

Step 2: Fostering cultural understanding through digital transformation - using technology to break down barriers rather than create them.

Step 3: Tackling societal challenges with technology - ensuring that digital innovation addresses real-world issues rather than exacerbating them.

Shaping the future for students and stakeholders

As educators, it is our responsibility to equip students with the competencies needed to navigate this evolving landscape. Future tourism and cultural professionals must develop skills in digital literacy, cultural interpretation, and responsible technology applications. By fostering critical thinking and interdisciplinary collaboration, we prepare students to bridge the gap between technology and cultural heritage responsibly.

Moreover, our research has implications beyond academia. The stakeholders we engage with - heritage organizations, policymakers, and industry professionals - must also adapt to these shifts. Projects like Pantour, Next Routes

Future tourism and cultural professionals must develop skills in digital literacy, cultural interpretation, and responsible technology applications.

and i-Demo address reskilling and upskilling needs of the sector, aiming at improving digital and creative competencies and making them fit for a digital transition in leisure and tourism. Strengthening partnerships with technology providers, cultural institutions, and digital entrepreneurs is essential to ensure sustainable and inclusive cultural tourism experiences.

A commitment to a responsible digital future

At the heart of our professorship is a commitment to balance technological progress with cultural integrity. By championing responsible digitalization, we aim to transform cultural heritage into a dynamic, interactive, and accessible domain that benefits both current and future generations. As we navigate this transformative era, the question remains: How can we ensure that technology serves culture rather than dictates it? Through continued research, collaboration, and education, we seek to find the answers - one digital experience at a time.

Professorship in Events and Placemaking

Events, leisure, and the social construction of place

Greg Richards
Ilja Simons
Esther Peperkamp



Greg Richards is professor of Events and Placemaking at Breda University of Applied Sciences. Ilja Simons and Esther Peperkamp are lecturers and researchers at Academy for Leisure & Events and co-chairs of the professorship in Events and Placemaking.

The professorship in Events and Placemaking explores events and places as dynamic settings for leisure practices, in which communities, identities, and meanings are continuously negotiated and constructed. We view events and places as meeting grounds: environments where like-minded individuals come together through shared rituals and communal activities, fostering a sense of community and contributing to social cohesion. At the same time, events and places also enable encounters between people from diverse cultural backgrounds and perspectives. By examining these processes in the context of both local and global networks, the professorship generates insights into the different types of value created through and within these spaces.

Meaningful experiences and societal impacts

Events and leisure activities play an important role in how places are experienced, understood, and valued. Within this professorship, we examine how leisure practices - ranging from festivals to everyday activities - generate meaningful experiences and produce societal impacts.

Eventful cities

A central theme throughout our work is the concept of Eventful Cities (Richards & Palmer, 2012), a framework for understanding how events

create value
for urban environments.

More than temporary spectacles, events can act as catalysts for transformation, building local identity, encouraging civic pride, and reshaping the narrative of a place.

An example is our study of the *Zandvoort Grand Prix*, in collaboration with the professorship in Social Impacts of Tourism (Zegers et al., 2022). Building on this work, we are now conducting a qualitative study with one of our MSc students, exploring how the event acts as both a unifier and a polariser, revealing the complex layers of social impact.

In Curaçao, we collaborated with local researchers to investigate how the *Kaya Kaya festival* acted as a catalyst for change in a stigmatised neighbourhood (Simons, 2023). *Kaya* means street in Papiamentu, and through a mix of community engagement and physical interventions like murals, the festival helped shift perceptions and reclaim public space - challenging negative stereotypes and allowing new narratives to emerge. This theme connects closely to our ongoing work with *Blind Walls Gallery* in Breda (Brito et al., 2024), where we continue to study the participatory process of creating murals and explore how the stories behind the murals help newcomers feel at home in the city. We also continue to explore how large-scale cultural celebrations shape social bonds. Our research on Carnival in the Netherlands and Brazil (Richards & Marques, 2022) examines the social bonds created by the event in both countries. Recently, we expanded this project to Aruba, where one of our MSc students is conducting a qualitative study into the interactions between residents and tourists during Carnival.

Street culture is another recurring theme, which Peter van der Aalst (2024) is examining in his Professional Doctorate project on the role



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Events and leisure
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of street culture and sports in urban placemaking in Brabant. Increasingly, local authorities are using street culture to make places more attractive to young people and as a stimulus for wider placemaking interventions.

Everyday leisure and social value

Beyond festivals and urban culture, it is also important to look at the quieter, everyday side of leisure. In her recent project, Esther Peperkamp (2024) explored how a variety of repetitive leisure practices, such as hobby meetings and events contribute to social interaction and community building. The study looked closely at the interplay of leisure, social encounters, and the spaces in which these activities unfold and how they support - or sometimes fail to support - social cohesion.

Digitalisation and hybrid event formats

As leisure moves into new spaces, our work has also turned to the digital realm. The influence of digitalisation and virtual spaces on business events is explored through the concept of

'phygital reality' presented in Design Futures scenarios related to hybrid event formats (Bevolo & Amati, 2024) developed with Design Research methodologies and then further updated and validated by Gen-AI automated foresight.

Leisure and events as forces of connection and division

Our professorship also addresses global challenges such as polarisation, disconnection, and the commodification of leisure, all of which have a significant impact on communities and places. Our research aims to deepen understanding of how events can serve as unifying forces, and how the rituals and practices around them can contribute to social cohesion and positive change. However, we also examine how the same mechanisms can lead to exclusion, division, and inequality.

Taking a critical approach, we investigate the role of events in social sustainability, aligning our work with the Sustainable Development Goals. We aim to play a key role in these discussions, encouraging debate and offering new perspectives. Our goal is to shift the conversation beyond viewing places, leisure, and events solely as commercial entities that need to be managed, and instead recognise them as socially and culturally meaningful contexts.

This effort includes organising an expert panel on 'Leisure for Liveable and Lovable Places' during the WLO Congress, featuring experts from Rotterdam, Breda, Barcelona, and Edinburgh. The panel will explore how leisure and events can act as catalysts for creating liveable and lovable places by changing and enhancing the uses, perceptions, and narratives of places.

This focus has implications for our research

projects; we aim to focus on projects that are both socially and culturally meaningful, contributing academic and practical knowledge to create impactful leisure experiences, places, and events.

Encouraging critical thinking and building strong networks

We feel it is important to educate students to take a critical approach to places and events. We encourage students to consider the broader context, and by questioning the possibilities, consequences, and dilemmas that arise, students are guided to explore how events and placemaking practices are embedded within larger social, cultural, and historical frameworks. We encourage students to view events not just as isolated occurrences but as stages for interaction and meaning-making that contribute to people's everyday lives. Our goal is to equip them with the knowledge and skills to navigate these contexts and design meaningful interventions that resonate with the communities they engage with.

This approach also has implications for our network. We collaborate with many different stakeholders, from academic researchers to event and placemaking practitioners, and cultural and social actors. We maintain strong connections with scholars in critical events studies, such as the ATLAS SIG Events and the newly established WLO SIG Critical Events Studies. We are also actively involved in several placemaking networks, including Placemaking Europe and KreativEU. While we continue to work with commercial partners, our primary focus is on academic and community-driven collaborations with a critical perspective as our guiding principle.

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Photography

- DGP 2024 - Fotostudio Zandvoort (page 22 right)
- Blind Walls Gallery - Edwin Wiekens – (page 23)

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As leisure moves into new spaces, our work has also turned to the digital realm.

Shaping AI the European way

BUas leads ethical and sustainable innovation in KreativEU

Carlos Santos
& Frans Melissen



Carlos Santos is transversal professor of AI and Data Science. Frans Melissen is transversal professor of Sustainability Transitions. Both lead the KreativEU project on behalf of Breda University of Applied Sciences together with their teams of researchers.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is changing the world around us at a breathtaking pace. From health care to climate modelling, from traffic systems to cultural preservation, AI is becoming a core component of how societies tackle complex challenges. But this digital revolution brings not only opportunities; it also demands reflection, responsibility, and above all, direction. What values guide the design of AI? Who benefits from its deployment? And how can we ensure that AI contributes to a more sustainable and inclusive future? These questions are at the heart of one of the core elements of an exciting new European collaboration: KreativEU. By heading this investigation dedicated to Ethical-by-Design and Sustainable-by-Design AI, BUas places itself in the European spotlight as a front-runner in value-driven technological innovation.

KreativEU: where culture, creativity, and knowledge meet

KreativEU is a European University alliance bringing together eleven higher education institutions from across the continent. Its main focus is on cultural heritage: understanding, preserving, and reimagining Europe's diverse cultural landscapes through education, research, and innovation. By placing cultural heritage at

the centre of its activities, KreativEU aims to highlight its importance not only for historical awareness but also as a foundation for addressing contemporary challenges and fostering a shared European identity. Its mission is to form a virtual university where culture, heritage, identity, and creativity are not only studied but activated as driving forces for education, research, and innovation. At its core, KreativEU believes that Europe's rich diversity and shared cultural history are vital resources in navigating today's global challenges.

The alliance is committed to deep, long-term cooperation. It envisions a future where universities work seamlessly across borders, where students and academics move easily between institutions, and where joint projects lead to real, social and environmental impact. KreativEU is about more than just exchanging knowledge; it is about co-creating a sustainable and inclusive Europe.

Enter AI: technology with a cultural conscience

In this ambitious European effort, Artificial Intelligence occupies a central space. AI is a gamechanger, but to ensure it serves the public good, its development must be guided by ethics and sustainability. Leading this part of the project reflects BUas' deep commitment to AI and sustainability, two of its strategic priorities. By integrating them into the framework of KreativEU, it contributes to shaping technology adoption in a way that reflects European values.

The BUas-led study aims to build a vibrant network of students, researchers, entrepreneurs, regional actors, and civil society organisations. This network will focus on developing AI systems that do not just work well technically, but that are also ethical and sustainable by design. The ultimate goal is to realise AI solutions that help preserve cultural



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AI is a gamechanger, but to ensure it serves the public good, its development must be guided by ethics and sustainability.

heritage, promote social inclusion, and support environmental sustainability.

AI for cultural and ecological stewardship

One of the most intriguing aspects of the study is its focus on the interplay between AI, sustainability, and cultural heritage. While these may seem like separate domains, they are deeply interconnected. For example, AI can help preserve intangible cultural heritage through digital storytelling, language preservation, and even by simulating ancient rituals or crafts in immersive digital formats. Tangible heritage, like historic buildings or artifacts, can be digitally reconstructed using AI-based imaging and 3D modelling, making them accessible to broader audiences. Simultaneously, AI is a powerful tool in environmental management. It can optimise energy use, model ecosystem regeneration, and support decision-making in urban planning or conservation efforts. But all of this only becomes meaningful if AI is developed with care for its broader impact.



The ultimate goal is to realise AI solutions that help preserve cultural heritage, promote social inclusion, and support environmental sustainability.

From summer schools to think tank

To bring these ambitions to life, a BUAs-led team within KreativEU will organise a series of summer schools and hackathons. By 2028, at least 300 participants - students, educators, professionals, and civil society actors - will have taken part in these hands-on, challenge-based learning events. The aim is not only to develop prototypes and new ideas but also to create a community that understands what ethical and sustainable AI truly means.

From these events, the project expects to generate a minimum of 12 early-stage AI systems and four concrete proposals for externally funded projects. These will serve as demonstrators for how AI can be harnessed to benefit both cultural heritage and sustainability goals.

A knowledge creation and design team will be established to support these efforts. Over time, this group will evolve into a permanent think tank. The think tank will be dedicated to supporting future innovations and shaping the theoretical and practical understanding of ethical-by-design and sustainable-by-design AI from a European perspective.



What does ethical-by-design really mean?

While the term 'ethical AI' is widely used, its meaning is often vague. This initiative seeks to change that by creating clarity. What does it mean for an AI system to be ethical? How can those values be embedded not just in outcomes, but in the very design process itself? These are not easy questions. It is necessary to consider the morality behind AI. What do we consider fair, just, and safe? And who gets to decide that? European values provide a powerful foundation, but translating those values into algorithms and architectures is a serious challenge.

The project will explore both current and emerging ethical dilemmas. As AI becomes more capable, questions of bias, transparency, surveillance, and autonomy will only grow in importance. This study will create educational resources, research insights, and policy recommendations to help navigate this complex terrain.

Sustainable-by-design: beyond efficiency

When people hear 'sustainable AI', they often think of energy efficiency. And while that is important, this project takes a much broader view. It identifies three key dimensions of sustainability impact:

- **Environmental impact:** This includes the energy and water consumption for training and using AI models, the rare earth elements needed for hardware, and the waste generated by technological infrastructure.

- **Social impact:** AI can disrupt job markets, exacerbate inequality, or deepen digital divides, and even alter the ways we connect and relate to one another. Sustainable AI must consider who benefits and who might be left behind.
- **Indirect systemic impact:** AI has the potential to influence how people think and act. If designed with care, it can promote sustainable behaviours and values. If not, it might reinforce outdated or reductionist world views that hinder real progress.

By unpacking these layers, the project aims to build a holistic understanding of what sustainability means in an AI context. The resulting insights will help developers, policymakers, and educators work towards AI that not only performs well but also contributes meaningfully to a better world.

Why Europe? Why now?

The urgency of this work cannot be overstated. As AI continues to develop rapidly, there is a real risk that technological design will be dominated by short-term commercial interests or by geopolitical powers whose values may not align with those of European societies. Europe has a unique opportunity to chart a different course - one rooted in democracy, inclusion, cultural richness, and long-term thinking. KreativEU and particularly the BUAs-led study on AI is a powerful vehicle for that ambition.

By drawing on the strengths of diverse institutions, involving a wide range of stakeholders, and focusing on real-world challenges, this project demonstrates what it means to innovate not just with intelligence, but with wisdom.

A future worth building

At a time when technological disruption is reshaping every aspect of our lives, the role of universities is more important than ever. BUAs, through its involvement and role in KreativEU, is showing how applied research, creativity, and collaboration can produce answers to some of the most pressing questions of our time.

This is not just a research project. It is an invitation - to students, scholars, professionals, and citizens across Europe - to help build AI systems that are worthy of our trust and aligned with our deepest values. AI, after all, is not just about machines. It is about people. And the future we choose to create together.

Illustration

- Created by AI (page 25 below)



Creative and Entertainment Games

Taking entertainment video games seriously

Mata Haggis-Burridge

Mata Haggis-Burridge is professor of Creative & Entertainment Games at the Academy for AI, Games & Media at Breda University of Applied Sciences.

The Creative and Entertainment Games professorship is about creating knowledge and insights related to commercial and artistic video games. Some might see these as trivial, but "53% of Europeans enjoy playing video games, including 46.7% of women and girls" and the average player age is 32 (Ipsos.com, 2024). This is not a niche hobby, and it deserves to be taken seriously.

Content, creation, context

Our approach is based on three angles: *the content* (what is in the games), *the creation* (the tools and processes of game creation, team composition, and dynamics), and *the cultural context* (how games interact with players, society, and culture). Across Europe, many professorships study serious and applied games, i.e. games focusing primarily on education or training, but entertainment video games are a new expressive and under-researched medium. They combine creativity and advanced software engineering and so, at BUAs, my team and I contribute to building the foundations of academia for and with this growing creative industry.

Our team, including Cradle (<https://cradle.buas.nl/>), work on amazing projects, for example: *Bound To The Miraculous* was a collaboration with an artist to digitally recreate a real voyage that ended in disaster, using live geodata to create an endless artistic piece; *GreeningGames* created new insights into sustainability and video game development; *PANEURAMA* is conducting EU-wide surveys to improve the alignment between bachelor's and master's education and industry expectations in the fields of VFX, animation, and games; and *GAMEHEARTS* examines how games connect with traditional cultural sectors such as museums, sports, and music. Our contribution

to these projects is creating original games to bring the research to life.

A mirror to society

Video games are part of the cultural landscape, and, like all culture, they hold up a mirror to society. To an outsider, they might seem preoccupied with war and violence, and these themes are indeed vividly represented in many big titles, but it is hard to say this is not also part of society: war is always with us, from the Cold War through various Middle East conflicts and to today's violence in Ukraine, Sudan, the DRC, and more. Despite strenuous well-funded efforts attempting to prove that video games cause violent behaviour, no causal link has been found, and games have many peaceful, wholesome, and calming genres too.

Another hot topic for video games is equity, diversity, and inclusion. Historically, video games have been a male-dominated entertainment medium, but industry awareness of our players' diversity has grown. As part of this professorship, we are working to deliver quantitative data regarding representation in games, so the industry can objectively see its collective work and make informed choices. We will soon publish the first studies from this data.

Sustainability and AI

Like all industries, two big topics are sustainability and the impact of advancing AI. Video games have a complex connection with these: gaming devices need rare metals and sit inside plastic casings. They run on electricity - which can be sustainably produced - but improving video game graphics often means increasing energy consumption. The picture seems bleak.

Then again, games can inspire ecological actions, and innovations in gaming devices have pushed forwards cutting-edge hardware developments, leading to massively reduced

energy draws for complex calculations, including those needed for AI breakthroughs. While generative AI currently has debatable value for game developers - and major ethical questions too - genAI tools may help creators express themselves more easily in the future. Beyond genAI, other machine learning approaches have huge potential for providing intelligent assistance. For games, there is a push-and-pull connection to sustainability and AI, and this should not be painted in black and white.

Connection with education, industry, and society runs throughout our research. We develop teaching materials on cutting-edge topics like virtual production, and document challenges for students transitioning to the workplace. Our work on social equity should give students insights for enhancing well-being in European society. Consultancy is available on topics like game narratives and accessibility. Our projects also provide internship positions and input for student's own research, and these are just a few of the ways we connect our R&D with student journeys at BUAs.

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Our R&D gives insights for educators and students into how games can improve the world.

Transitioning tourism mobility

Balancing emissions and sustainability

Nina Nesterova



Nina Nesterova is professor of Sustainable Development in Tourism and Transport at Breda University of Applied Sciences.

The tourism industry has long been a driver of economic growth and cultural exchange. However, it is also one of the fastest-growing contributors to global carbon emissions. As the climate crisis reaches existential tipping points, the tourism sector continues to lag behind in its transition towards sustainability. Despite growing awareness, no country has successfully reduced its tourism-related emissions, raising urgent questions about how the industry can evolve while staying within planetary boundaries. Traditionally, sustainable tourism has been framed through a destination-focused lens, emphasising eco-friendly accommodation and local activities while largely ignoring the role of mobility. But the increasing travel distances and reliance on high-carbon transport - particularly aviation and private cars - are the real drivers of the sector's growing emissions. While road and rail transport offer viable decarbonisation pathways, aviation remains one of the hardest sectors to transition to low-carbon alternatives. Long-haul travel has an outsized impact: just 20% of all tourism trips contribute to 80% of the sector's emissions.

This raises critical questions about the future of tourism. If the sector is to become truly sustainable, there is a need to fundamentally rethink how and where people go while travelling on holidays.

Centre for Sustainable Tourism and Transport (CSTT)

CSST has a clear ambition to contribute to this

transition, working to reduce the climate footprint of tourism and leisure mobility. Our mission is to create meaningful change through research, consultancy, and education, supporting public authorities, industries, and society in embracing sustainable tourism practices. At the heart of our strategy is a vision for a just tourism mobility system - one that stays within planetary and societal boundaries while ensuring the economic sustainability of the sector. To achieve this, CSTT has developed a research programme organised in three main areas:

1. Reimagining tourism mobility

The current global tourism system relies heavily on aviation and car-based transport, making it unsustainable in the long run. Can we reimagine currently predominant travel habits and explore alternative mobility futures that serve society while reducing emissions? CSTT is working to help the industry move towards more localised, low-carbon tourism models that not only benefit the environment but also enhance well-being.

2. Navigating the transition

The shift towards sustainable tourism mobility is not just a technical challenge - it is a deeply political and social one. Governments, businesses, and tourists often have conflicting interests, which slows down necessary progress. What are the current paradoxes and barriers slowing down the transition? CSTT investigates these barriers and works on the strategies and tools to help industry overcome them, navigating productively through the transition.

3. Transforming tourism mobility in practice

To accelerate the transition to sustainable tourism, CSTT works on the deployment of concrete interventions, methodologies and tools. For example, we are one of the lead research partners within the INTERREG North-West MONA project (Modal shift, routing and nudging solutions in nature areas for

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Can we reimagine currently predominant travel habits and explore alternative mobility futures that serve society while reducing emissions?

sustainable tourism), where we assist European nature areas in the development of practical approaches encouraging tourists to shift from car to sustainable travel modes travelling to nature parks. Another example is an ongoing CELTH project: Destination RiskScan (Innovation for Tourism Destinations in a Warming World), where together with European partners we are developing an online climate risk scan to help destinations identify their risk profile and improve destination-level climate risk strategies. Additionally, through the European Sustainable Tourism Mobility Forum, which we organise every year, we aim to bring together tourism and transport stakeholders to foster productive dialogue and accelerate the transition towards sustainable tourism mobility.

In this way, CSTT's research and initiatives aim to pave the way for a sustainable transition in tourism mobility, looking towards a future where tourism enriches people's lives without costing the planet.

Digital Media Concepts

Designing the media of tomorrow

Marnix van Gisbergen



Marnix van Gisbergen is professor of Digital Media Concepts at Breda University of Applied Sciences.

Can you name a medium that has completely disappeared in the last 300 years? This is the question we often begin with in our presentations. It is harder to answer than you might expect, because while new media emerge constantly, old media rarely vanish entirely. Instead, they evolve. This perspective is central to our work in the professorship of Digital Media Concepts (DMC).

Why context matters

At DMC, we explore how new media technologies impact organisations and society. More importantly, we examine how these technologies relate to existing media, and how that context influences their value. We are not just asking, "Does this medium work?" Instead, we are asking: "How is its impact shaped by the context of other media?" For example, Virtual Reality (VR) may be effective for training - but how does it compare to traditional learning tools? What makes it better, or different? How should content be designed for each? That's why our focus combines research and development (R&D), not only creating innovative concepts but testing and refining them through real-world application.

Focus: immersive media and virtual humans

In the past ten years, our primary focus has been on immersive media (VR, AR, XR, Metaverse) and virtual humans and beings. We explore how these technologies influence experience and behaviour across different domains. Why experience? Because in creative sectors like media, entertainment and gaming, experience is often the end goal. But it is also a powerful tool to drive behaviour, whether that

means changing habits, building empathy, or improving skills. Immersive media can create unique experiences, a sense of presence and realism that is difficult to match with traditional media. This unique potential is why we connect our work to the broader BUAs research themes of Digital Realities and Experience Research & Design.

Real projects, real impact

Our professorship is hands-on and project-driven. We have collaborated with major brands and organisations ranging in the creative industries (e.g. Samsung, Sony, VodafoneZiggo, DPG Media, Google, Omroep Brabant, Banijay, PSV, De Effenaar, 4DR Studio, Enversed, and several museums), healthcare industry (Novadic-Kentron, Schola Medica and several hospitals) and societal domain (United Nations, EU).

Here are a few highlights:

- VR and AR apps to help users overcome alcohol addiction or speech anxiety.
- Immersive training tools for safety procedures and emergency protocols.
- AR applications to enhance sports, music, dance, film, and museum experiences.
- Virtual diving simulations promoting sustainable diving experiences.
- Empathy-building VR experiences to support refugee awareness and inclusion.
- Virtual humans to deliver news content tailored to young audiences, train medical professionals in sensitive conversations like delivering bad news or assisting childbirth and support organisational awareness around bias, risk, and even grief.

Looking ahead: a (real) virtual future

The future of digital media is evolving rapidly. AI-powered immersive technologies are becoming increasingly advanced and powerful through quantum computing. Blending with our bodies, brains and senses (cyborgs) it is opening doors to a world that is both exciting and ethically complex. Imagine virtual worlds and digital humans so lifelike that we cannot

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Immersive media can create unique experiences, a sense of presence and realism that is difficult to compare with traditional media.

distinguish them from reality. Imagine having a digital version of yourself or your beloved ones, that lives on after death, already a reality in some parts of the world. Would you want that?

Why this matters to you

With great opportunity comes great responsibility. These technologies offer ways to improve education, inclusion, and sustainability. But they also pose risks around misinformation (deepfakes), desensitisation (violence), and loss of identity. Whether you are a student, teacher, or professional, you will likely work with immersive technologies at some point in your career. That's why we focus on developing practical skills and critical thinking across disciplines like AI, media, ethics, health, tourism, and law. Together, we explore not only what we can create, but why we create it and what kind of digital future we want to shape. The question is no longer if the media change us, but how we want to change the media. So you can also make an informed decision if you want to spend time in a virtual world as a virtual being, now and after death.

Coping with war in Kyiv

The power of live music for survival



Anastasiya Vaganova is a lecturer and researcher of Live Music and Dance Events at Breda University of Applied Sciences.

Kyiv, Ukraine's capital and largest city, has become a symbol of resilience amidst the ongoing war with Russia. Despite relentless bombings and attacks, the city's vibrant entertainment and cultural scene has transformed from a source of mere leisure into an essential pillar for mental survival. Theatres, concert venues, and festivals have become sanctuaries for residents, offering solace, unity, and emotional relief in the face of extreme adversity. This article shows how live music in Kyiv has become essential for mental well-being during the war. Through the voices of organisers, musicians, and attendees, the piece highlights how live music has come to provide a powerful escape in the face of war.

The new role of concerts in wartime Kyiv

Before the Russian invasion, Kyiv was well known for its cultural vibrancy. It boasted the highest number of theatres and concert venues in Ukraine and played host to international superstars like Imagine Dragons, Madonna, and Depeche Mode. The Atlas Weekend Festival, one of the largest music festivals in Eastern Europe that took place in 2021, reinforced Kyiv's status as a global music hub.

Since the war, Kyiv's cultural scene has adapted rapidly. Despite the constant threat of missile attacks, musicians in Kyiv remain determined to perform. For many, the war has shifted the purpose of their craft, turning performances into a form of duty. The ongoing conflict has forced event organisers to make significant adjustments though.

"There are many events happening all over Ukraine every week, including festivals, mainly in the safer areas of the country, which are not close to the frontline. In September 2023, we finally reopened our Atlas venue (from which

the festival got its name) in Kyiv and concerts have been happening there since. Other venues have been operating even earlier. The organisers had to adapt a lot for that to become possible. You must deal with the curfew, which starts at midnight. This means that most events are over by 10 p.m., so people can reach their homes on time. We have been dealing with blackouts as well, meaning most venues had to get a generator and learn to switch to it as soon as the lights went down to continue the event. And, of course, each venue needs to have a shelter nearby and a robust evacuation plan. As soon as the siren starts, the event has to stop, and people need to seek shelter. There are now some venues that are based in a shelter, especially in the frontline cities, where it is the only opportunity to make a relatively safe event, as often, there is not enough time for evacuation because the missiles reach the cities too quickly". (Vlad Yaremchuk, Music Save Ua, booking agent Atlas Weekend, Atlas Venue.)

Events now need to be carefully planned around curfews, missile strikes, and the availability of nearby shelters. Organisers provide shelters next to venues for visitor safety during missile threats. Also, due to curfews, showtimes have been moved earlier. Atlas Weekend, for instance, had to relocate from its traditional venue at the National Expo Center to Blockbuster Mall, which offers a 50,000-m² underground parking lot serving as Ukraine's largest bomb shelter.

"During our preparations, we had to deal with lengthy blackouts due to ongoing Russian attacks on electricity infrastructure. Sometimes, we would have only four hours of electricity spread across the working day, making the process even more difficult than it already was".

Staffing the event was also a challenge

"We only had a few months to organise the whole festival, which also made things difficult. Usually, we would need a year, if not more, to organise everything, but this time, we only had

a few months and had to gather a team. It's been three years since our last festival. A lot of people changed jobs, some left Ukraine, some were part of the military and so we needed to get a lot of new people in, who we had to integrate into our processes on the go". (Vlad Yaremchuk)

Dmitriy Felixov, director of Concert.UA, Ukraine's largest ticketing service, reflects on how these logistical hurdles have affected the industry: "The war has revealed hidden national potential. Additionally, there is a strong demand for Ukrainian theatre which is flourishing. Holding events is important for maintaining mental health. People mostly see attending concerts as a therapy session".

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Despite the constant threat of missile attacks, musicians in Kyiv remain determined to perform.

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Events now need to be carefully planned around curfews, missile strikes, and the availability of nearby shelters.

Music events for charity

Many events have started to incorporate charity functions, allowing attendees to donate to the country. Such was also the case with the Atlas Weekend festival in summer 2024. The festival featured over 50 acts and attracted 60,000 attendees. Though fraught with logistical challenges such as missile threats and curfews, the festival was still able to raise over €2.3 million to support Ukrainian communities affected by the war.

The Caribbean Club, one of Kyiv's most iconic venues, has hosted over 3,000 performances since its transformation into a concert hall in 2013. Even during the war, it continues to organise charity events, raising funds for humanitarian causes. Since the reopening of the Caribbean Club Concert Hall in May 2022, venues across Kyiv have hosted over 400 shows, selling 60,000 tickets and raising over 150,000 euros for charity.

Dennis Adu, a renowned Ukrainian jazz musician, trumpeter, and conductor, has become a symbol of cultural resistance since the start of the war in Ukraine. In addition to his work as a lecturer and band leader, he quickly defined his

civic role in response to the Russian invasion. Alongside other artists, he joined the *Ukrainian Art Front (UAF)*, a collective founded in Lviv in March 2022 to raise funds for the Armed Forces and aid civilians. Through his actions and performances, he transformed his music into a vital tool for resilience and resistance. The Ukrainian Art Front (UAF) project illustrates how music can unite people, raising funds and morale. The unity and humanity witnessed in the early days of the war continue to resonate through these musical endeavours, proving that even in the darkest times, art and community can light the way forward.

Music for mental health

In a city under siege, where air raid sirens are an everyday occurrence, music and other forms of entertainment have become ways to cope with the stress and trauma of war. These events provide a temporary escape from the brutal reality, fostering a sense of community and normalcy. Dmitrii Vasiliev, regular visitor of the Kyiv music concert venue Peppers Club, captures this feeling perfectly: *"Live music creates a space of shared experience, creativity, great mood, and optimism - everything you need to cope with stress"*.

Dennis Adu shared how playing music has helped students cope with the psychological burden of the conflict: *"In July, the admission campaign took place at the R.M. Glier Kyiv Municipal Academy of Music, and in September, we started mixed learning. Everyone understood that it was also necessary to encourage students to work and thus pull them out of the difficult moral state they found themselves in during the hostilities in their cities. Finally, 'offline classes' began to be held, as it was very difficult to study online during the first few months of the war, and most students were not always able to do so. It was felt how everyone missed playing music together, even when conducting orchestra classes with 5 to 6 people, everyone was very happy to be there, play together, and learn something new. The eyes of most students changed at that moment when they entered the rehearsal rooms, and I, along with them, forgot about the horrors happening in the country for 2.5 to 3 hours, and only the 'air raid alert' brought us back to reality. Everyone began to adapt to the conditions in which they had to live. And musicians were no exception"*.



Organising music events serves as a crucial coping mechanism for musicians and promoters. It allows them to channel their stress and anxiety into something positive and impactful. The sense of purpose and community they derive from their work is invaluable, as highlighted by Yaremchuk's gratitude for the support from both within and outside Ukraine. This support not only sustains their efforts but also fosters a profound sense of unity and shared purpose.

Kyiv's concert venues, more than just places for entertainment, have become vital lifelines for the city's residents. These events offer much-needed joy and respite from the relentless war. As a regular visitor to the music venues Caribbean Club and Pepper's club Dimitrii Vasiliev notes, that *"live performances create shared experiences and provide a much-needed escape from daily hardships. For many, attending*



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Many events have started to incorporate charity functions, allowing attendees to donate to the country.

SHARON DEN ADEL

@wtofficial



concerts has become a crucial way to maintain mental health and a sense of unity".

Cultural diplomacy: global support through music

Finally, music has emerged as a powerful unifying force. Concerts and festivals, both local and international, act as platforms for solidarity and cultural diplomacy. Vlad Yaremchuk recounts a significant event during the summer of 2024:

"On 8 July, Monday, the same week the festival was supposed to start, Russia carried out one of the most brutal missile and drone attacks on Kyiv to date. We had to switch to a primarily local line-up since not many international artists were ready to play in Ukraine during the war. We managed to get an international headliner - Sharon den Adel from (the Dutch well-known rock band) Within Temptation. She came to Ukraine earlier that year to shoot a music video and was ready to come again to perform".

Music Saves UA, a humanitarian fundraising initiative, has become a beacon of cultural diplomacy for Ukraine. Spearheaded by the Ukrainian Association of Music Events, it collaborates with international festivals, conferences, and artists to raise both awareness and funds. Since its start on 1 March 2022, the initiative has raised over 630,000 euros, providing urgent humanitarian aid and rebuilding cultural infrastructure.

International artists play a pivotal role in supporting Ukraine's cause. By performing at Ukrainian festivals, they foster global solidarity, acting as cultural ambassadors. Through Dutch festivals like Lowlands and Pinkpop, Music Saves UA raises funds while showcasing Ukrainian talent on the global stage.

The impact of these collaborations extends beyond financial aid. As Yaremchuk emphasises, personal interactions between Ukrainian artists

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Through his actions and performances, he transformed his music into a vital tool for resilience and resistance.

and international audiences have opened eyes to the realities of life in Ukraine. Many people are surprised to learn that despite the war, Ukrainians continue to live, create, and maintain their cultural identity.

The unbreakable spirit of Kyiv's cultural scene

During constant conflict, Kyiv's cultural and entertainment spaces have thus become much more than just places to have fun - they have turned into safe havens where people find comfort, togetherness, and strength. The way the city's artists, event organisers, and audiences turn moments of joy into essential support for mental and emotional health, and humanitarian aid, shows the unbreakable spirit of Ukraine. Art's and music's ability to heal, bring people together, raise awareness and inspire hope has never been clearer than in Kyiv. These performances are crucial for the nation's survival. As the war continues, Kyiv's live music scene remains a symbol of hope and strength. It serves as a reminder that even in the toughest times, people find ways not just to survive but also to live and thrive for a better, peaceful future. Live music shows, in particular, act as a powerful tool that can unite everyone in need and spread this enduring hope.

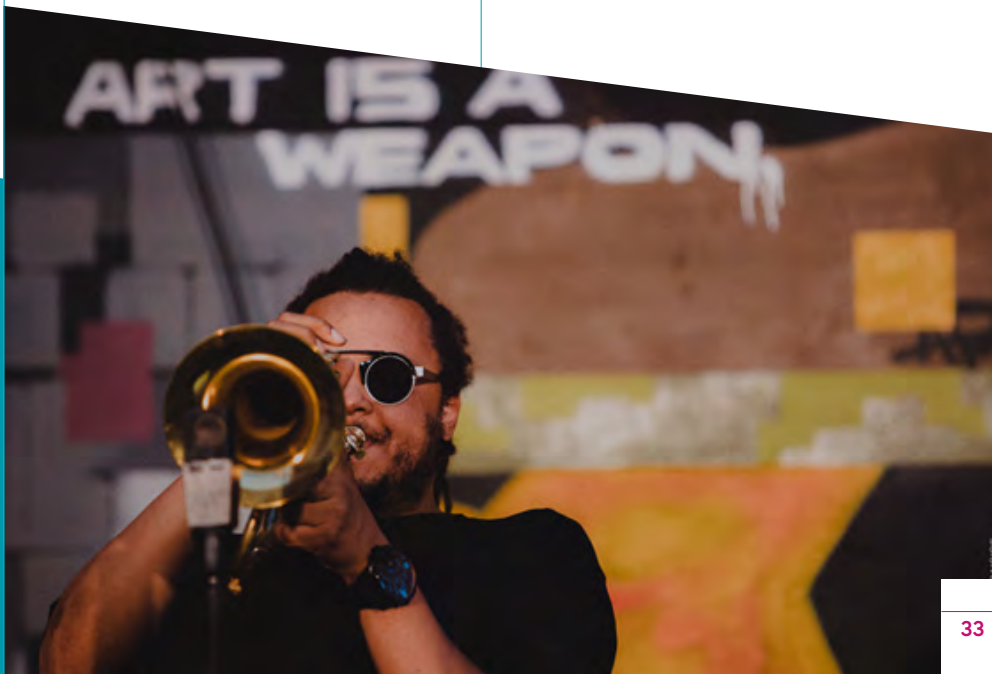
Note: This article was previously published in the journal VT Studies and on NRITmedia.nl.

Photography

- Vasył Stefurak (page 30 below)
- Yuri Gryaznov (pages 29 and 31)

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Holding live music events has become essential for mental well-being during the war.



The case of the Dancing Cats

Story-based routes as catalysts for meaningful experiences for visitors and local communities



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

The province of Brabant (the Netherlands) is renowned for its numerous attractions, its picturesque countryside, and its excellent bicycle infrastructure. VisitBrabant Routebureau aims to enhance the province's recreational offerings through routes based on well-known local stories. Since 2019, the professorship in Storytelling (Breda University of Applied Sciences) and VisitBrabant so far have realised 18 story-based bicycle routes, 12 of which are based on local folk tales. Storytelling is at the core of these routes, because it is a valuable instrument for creating meaningful experiences for visitors. By matching the logic of the storyline with that of the route and the local entrepreneurs, the story-based routes become embedded in the area. When a story derives from the local community, the value of the

route stretches beyond the visitor experience. It can reinforce the community's connection with the story leading to new meaningful experiences. This is the case with the route of The Dancing Cats around the village of Bergeijk.

The power of storytelling in the physical space

Stories can help visitors attach meaning to places, images or objects. An important objective of stories is to entertain or engage people. Storytelling frequently employs a dramatic arc to build suspense, engaging the audience's curiosity about the story's progression. There are various storytelling models for the designing of a dramatic arc, like the five-step model, which consists of the set-up, motoric moment, turning points, climax, and resolution.

Not all storytelling depends on verbal texts. Implicit and environmental storytelling relies on (elements in)

the physical environment to convey stories. Experts in folk culture discuss *lieux de mémoire*, *lieux d'imagination*, and trigger objects that visitors encounter and that help them experience a story. When a story is set in a physical space, visitors navigate through the story in an embodied way, experiencing the storyline as they move from one location to the next.

Local folk tales as a starting point

The countryside of Brabant looks picturesque, but in the old days it could be scary for the local people. Here, they would encounter strange phenomena for which they imagined supernatural explanations. Boulders from the ice age that they found scattered were thought to be witches turned to stone. A ring of mushrooms became a witches' circle, where witches or cats - as their alter egos - had danced at night. A pre-historic burial mound was where those dances had taken place. It became nicknamed the *Cats' Mountain*. Folk tales about dancing cats emerged here and there. They were cautionary tales. When, as a man, you go out into the night by yourself, beware of dancing cats. They will lure you into their circle and make you dance all night, sometimes until you drop dead.

How to create a story-based route

The creation of a route based on folk tales always starts with looking for a specific story (**first step**). We do desk research of literature on folk culture, but also of documents provided by local experts. An important criterion is whether there is 'energy' around a certain story or characters in the local community. In Bergeijk, the *Dancing Cats* tale is somehow known. It has a theatre called *De Kattendans* and a windmill which was claimed to be haunted at night.

The **second step** in creating a story-based route is the exploration of the area by bicycle. Together with a local expert we go in search of points of interest. First of all, we look for *lieux de memoire*. In this case there was a haunted windmill. Furthermore, we saw the Luihuis, a small building opposite the village church. Its bell is chimed at funerals. We also came across



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Storytelling frequently employs a dramatic arc to build suspense, engaging the audience's curiosity about the story's progression.

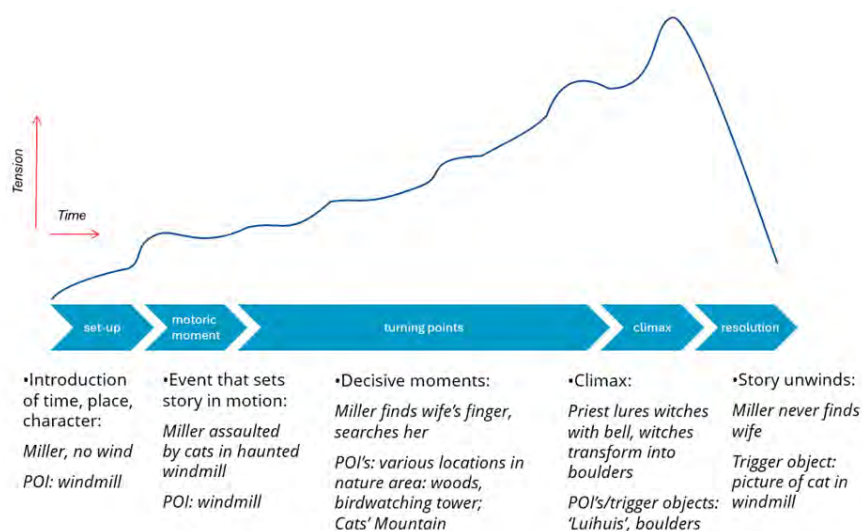


Figure 1

boulders from the ice age as *trigger objects*. With a rough storyline in mind, we looked for *lieux d'imagination*. A burial mound in the middle of the woods could well have been a place where cats would dance. From a birdwatching tower, you might see witches flying. During such an exploration, we take many pictures.

A story-based cycling route is not only about experiencing a story. For it to be successful, practical places are included such as parking places, bicycle rentals, restaurants to stop for coffee or lunch, or shops that sell local products or souvenirs.

In the **third step** we cut out all the pictures and try and match the logic of the storyline with the logic of the route (*points of interest, trigger objects*) along the five-step model (See Figure 1) we typically use for designing experiences.

The **fourth step** in the process of developing the story-based route is a workshop with local stakeholders, such as entrepreneurs. We present the storyline with the points of interest and we invite them to come up with additional ideas. In the case of the Dancing Cats, it was suggested that female shopkeepers in the village of Bergeijk could place a broomstick by their doors, symbolising their mode of transportation to work. Another cost-effective idea was to fill flowerpots in front of a restaurant with catnip. Ideally, entrepreneurs during these workshops connect and jointly develop new products, packages, or events.

The Dancing Cats

Many years ago, in the village of Bergeijk, there was a prolonged period without wind. The miller Dorus was unable to operate his windmill to grind grain into flour, causing the villagers to go hungry.

The villagers saw that the wind picked up late in the evening, so they forced the miller to work at night. He did so reluctantly because it was well-known that the windmill was haunted then. Indeed as soon as he set to work, he was assaulted by some 40 black cats. Dorus fled.

The miller's servant was not a coward and offered to do the work. He too was assaulted by the black cats but he fought them off with a sabre.

The next morning, the miller entered the mill and saw something lying on the floor: a cut-off finger, the ring still around it. He immediately recognised his wife's wedding ring. His wife was missing.

He went looking for his wife in the area around the village: in the woods, in the air. But no sign of her.

There was only one place left to find his beloved wife: the Cats' Mountain. The miller ventured there at night and found 40 black cats dancing in a circle. Though terrified, the miller joined them, dancing hand in paw. Suddenly, he noticed that the paw he was holding lacked a joint. As he turned to look at the cat, dawn broke. The cats transformed into witches, flying away on broomsticks.

The desperate miller then asked the village priest for help. The priest devised a plan. He rang the bells of the Luihuis to attract the witches, who often flew over the church during funerals. As the witches approached, the priest flung holy water high into the air. Each time a drop landed on a witch's skirt, she plummeted to the ground and transformed into a boulder. The miller never found his wife. To honour her memory, he painted a picture of a cat and hung it in the windmill.

In the next step, VisitBrabant has mood images and a video trailer made for the route, highlighting meaningful moments in the storyline and certain points of interest. The route is then launched offline and online on all the well-known route platforms. Furthermore, there are social media campaigns and free publicity is generated.

Meaningful experiences for the local community

In the case of *the Dancing Cats*, the launch of the route led to additional spin-off for the local community. VisitBergeijk commissioned a children's books author to write two books around this story: one picture book to be shown and read out loud at school or at home, and one longer and slightly scarier version for older children to read for themselves. An audio version of the story can be found on YouTube. The idea of the initiator is that the municipality provides a copy of the book as a present for every newborn baby that is registered at the

town hall. And that schoolchildren learn the cats' dance or play in the school musical around this story, possibly in the *Kattendans* theatre.

The Cats' Dance is a good example of how story-based routes not only lead to meaningful experiences for visitors, but also serve as practical means to develop networks between entrepreneurs and other local stakeholders, ensuring a flow of additional ideas and resources.

More information

- Link to the route:
<https://www.visitbrabant.com/en/routes-overview/1277629436/the-dancing-cats-of-bergeijk-cycle-route>
- Link to the trailer:
<https://youtu.be/ummlOTkg6qk?si=-vP7U2ipvQHJq02K>

Photography

- Brabant Partners - Willeke Machiels

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An important criterion is whether there is 'energy' around a certain story or characters in the local community.

Hip-hop as a naturally inclusive space for leisure activities

A special need does not limit a child, but being left out does



Banoyi Zuma is 'Samen Dansen' project lead. Margo Rooijackers is lecturer and researcher at Breda University of Applied Sciences. Liliya Terzieva is professor of Designing Value Networks at The Hague University of Applied Sciences. Inge Vos is 'Samen Sporten' programme manager at Stichting het Gehandicapte Kind, which includes the 'Samen Dansen' project.

Leisure plays a pivotal role in enhancing the human condition, offering avenues for exploration, growth, and self-actualisation

(Kleiber, 2017; Kleiber & McGuire, 2019; Tapps, Wells, & Parr, 2021). The World Leisure Organization (WLO) emphasises that "well-selected leisure experiences improve quality of life for all - from childhood to later life" (WLO, 2023). This article features the inclusive Samen Dansen (Dancing Together) dance project by Stichting het Gehandicapte Kind, which aims to foster inclusion among children with and without special needs through hip-hop dance classes.

Approach

The project builds on the inherently inclusive nature of hip-hop culture and its community. By welcoming children with and without special needs in the same dance classes, the inclusive dancing project functions as a creative tension engine by embracing the challenges and turning

them into opportunities for innovation. During this six-week course, the dance instructors blend structured choreography with freestyle elements to accommodate the difference in physical and cognitive abilities of the participants and as such, incorporate new movements to the hip-hop dance vocabulary.

The visualisations, combined with the experiences of relevant stakeholders, effectively illustrate how the hip-hop community embodies the principles of diversity, access, and inclusion by welcoming individuals from all walks of life, including those with disabilities. It fosters an accessible and empowering space for self-expression and leisure. This open and inclusive approach perfectly aligns with the mission statement of Stichting het Gehandicapte Kind, which asserts that "a special need does not limit a child, but being left out does."



Parents of children with special needs

The dance instructors do not assume that the children cannot do it, but simply see how far they can get. Children with disabilities are too often approached as if they cannot do anything.

You have helped my daughter come out of her shell.

I have finally found a place for my son where everyone is human.

My child is happy, and that is not a given. She's growing, she's dancing, she's enjoying herself, that's great to see.

Children with special needs



Dancing is my life.
I can show
what I can do, who I am.

Do not try, just do it.
No matter your
special need, you can
dance your style.

It's great.
When I dance,
I feel free.

Children without special needs



It is nice to see that
they take into account
what you are unable
to do and then find
solutions for it.

It is nice to feel
who you are - and
to feel free.

The hip-hop and breaking
culture is a culture that
does not look at what
you cannot do, but at
what is possible.

I have learned to look
at the individual child
even more closely.



Dance instructors

Conclusion

Art can disrupt dominant narratives and provide alternative viewpoints, with hip-hop culture serving as a safe space for inclusive leisure activities. For children with special needs, the hip-hop dance classes offer a way to develop motor skills, coordination, and body awareness in a supportive, non-judgmental setting and an opportunity to connect to children without special needs. For children without special needs, the classes foster empathy and awareness by exposing them to peers with different abilities, promoting collaboration and reducing stigma, while mastering new dance

skills. To ensure this exchange of valuable insights from their encounters, it is important to maintain a good balance between the number of children with and without special needs in the dance classes to foster interaction and embrace the reciprocal nature of learning.

These dance classes prove to be just as important for parents, especially parents of children with special needs. For them, the dance classes provide a space for growth where their child is unconditionally accepted. For dance instructors the challenges of teaching dance to

a mixed group of children calls upon their self-reliance and self-confidence, strengthening their development as educators and ambassadors of inclusive dance.

More information

See for more information on the case study pages 122-144 of the proceedings of the NADR symposium of the Dutch Design Week (21 October 2024) via: <https://nadr.nl/publications/the-societal-impact-of-applied-design-research>.

Why 'not designing for meaning' might be just as meaningful

On the importance of leisure activities without the need for intentional cognitive processing

Wim Strijbosch



Wim Strijbosch is a researcher and lecturer of Experience Lab and the Attractions and Theme Parks Management track at Breda University of Applied Sciences.

Over the past couple of years, I have engaged with several platforms representing various sub-sectors of the leisure industries, ranging from theme parks and zoos to recreation and museums. A recurring theme on these platforms is that organisations should provide highly impactful experiences. The belief, driven by seminal works from both the professional and scientific literature, is that success can be achieved by offering meaningful and perhaps even transformative experiences. Although these experience types are certainly impactful, the terms 'meaningful' and 'transformative' sometimes tend to be taken out of context and become buzzwords instead, leading to the notion that everything must suddenly be meaningful or transformational. This results in imposed meaningfulness or transformation by design, which potentially leads to the opposite effect among consumers instead. Paradoxically, I would therefore argue that sometimes intentionally not designing for meaningfulness might be just as meaningful.

Experience typology

When looking at experience impact, it is good to place the different terminologies within an overarching framework to see how they relate to each other. In 2018, Duerden and colleagues introduced a framework categorising experiences based on their impact (Duerden et al., 2018). This framework first distinguishes between ordinary experiences and extraordinary

experiences. Ordinary experiences attract attention but evoke weak emotional responses. Extraordinary experiences attract attention and evoke strong emotional responses, discovery, change, or a combination of these. Extraordinary experiences are further classified into memorable, meaningful and transformative experiences. Memorable experiences evoke strong emotions, meaningful experiences evoke emotions and discovery, and transformative experiences evoke emotions, discovery and change. This hierarchy suggests that memorable experiences are less impactful than meaningful ones, which are less impactful than transformative experiences in turn. The hierarchy of this framework has been empirically validated in existing scientific literature (see e.g. Duerden et al., 2025) and in unpublished work by our BUAs Experience Lab.

The underlying dynamics of experience impacts

The relationship between emotions and memorability is well-documented in the literature. The consensus is that strong emotional responses during experiences are more likely to make those experiences memorable. Recent contributions from our very own BUAs Experience Lab have nuanced this thesis, demonstrating that more is not always better. They suggest that moments evoking strong emotions should be alternated with less emotionally intense moments.

The conceptual exploration of higher-level impact types has only recently begun. In a recent paper, Bastiaansen and Duerden (2025) discuss how experiences become meaningful. They emphasise that an experience must first be remembered to become meaningful. This is because reflection, which involves intentional cognitive processing of the experience, is the key working principle of making experiences meaningful. Naturally, one cannot reflect on

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'Meaningful' and 'transformative' sometimes tend to be taken out of context and become buzzwords instead.

something that is not remembered. If this reflection process results in insights related to different sources of meaning (Bastiaansen and Duerden (2025) outline social connection, fulfilment, contribution and growth), the experience moves up another rung on the experience impact ladder to become meaningful. If these insights are integrated into one's autobiographical memory or identity, the experience can reach the highest level by becoming transformative.

Based on their conceptual framework of the process underlying the come-into-being of meaningful experiences, Bastiaansen and Duerden (2025) suggest several experience design strategies that facilitate reflection before, during and after an experience. These tools help leisure and tourism providers embed objective design elements that might be pre-determinants of reflection processes, making the experiences they provide more likely to become meaningful (for detailed information, see Bastiaansen & Duerden, 2025). They also present an empirical research agenda to intentionally examine specific strategies,

contexts and participants to begin building a body of evidence-based best practices. Given the complexity of the matters, it is commendable how Bastiaansen and Duerden (2025) couple fundamental scientific research to practical tools and strategies.

Facilitating meaningfulness in all experiences?

An important question is whether all experiences in tourism and leisure should be designed to facilitate meaningfulness. In their original paper, Duerden and colleagues (2018) caution against making every experience extraordinary. They note that *"the terms ordinary and extraordinary relate to frequency rather than perceived importance of these experience types"* (p. 201). They assert that ordinary experiences matter and deserve intentional attention, partly to ensure that they do not detract from desired ordinary experiences. Although both meaningful and transformational experiences are extraordinary, the same can be said of these as compared to memorable experiences.

Emotions, the key component of memorable experiences, are spontaneous cognitive processes. Reflection, the key component of meaningful and transformative experiences further downstream, requires intentional cognitive processing (Bastiaansen & Duerden, 2025). Some leisure and tourism activities are particularly valued because there is no need for intentional cognitive processing. In our increasingly fast-paced and cognitively demanding world - both in and outside of leisure - the value of leisure experiences that do not require intentional cognitive processing should not be underestimated. I would like to offer three different perspectives on this thesis.

First, in one of the early yet seminal works in the tourism literature, Cohen (1979) sets out that besides more meaningful 'tourism modes', there are also less meaningful ones where meaning is neither required nor desired. While the latter have been looked down upon by early tourism scholars, Cohen (1979) argues that it is exactly the lack of meaning that allows tourists to rejuvenate and better function in daily life. A second take on how the lack of minimal intentional cognitive processing during an experience can be found in the concept of flow. Flow, consistently linked to subjective well-being, was famously conceptualised by the Csíkszentmihályis (1992) as a state of complete absorption

and focus on an activity that is challenging yet within your skill level, where you lose track of time and everything else around you. A key characteristic of flow is the merging of action and awareness, where activities are performed spontaneously without conscious thought. Here too, minimal cognitive processing is therefore not necessarily unbeneficial. A third perspective on these matters comes from a concrete example from my own research on dark ride attractions in theme parks. In a recent study that I did with Pieter Cornelis on these attraction types (Cornelis & Srijbosch, 2024), we found that dark ride attendees particularly value dark ride attractions because they allow them to temporarily switch off their thoughts and be present in the sensory here and now. Prompting participants to engage in intentional cognitive processes that facilitate reflection might take away from their ostensibly valued here-and-now experience.

How a lack of meaning might be meaningful nevertheless

At the same time, the pursuit of meaning in leisure and tourism experiences does not always require intentional cognitive processing during the experience. A lack of immediate meaning during an experience does not imply the absence of meaning at the end of the line. On the contrary, experiences initially valued for their lack of immediate meaningfulness can become meaningful upon reflection later - especially considering the fast-paced and cognitively demanding times that are currently ours. The experiences that I cherish most are those impulsive moments with my extended family, making me realise afterward how lucky I am to have them in my life. I doubt I am alone in this. Examples like this suggest the importance of allowing space for spontaneous, unstructured experiences. By not imposing a sense of the extraordinary by design, we can perhaps enable individuals to derive personal significance from their experiences in their own time and at their own convenience. It might then even turn out that spontaneous reflection could make experiences more meaningful than when triggered by design.

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Photography

- Floris Oosterveld

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It is exactly the lack of meaning that allows tourists to rejuvenate and better function in daily life.



CREATE TOMORROW'S VINTAGE

The end of retail therapy?

Leisure, fashion, and the search for lasting fulfilment



STEADY EDDIE II - KOJIMA SELVAGE / 13 OZ. JAPANESE DENIM

Stifani Herpich



Stifani Herpich is fashion and experience designer and PhD candidate. She works as a lecturer and researcher at Breda University of Applied Sciences.

For decades, fashion consumption has been deeply intertwined with leisure, shaping not only how we spend our free time but also how we construct our identities. The rise of fast fashion and mass production has made clothing more accessible than ever, turning shopping into a widely embraced pastime rather than a mere necessity. Retail therapy, the act of shopping to improve mood or relieve stress, has become a cultural norm, fuelled by marketing strategies that create desire and reinforce the idea that consumption equates to freedom and self-expression. However, as awareness of environmental and social consequences grows, we are witnessing a shift towards voluntary simplicity in leisure and consumption. Consumers are increasingly questioning the long-standing association between happiness and material accumulation, embracing alternative ways to find fulfilment through mindful consumption, second-hand fashion, and more intentional purchasing habits. This transition signals a potential decline in the dominance of consumer culture, paving the way for a more sustainable and conscious approach to leisure, reclaiming it as a pure dimension of life that is based on creating deeply satisfying experiences rather than spending money.

Retail therapy and the instant gratification loop
Leisure scholars have associated leisure to consumption and consumerism (Roberts, 2008;

Stebbins, 2020). Shopping has long been positioned as a key leisure activity in consumer societies, offering not just the thrill of acquiring new items but also an engaging, sensory experience. Malls and shopping streets are designed to be inviting spaces for social interaction, entertainment, and escape, reinforcing the idea that consumption is a pleasurable way to spend free time. Beyond its recreational appeal, shopping also taps into powerful psychological mechanisms. While retail therapy is not widely explored in research, some studies show that it triggers a dopamine rush, providing a temporary sense of excitement, control, and relief, as well as connection to overall well-being (Lee and Böttger, 2017). However, while this instant gratification can offer short-term emotional regulation, the long-term consequences could be less satisfying. Many shoppers experience buyer's remorse when the initial high fades, realising that their purchases were impulsive or unnecessary. Over time, frequent emotional spending can lead to excessive clutter, contributing to stress rather than alleviating it, and in more severe cases, financial strain and compulsive disorders. As awareness of these patterns grows, more consumers are reconsidering their shopping habits, seeking fulfilment beyond the fleeting satisfaction of material acquisitions.

Voluntary simplicity and frugality as a path to well-being

The rise of voluntary simplicity reflects a growing movement towards more intentional and mindful consumption, emphasising sufficiency over excess. It involves consciously reducing material consumption, prioritising meaningful experiences, and valuing well-being over accumulation. This shift is largely influenced by cultural and economic factors, including increasing awareness of sustainability issues, financial pressures, and the growing appeal of minimalist aesthetics. In the context of

fashion, scholars on slow fashion emphasise that sustainable consumption involves shifting pleasure from acquiring clothing to enjoying its use (Freudenreich & Schaltegger, 2020). This perspective challenges the traditional consumer mindset, advocating for a deeper appreciation of clothing longevity and mindful ownership rather than constant replacement.

Over the past few decades, lifestyle trends promoting reduced consumption have gained and lost popularity, reflecting society's evolving relationship with material goods. Movements such as the zero-waste home (2010), minimalist living (2015), and the recent *underconsumption core* micro-trend (2024), illustrate the ascension of frugal behaviour as a morally virtuous behaviour. These trends often emerge as responses to economic constraints and environmental concerns, with individuals seeking alternatives to mass consumerism and fast-paced consumption patterns. However, despite the increasing discourse on reduction and sufficiency, voluntary simplicity is still often

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Retail therapy, the act of shopping to enhance mood or relieve stress, has become a cultural norm.



Many shoppers experience buyer's remorse when they realise that their purchases were impulsive or unnecessary.



viewed as a niche lifestyle choice rather than a widespread norm.

A key challenge to sustainable consumption is the paradox of consumer behaviour, particularly in fashion. While awareness of sustainability is increasing, fast fashion continues to thrive, particularly among Generation Z consumers, who are the primary audience for ultra-fast fashion brands, such as Shein and Temu. Research suggests that affordability, social media influence, and the desire for variety drive their consumption patterns (Makkar & Spry, 2024). This dynamic underscores the complexity of aligning ethical values with purchasing habits in a digital age where trends evolve rapidly, and instant gratification is a key motivator. Nevertheless, frugal leisure practices such as clothing swaps, second-hand shopping, and experience-based consumption are emerging as alternatives to traditional retail therapy. These activities offer the joy of novelty and self-expression without contributing to overconsumption, signalling a shift towards more sustainable and conscious leisure choices.

The business response: sufficiency models and alternative value creation

As concerns over environmental impact and resource depletion grow, businesses are increasingly exploring sufficiency-driven circular business models to promote sustainable consumption. These models seek to moderate overall resource use by curbing excessive demand through education, consumer engagement, and innovative strategies (Bocken & Short, 2016). Unlike traditional circular models that focus primarily on recycling, sufficiency-based approaches prioritise refuse, reduce, and rethink strategies, encouraging consumers to buy less and value longevity over disposability. To integrate sufficiency principles, businesses must consider key elements such as purpose, ownership, finance, governance, networks, scale, and impact (Bocken & Short, 2016). By encouraging a shift in consumption patterns, sufficiency-based businesses can create new forms of value that go beyond the immediate sale of goods. In this context, leisure can take on a redefined role, offering pleasures derived from experiences of care and mindful engagement.

Some companies have already embraced slower, more intentional production and consumption models, proving that sustainability and profitability can coexist. For example, the denim brand *Nudie Jeans* produces high-quality jeans designed to improve with wear, emphasising durability and uniqueness over time. The brand also offers free repairs and sells refurbished jeans, reinforcing a circular approach to fashion. Similarly, *The Seam* connects customers with skilled craftspeople for garment repairs, fostering a culture of care and longevity using social media. Dutch designer *Jolie Jolink* takes sustainability further by integrating regenerative practices into her collections, even purchasing a farm to support her radically transparent and sustainable fashion model. These businesses leverage reuse, product longevity, and conscious sales as core strategies to drive sufficiency while maintaining financial stability.

However, despite the growing interest in sufficiency-driven business models, further research is needed to develop innovative designs tailored to the textile industry (Freudenreich & Schaltegger, 2020). The transition to a sufficiency-based circular economy will require collaboration between businesses, consumers, and policymakers to ensure long-term success.



The paradox of consumer behaviour: while awareness of sustainability is increasing, fast fashion continues to thrive.

Conclusion: rethinking leisure for long-term contentment

Redefining leisure in the context of fashion beyond material acquisition is essential for a more sustainable and fulfilling way of living. Rather than equating happiness with endless consumption, embracing intentional and mindful consumption can lead to greater well-being by prioritising experiences, creativity, and long-term value over instant gratification. By shifting the focus from acquiring to appreciating, individuals can cultivate deeper satisfaction while reducing environmental impact. Businesses, too, have a crucial role to play by adopting sufficiency-driven models that encourage durability, reuse, and transparency. Moving forward, consumers can support this shift by making more conscious purchasing decisions, seeking joy in non-material experiences, and advocating for responsible business practices. Likewise, companies can align with evolving consumer values by designing products and services that promote longevity and meaningful engagement. As we collectively move toward a more mindful and purpose-driven approach to leisure and consumption, both individuals and businesses have the opportunity to shape a future where sustainability and well-being go hand in hand.

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Photography

- *Nudie Jeans* (page 38 top)

Why investing in street culture and sports pays

Driver of social value

Peter van der Aalst



Peter van der Aalst is a lecturer, researcher and PD candidate at Breda University of Applied Sciences.

The positive impact that leisure can have on people's lives has been studied extensively. This usually concerns such things as having fun, finding meaning, innovation, identity formation, talent development, physical and mental health, social cohesion, diversity and inclusion. These are also the factors that are often mentioned when the value of street culture and sports are discussed. And that is the impact that policymakers hope to achieve by investing in street culture and sports facilities in their city or municipality.

The value of street culture and sports

Street culture and sports are catch-all terms. The communities involved are diverse although they have common characteristics such as the strong bottom-up power.

Conducting research into the value that street culture and sports have or may have for both the several communities and the city or municipality as a whole is the core of my Professional Doctorate project. The focus lies on the cities of Breda, Tilburg, and Rotterdam, but insights from observations and expert interviews in other cities inside and outside the Netherlands are also incorporated to provide as complete a picture as possible. In addition, quantitative research is being conducted among players of street sports. The aim - with this knowledge - is to contribute to investments in street culture and sports that are valuable to communities and cities.

Based on a number of initial interviews and focus groups, a reasonably shared view of the social value of street culture and sports is already emerging.

Encouraging creativity and entrepreneurship

Street culture and sports encourage young people to look at their environment in a different way, which requires a creative approach and a flexible way of thinking. Young people learn to take initiative and set up projects without any fixed structures.

"When you grow up on the streets with your sport and your friends, you have to take a lot of initiatives yourself. You have a certain freedom, you start to see the city in a different way, as a playground. This allows you to use objects and places in ways other than their intended purpose. You learn to look at things in different ways, which fosters a certain creativity that you then carry with you into what you do next", says Rinse Staal from Pier 15 skatepark. "I think there is plenty of entrepreneurship in that scene and loads of creativity. So, if you create such places where they come together, this may have a flywheel effect on innovation, new ideas, which makes your city more enjoyable".

Identity formation and self-expression

In many cases, street culture and sports serve as a form of self-expression where young people can explore and shape their own cultural and personal identity. The cultural element is seen as valuable because it helps young people express themselves. This process of self-discovery takes place in various forms, such as hip hop, graffiti, dance and other elements of street culture. It not only offers young people the opportunity to express themselves, but also helps them develop a sense of pride and identity.

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When you create places where they come together, this can really have a flywheel effect on innovation, new ideas.

Talent development, self-fulfilment and social development

Street culture and sports offer young people the opportunity to explore and further develop their talents. This does not just help them improve their skills, but also gain access to broader (professional) opportunities in society.

"Some more than others, of course, but I see people that are attentive and train with that team and things like that; I see them growing on a personal level too. They are absorbed by that group of people and that community and, in my experience, they go through a kind of accelerated growth process", says Ruud Lemmen from Hall of Fame in Tilburg.

Diversity, inclusion and accessibility

In a city where different cultures come together, street culture and sport can play an important part in promoting diversity and cultural exchange, by offering a platform where people from different backgrounds come together and learn from each other. This offers young

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Investments in physical space must preferably be flexible and accessible, providing scope for self-organisation.



people the opportunity not only to celebrate their own culture, but also to be open to the culture of others, which contributes to a more inclusive society.

Unlike traditional sports clubs and cultural institutions, most street culture and sports facilities are accessible and low-threshold to young people from different social backgrounds. However, physical proximity is also an important factor: "People in Noord in general, regardless of whether they want to skate or whatever, don't go to other parts of the city very often. They do go to Studio Noord or to a youth centre there", says Ruud Lemmen.

Despite an image of inclusivity, there are surely still challenges in practice. "I find it less open than it should be. It's often the case that communities like that say 'we're open and anything goes here and things like that', but you have to belong, you have to get in first", says Ruud Lemmen.

"In my experience, hip hop isn't very inclusive; there's still a patriarchal mindset among many members of that scene. Spoken word is much more inclusive, in my opinion; that's already completely included," says Teun van Irsel, cultural strategist for the municipality of Tilburg.

Social cohesion and community building

One of the striking aspects of street culture and sports is the way they contribute to social cohesion and community building. In urban environments, young people might sometimes feel they are not being heard or they are excluded from society. Street culture and sports offer a platform where young people, regardless of their background, can connect with others who share the same interests. "I also think that places like Skateland can play a very important role in social cohesion in these neighbourhoods. When we have an event here with the neighbourhood, for the neighbourhood, by the neighbourhood, you do indeed see white, highly educated mothers with three white children

among the black children from the neighbourhood and the mothers from the neighbourhood, which is maybe a bit exaggerated, but together... You both have a skateboard with wheels underneath. So that's actually your common denominator, which can create more understanding for each other", says Frans Dietvorst from Skateland.

The feeling of being part of a community offers young people a safe space to express themselves, and at the same time, it strengthens social bonding within the city. This promotes not only personal development, but also cooperation and solidarity within a community.

At the same time, the way in which young people develop within street culture and sports has changed. According to Danijel Ribaric from Roffa Rotterdam, young people start out individually more and more often, through online content before taking the step to a community. This makes it harder to train new community leaders and maintain the social structures within street culture and sports. Chiara Riboch from Studio Noord agrees: "Because social media is such a big part of our lives, even bigger than the offline world. Everyone takes a bit of everything, so to speak. And... yes, so I think identity formation has changed quite a lot. I don't think it's the same as it used to be".

Knowledge transfer: each one, teach one

There is a natural transfer of know-how between generations. Respect within the scene is not determined by age or status, but by commitment and passion. Generations learn from each other and support each other. "So that knowledge transfer across all those levels - because they're all mixed together into one single heap - works really well. So I think I'd like to mention that about street culture, that mutual respect and the different ages and generations are important", says Rinse Staal.



Dennis Elbers from Blind Walls Gallery in Breda would like to use his position to transfer knowledge to younger generations: "I would really like us to have three places here for people that do not necessarily cost a lot of money, where I can let them experience what it is like to work here, to develop ideas, and who can also use them to make things for their own target group".

Physical and mental health and well-being

The physical aspect of street culture and sports contributes to a healthy lifestyle, while the social aspect can play an important role in reducing stress and promoting a sense of belonging. Street sports offer young people an accessible and low-threshold way to be physically active, outside traditional structures. At a time in which obesity and mental health issues among young people are on the rise, it



can play an important role in improving their well-being.

The informal nature of street culture and sports makes it appealing for young people to exercise without the competitive pressure that traditional sports entail. Social interaction is also an important factor in health. "So culture, art, sports, but also being there for each other and trying to help each other out. That's what it's all about here, also because we're in a very challenging neighbourhood, the Feyenoord district. It gave me goosebumps when I first started here, seeing mainly kids from the neighbourhood who you know are having a tough time, just enjoying riding their skateboards here", Frans Dietvorst says.

Urban dynamism and area development

The place where Pier 15 is located has transformed from disreputable fringes of society into a vibrant cultural area in ten years' time. This demonstrates that successful initiatives can redefine public space and contribute to a vibrant and liveable city. Tyrone Tjon-a-loi, culture broker in the city of Den Bosch, who has long been active within the street culture and sports communities of Tilburg, pictures this dynamism: "These are the steps you can actually outline: first, we take the old empty buildings, the ones that also have a bit of charm. These are now almost all filled in every city. Then we move on to the industrial estates with slightly less old buildings, but ones that are really starting to look a bit run down, and then you tackle those".

Creating these kinds of places, where different groups come together, can make the city more attractive and diverse. Street culture and sport play a role as catalysts for a vibrant and lively city, for dynamism and innovation, and bring creativity and entrepreneurship to the public space. However, municipalities often struggle to facilitate this dynamism because existing structures are often rigid and do not fit well with the bottom-up approach of street culture and sports. "Area development offers many opportunities, but you don't find the people who understand this side of the story there", says Dennis Elbers. Teun van Irsel from the municipality of Tilburg, however, certainly sees the value of this form of value creation: "Studio Noord as one of our rule-free spaces. And these

are the places we want to create in the city, where people can simply walk in with an idea".

Conclusion and recommendations

Based on the initial research phase, a picture emerges of the social value of street culture and sports, and a number of recommendations can be made.

Street culture and sports encourage creativity, entrepreneurship, identity formation, talent development, social cohesion, inclusion, and health. Their accessibility and bottom-up nature mean that the strength comes from the community itself, not from institutional frameworks. This requires a different kind of involvement from the municipality; as a facilitator, not as a director.

Investments in physical space should preferably be flexible and accessible, with room for self-organisation. It is recommended that 'rule-free spaces'

should be facilitated; places where young people can experiment and develop themselves, with as few bureaucratic barriers as possible. This requires trust in the community and a willingness to let go of or adapt existing structures. Street culture and sports often fall between different policy areas, resulting in a lack of integrated strategy and fragmented funding.

It is recommended that cities should recognise street culture and sports communities as partners in urban development. The expertise and experience within these networks are valuable for successfully designing places that function socially, creatively and sustainably. Invest not only in bricks and mortar, but first and foremost in people. Make room for their creativity and dynamism in urban policy, and facilitate encounters, ownership and knowledge sharing. To reach a diverse target group, it is important that facilities should be created close to where people live, including in neighbourhoods outside the city centre. This will ensure that street culture and sports truly become a sustainable added value for the city and society.

Photography

- Ruben Klink (page 40)
- Rob Lipsius – Blind Walls Gallery (page 41 left)
- Bureau Duizenddingen (page 41 right)
- Len van der Pol & Raemy Abdelsalam (page 42)

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This promotes not only personal development, but also cooperation and solidarity within a community.



Helping to build the 'new economy'

Explorations by the Transformative Social Innovation specialisation

Ger Pepels

Ger Pepels is an expert in transformative social innovation and founder of 'Wat Aarde vraagt...'. He worked for BUas in different roles from 1988 to July 2025. Contact via ger.pepels@home.nl

The substantive focus of the Transformative Social Innovation (TSI) specialisation is in keeping with the intended renewal of Higher Economic Education (HEO in Dutch). As a social innovator, the leisure manager can act as a 'connector and change broker', who creates and substantiates essential room for experimentation. The National Educational Profile of Leisure & Events Management (LOP) expresses this aptly: "In an integrated way, at the intersection of sectors, across the entire spectrum from the experiential world to the systems world". Such a contribution made by TSI calls for a critical and hence, challenging approach to the underlying assumptions of the economy and innovation.

TSI uses (leisure) time for societal change

While society seems trapped in a growth imperative and strict market rules, which is recognisable in the traditional commodified leisure sector, leisure can also make a powerful contribution by focusing attention to alternative forms of leisure pursuits. This means a shift of focus: no longer primarily focusing on forms of leisure pursuits delivered by the capitalist market that mainly respond to hedonistic needs and consciously create scope for the eudaimonic interpretation of leisure pursuits, for instance, by actively contributing to the flourishing of social and natural environments of local communities.

Taking joint responsibility for the common good outside conventional paid working hours thus becomes more prominent and offers people a meaningful way to spend their (leisure) time. Academic research supports this approach: "... there is solid empirical research showing that it predicts outcomes which are uncontroversially considered valuable, including physical and mental health, other aspects of societal well-being and productivity". Furthermore, it

happens all the time in practice as the Diverse Economies – Iceberg (Community Economies collective) shows. The important thing is to draw attention to it.

Model 1: Diverse Economies Iceberg

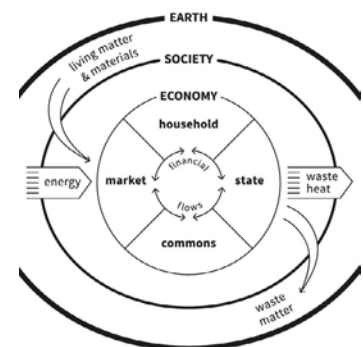


Credit: Community Economies Collective – Creative Commons

Such a shift of perspective opens paths to alternative economies that, for example, focus on sustainable food production, innovative care

facilities, and creating a high quality environment. These essential basic provisions function less around cash flows and more on the basis of intrinsically motivated time investment of those involved, thus providing a basis for another valuation system. This approach is a concrete and practical elaboration of concepts such as the 'plural and embedded economy', in which attention and appreciation explicitly go to the contributions of people in family relationships, communities, and the *meents* (commons), respectively, as fully-fledged economic sectors alongside the conventional market and state.

Model 2: The Embedded Economy



Credit: Kate Raworth and Marcia Mihotich

Such a holistic approach to the economy falls outside the current mainstream economic perspective, while it directly connects to the urgently desired social transitions. This calls for transformative social innovations in the economic domain, going beyond mainstream innovation approaches: the 'agentic, relational, situated, and multilevel process to develop, promote, and implement novel solutions to social problems in ways that are directed

towards producing profound change in institutional context"(Ledingham, K., 2024).

Working on transitions in HEO is necessary, yet challenging

The challenges we face are now widely known, scientifically acknowledged and increasingly urgent: climate collapse, global inequality, food security, housing shortages, biodiversity loss, depletion of raw materials, stress and the focus on performance, and ongoing technological acceleration. These complex issues require transitions in areas ranging from energy production to digitisation and from mobility to agriculture.

Higher education has a responsibility to anticipate these transitions adequately. This is happening, albeit cautiously. This is also the case within higher economic education (HEO). The HEO Exploratory Report titled *'Met regie naar verantwoordelijkheid'* (HEO Steering towards responsibility) notes that these transitions require graduates "who, where necessary or possible, can provide guidance for these transitions, while maintaining the performance and (social) earning capacity of organisations". To achieve this, the report states that students must learn to think and work in crossovers and focus on multiple value creation. The report sees "(e)conomics programmes as a skewer piercing through the social domains and other sectors". The hospitality domain of HEO even considers this crossover way of working to be the domain's characteristic contribution to making connections outside its own sector.

**Model 3:
Framework New Economic Education**



Credit: Our New Economy & Sector Council of Higher Economic Education– Creative Commons

Our New Economy (ONE) has formulated a framework in partnership with the HEO Sector Council to structurally anchor New Economic Thinking in the curriculum. ONE identifies this innovation in three dimensions: embedding existing subject-specific expertise in a stronger orientation towards social challenges, integrating systems thinking and the approach to transitions, and on top of that, strengthening the orientation towards the individual and the relationship with others and the world.

TSI appreciates the scope that the new national Leisure & Events profile (LOP in Dutch), fully in line with these sectoral developments, creates for the leisure manager as a social innovator, change-maker and sense maker. This offers fertile ground for contributing to transformative steps in society.

TSI considers all the above developments as an invitation to teach students to add value via crossovers in plural value systems. With regard to subject matter content, this requires the social innovator to become proficient in developing meaningful experience (experience design) and the development of new communities (community design) by facilitating in-depth dialogues (process design), with a thorough understanding of alternative economic approaches to develop organisations in a sustainable manner (new economics design). An understanding of the social challenges, transitions, and a foundation in systems thinking, form the basis for this. Orientations towards the individual, others and the world make up the starting points for the pedagogical choices. TSI can thus work on both the BUas cross-academic programme with hospitality domain partners tourism and facility management and on the necessary social transitions from HEO.

However, getting started with this is no easy task in higher professional education. The professors' platform *Vernieuwing Economieonderwijs* (Renewal of Economics Education) aptly describes the necessary efforts as being in the 'trouble spot', which means that working from the third learning loop of the triple-loop learning approach is necessary. In other words: "the critical questioning of values and deep convictions that are not only embodied at the individual level, but that are culturally maintained through largely implicit, collective processes" regarding subject matter, pedagogy and organisation of education.

After twenty years, TSI has a real feel for what it means to work in this challenging 'trouble spot'. The key question here is what is involved if you really want to fathom and implement alternative economic approaches.

Model 4: Systems Iceberg



Credit: The Academy for Systems Change

Deep change calls for changing mental models

What is actually required to achieve the intended transitions? Johan Schot (professor of Global History and Sustainability Transitions) points out the necessity to primarily seek the deeper connecting causes of all those crises in addition to the more sectoral transition efforts (such as around energy, mobility and

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As a social innovator, the leisure manager can act as a 'connector and change broker', who creates and substantiates essential room for experimentation.

agriculture). This presupposes 'deep change' at the level of values and beliefs. According to systems thinker Donella Meadows, the power to effect change is greatest at precisely this level by questioning, visualising and purposefully changing these mental models (values, assumptions, beliefs). However, realising this transformation is a challenging matter. Business consultant Jennifer Wilkins has made a valuable picture of the playground of economic approaches on the basis of underlying values, beliefs and assumptions.

The figure (model 5) in this article builds on Wilkins' work, placing the 'capitalist logic' and the 'cosmological logic' on a conceptual axis to highlight the profoundly different ways in which alternative economic approaches address the balance between economic, social, and ecological logics. Where Wilkins primarily wants to highlight 'degrowth' as an approach, we enrich the figure with the broader overview of economic approaches from the study 'Economics that dare to care'.

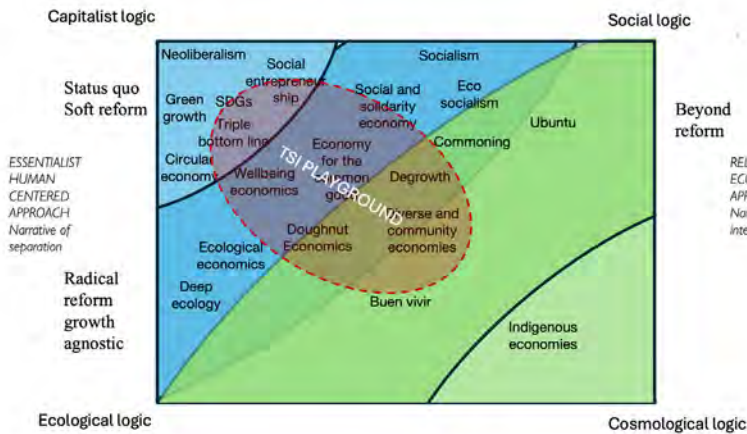
In the efforts to fundamentally renew economic thinking, we recognise the 'soft reform' and 'radical reform' approaches based on the capitalist logic.

In *soft reform*, economic growth remains central, while efforts are made to reduce negative social and/or ecological impact. Neoclassical economic thinking also forms the basis of these alternatives. In the Green Growth approach, the SDG approach and also the Circular Economy, economic growth is a condition for successful investments.

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Students should learn to think and work in crossovers and focus on multiple value creation.

Model 5: Economic playground



Credit: Ger Pepels, adapted from Jennifer Wilkins

In *radical reform*, economic growth is no longer the absolute condition for achieving greater well-being, even though the underlying capitalist relations of production remain largely intact. Doughnut Economics takes a growth-agnostic stance: growth is possible, but selectively, especially in view of the desired 'absolute decoupling' of economic activity and environmental impact.

On the other side of the axis, we see the *cosmological logic* opposite the *capitalist logic*. In its most pronounced form, this is an approach based on a holistic world view, for which indigenous economic approaches serve as a model. The diversity within this perspective is also considerable, with some denominators themselves being overarching concepts (Degrowth Economics). A common denominator for these approaches lies in the ambition to operate from a 'caring' perspective on people and nature. Therefore, these approaches are referred to as transformative, anti-capitalist or 'beyond reform'.

Economic science offers a wealth of alternative approaches while the dominant neoclassical approach is generally the one used. Transition thinking assumes openness to fundamental alternatives, in which the underlying views of humanity and world views emerge.

World views and views of humanity

The different logics are connected to underlying world views and views of humanity. The economic theories

that are positioned closer to the side of capitalist logic are based on an approach to the world referred to as the 'narrative of separation'.

This *narrative of separation* fundamentally approaches the world as a collection of separate, independent entities, rather than a web of relationships and interdependencies. People are considered truly different from nature, and the environment is primarily a resource that can be controlled and exploited. Individual autonomy is prioritised over interconnectedness, with competition considered the primary mechanism for progress and development. This world vision fragments knowledge into specialist domains and addresses systems as mechanical and reducible to their component parts. The view of humanity and world view of the *homo economicus* is in line with this, with the centrality of the autonomous individual, instrumental rationality, the transparent and knowable world, and the central position of man in analysis and decision-making.

In contrast with this, the cosmological logic recognises the '*narrative of interconnectedness*' as the fundamental connectedness that is the essence of existence. Everything is understood as dynamically interconnected, in which the boundaries between self and other become fluid and permeable, and together form a coherent ecosystem. Instead of seeing the world as a collection of separate

objects, this perspective sees reality as a living web of relationships in which each element co-creates and is created by its connections to the whole. People are seen as participating participants in, not as external controllers of a complex living network.

So, the two approaches are fundamentally different, without an inherent value judgement being attached to the concept. When assessing concrete initiatives, the underlying view of humanity and world view should be explicitly taken into account to look beyond just the symptoms (see events in the systems iceberg) for tackling an issue and for opting for an appropriate approach based on the desired value orientation. In view of the potential of a eudaimonic approach to leisure, other activities and other qualities come into play that can prove valuable in crossover approaches to transition challenges.

Conclusion

Higher economic education (HEO) is expressly committed to the transitions. However, it is crucial to realise that contributing to transitions is more than a merely technical exercise. Assessing the direction and approach requires a more detailed definition of what we mean by the economy and making value-driven choices. In other words, it requires a political stance. Not making a choice is also making a choice. The meta-crisis calls for an exploration at the 'trouble spot' to critically examine what we should dare to question during the transitions from an economic perspective, and how we can do so by taking into account the world views and views of humanity that underlie our thinking. Thanks to its leisure background, where the systems world and the experiential world emphatically touch each other, Transformative Social Innovation can make a meaningful contribution to this.

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Economic science offers a wealth of alternative approaches, while the neoclassical approach is used in particular.

Sources

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Beyond applause

Measuring the impact of performing arts attendance

Pieter de Rooij
&
Ondrej Mitas



Pieter de Rooij is senior lecturer and researcher in experience marketing & impact at the Academy for Leisure & Events, Breda University of Applied Sciences. Ondrej Mitas is senior lecturer and experience researcher at the Academy for Tourism, Breda University of Applied Sciences.

Impact has become a key area of interest. Because it is a container concept, it is not easy to evaluate. Theatres are interested in measuring their impact by incorporating one or two questions in their visitor surveys. Our project focused on the impact that performing arts experiences have on individual visitors. Which questions should theatres include to help identify individual impacts?

Why impact?

Impact has become an important topic in the cultural industry. Attention has shifted from service quality and satisfaction (in the 1990s), to visitor experiences and customer loyalty (in the early 2000s), to the impact of the visit. The Dutch Council for Culture (Raad voor Cultuur, 2023), for example, advised the Secretary of State to include societal impact as an additional measure of evaluation alongside artistic value. Furthermore, several theatres have included impact-related outcomes in their core mission. Impact evaluation has become important to strategically improve cultural offerings, and to demonstrate legitimacy and accountability to stakeholders.

Impact and well-being

Impact is often defined as the effect of a service on an individual or group. Impact can be viewed from multiple perspectives. Dunphy (2015) provided a clear overview of six different domains related to the impact of cultural organizations: (1) cultural domain (e.g. aesthetic appreciation, creativity stimulation, cognitive stimulation, appreciation for diversity of cultural expression), (2) personal domain referred to as well-being (e.g. emotional well-being, life satisfaction), (3) economic domain (e.g. direct employment, visitor expenditure), (4) ecological domain (e.g. awareness of environmental

issues), (5) social domain (e.g. equality of opportunity, friendships developed), (6) civic domain (e.g. active citizenship, engagement in political processes).

Some theatres have made it part of their mission to contribute to the happiness of their audiences. In this study, after discussions with theatres, we chose to focus on the well-being impact. So we asked: What does attending a performing arts performance mean in terms of changes in visitors' well-being? In this study, we have incorporated several well-being dimensions, such as emotions, satisfaction with life, empathy, and leisure quality.

Current evaluation processes

Dutch theatres send short visitor surveys consisting of around four multiple-choice questions and one open question after each performance to their visitors. In most cases, the survey is automatically distributed by email the same evening or the next day. The response rates are relatively high, sometimes up to 30% or more. The results are discussed at an organization-wide level a few days later. The surveys include questions related to satisfaction, experience, and the Net Promoter Score (word-of-mouth). These questions reflect economic or commercial goals. We propose that these surveys could be an opportunity to include questions which are non-commercial, and reflect individual impacts as well.

The NPS question has been embraced by multiple organizations. This is a single, straightforward item used all over the world ('to what extent would you recommend this service to your family or friends?'). One or two items reflecting individual impacts can easily be added to the theatre's current evaluation

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In this study, we have incorporated several well-being dimensions, such as emotions, satisfaction with life, empathy, and leisure quality.

practices. This would enable theatres to gain insights into individual impacts without the need for a large quantitative study with high costs and/or lower response rates. However, impact is a container concept. So what might be the single (NPS-like) question that should be used in the performing arts industry?

Since impact is an effect of a performing arts visit, it is difficult – timewise – to inquire about it in a questionnaire distributed shortly after the visit. Visitors would not be able to give a proper answer as to whether or not their visit affected their life satisfaction or leisure quality. These questions relate to long-term effects, while the questionnaire is distributed in the short term. Ideally, these questions would be asked at a later stage. However, this conflicts with the current evaluation process and theatres are not keen on asking their visitors to fill in two surveys. Therefore, it would be interesting for theatres to include relevant questions which are related to individual impacts, and which make

Psychological process	Items
Attention	I was fully absorbed during the performance I couldn't really keep my attention at the performance The performance caused me to forget everything around myself I really got pulled into it
Affection	I was deeply moved by the performance The performance grabbed me The performance took my breath away The performance touched me
Cognition	The performance made me think The performance gave me new insights The performance was inspiring

Table 1: Items of the independent variables.

sense to ask shortly after the visit. Therefore, the question is: what item(s) should be included that relate(s) to long-term effects?

Three core processes

We identified three psychological process areas which allegedly affect experience outcomes in the long run: (1) attentional processes, such as mindfulness and absorption, (2) affective processes, such as enjoyment, being emotionally touched or connection with fellow audience members, and (3) cognitive processes, such as learning and gaining insights. Visitors are able to reflect on these processes shortly after the visit. Incorporating questions related to these processes would make sense to visitors. Therefore, in this study, we wanted to investigate the relationship between these three processes (the extent to which visitors were absorbed, touched or made to think) and the four well-being concepts (emotions, satisfaction with life, empathy, and leisure quality). The goal was to find the items that best correlate with well-being. The conceptual model (Figure 1) reflects the theoretical background of the study.

Research method

In this project, we collaborated with two theatres in the Netherlands. Parkstad Limburg Theaters (PLT) from Heerlen/Kerkrade and Chassé Theater in Breda are among the Netherlands' largest and most prestigious theatres. The former has 2,320 seats spread across two locations, while the latter boasts 2,280 seats in three auditoriums. Both venues host a wide range of performances, showcasing

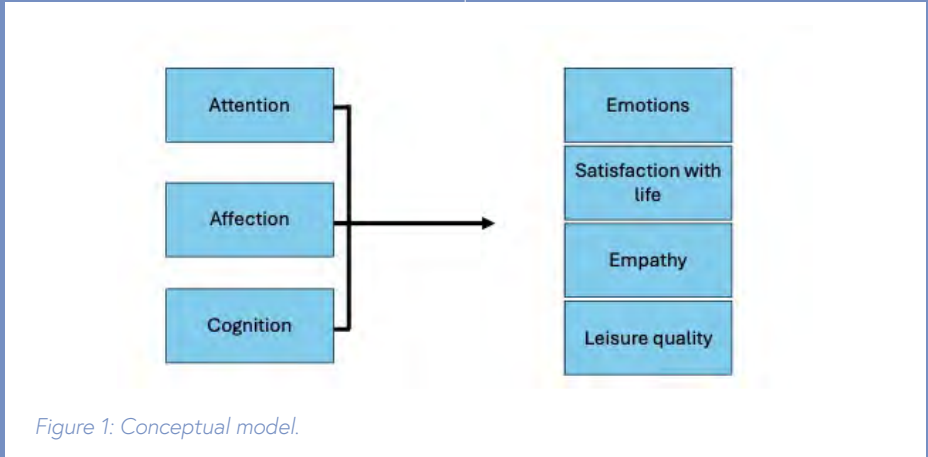


Figure 1: Conceptual model.

local emerging talent, established national and international companies, and a mix of large-scale entertainment and artistic experimentation. Both organizations host approximately 350,000 visitors every year.

We administered a questionnaire to theatre attendees measuring outcomes two to three days before (t0), immediately after (t1), and one month after (t2) a performance of their choice. The t0, t1 and t2 questionnaires contained items reflecting the dependent well-being concepts (such as satisfaction with life, empathy, etc.). The t1 questionnaire included items reflecting attention, affection, and cognition. These items are included in Table 1. The respondents filled in all three questionnaires, enabling us to investigate changes in well-being.

We collected data during December 2024 and January 2025, covering over 500 respondents

from 24 separate performance acts. Our approach to analyzing the data is aggressively empirical - we will examine bivariate correlations between each item and t0-t1 and t0-t2 change scores. We will also conduct multiple regressions and exploratory factor analyses to understand covariance structures of the predictor items. Nevertheless, the aim is to identify one or two items, rather than to develop a multi-item scale.

Finally

The aim of this study is to find one or two items related to individual impact that theatres can use in their current evaluation practices. Theatres program many performances which they want to evaluate with the same item(s) in a consistent way. This information can be used for future programming decisions and for accountability purposes. We realize that producers or artists might have different needs than theatre venues. Since each performance will have its own specific goal or intention, they

might be interested in evaluating the specific impact of their single performance. This would require specific indicators, focused on single performances and related to specific content of this single performance.

Sources

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Photography

- Parkstad Limburg Theaters (page 46)
- Wannes Cré (page 47)

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We identified three psychological process areas which allegedly affect experience outcomes in the long run.



Impact of social interventions

Lessons learned from front-runners

Kristel Zegers
& Simon de Wijs



Kristel Zegers and Simon de Wijs are involved in the design and teaching of the Urban Life and Placemaking programme at Breda University of Applied Sciences.



We all have things that we feel could be improved in a place. Perhaps there is a neighbourhood cut in two by a busy car-filled street; maybe a local play park does not suit the needs of local children; what if the city council has no policy for promoting local organisations and events? Sometimes in order to see a change in a city, we need to make that change for ourselves. Your challenge is to instigate an intervention, which will bring about the change you feel the place needs.

This quote is the first paragraph of the study guide for the Social Intervention Project, a challenge for third-year Urban Life and Placemaking students. During their semester abroad they live in various European cities and attend online classes that support them in their local projects. For the Social Intervention Project students choose an issue, map it, and connect with stakeholders to design and execute a social intervention. This academic year (2024-2025) students have focused on oil pollution (Stavanger), neighbourhood community (Turin), use of and relationship with the river (Bilbao), and overtourism, shifting to international communities supporting residents after storm DANA and the ensuing floods (Valencia). Previously, students' focus included safety for women in nightlife (Turin), car use in school districts (Porto), promoting the sharing economy and reducing street waste (Leipzig).

Mapping the chosen issue aims to deeply understand it, the stakeholders involved, and previous actions taken to tackle the issue. This research and mapping part culminates in an international conference, held both online and on the BUas campus in Breda. The conference is an explicit part of the learning process of students since they present the mapping of

their issues, receive feedback, and enhance their knowledge and network through workshops, panel discussions, and keynotes. This year's conference theme was the impact of social interventions.

In this article we share the lessons learned from the panel discussion of the conference, discussing how social interventions can be impactful. Jesse Jop Jorg, Amanda Sperger, and Matthijs van Muijen reflect on how they were able to make an impact with their initiatives and interventions.

Benches collective

Jesse, founder of We the City, a creative agency for urban change, initiated several projects including a rooftop

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Visit the website, share your bench, invite the neighbours, use the pavement as a shared space, and serve coffee.





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We found out it is legal to swim, called ourselves Schwimmverein Donaukanal, and just started to do it.

festival, and Pop-Up Parking Service. The impactful project he highlighted is Benches Collective, which encourages using pavements as shared living rooms, creating the world's largest open-air café. Participants share their benches, invite neighbours, and serve coffee, thus fostering community connections. Since the start, this initiative has seen 8,000 benches in 24 countries, with 1,800 in 2024 alone. On average, participants meet 15 people on a bench. About 70% of the participants got to know their neighbours, and 60% stayed in touch. Originally focused on one Amsterdam neighbourhood, the project went viral, influencing communities globally, even as far as South Korea. The simple, easily scalable concept effectively strengthens neighbourhood bonds.

Schwimmverein Donaukanal

Amanda introduces the Schwimmverein Donaukanal, a project to revive urban swimming in Vienna's Danube Canal, a former transport canal. The Danube, Vienna's main river, is popular for water activities but is 30 minutes from the city. The Danube Canal, once neglected, now has cafes and bars but remains underutilised. Swimming in the canal was common until the World Wars and pollution halted the tradition. In 2020, four students from the University of Applied Arts in Vienna discovered it was legal to swim in the canal and formed the Schwimmverein Donaukanal association. They gained media attention, hosted events, and engaged with experts. Now with 300 members, the association organises regular swims and community activities, collaborates with urban gardens for infrastructure, and advocates for official recognition and support. Their goal is to make urban swimming a convenient and enjoyable part of city life.

Placemaking in The Hague

Matthijs works for The Hague's housing department, focusing on impactful projects like improving inner gardens with housing corporations and utilising vacant estates for social projects, sports, and homework spaces. One of his ambitious targets is eliminating homelessness in The Hague by 2030. A specific project is located in The Hague Southwest,

within a housing complex owned by Haagwonen. This project faces several challenges, including adding more housing, creating attractive public spaces, and fostering social interactions among residents. To meet community needs, Matthijs is involved in activities around culture and expositions, creating green areas and play spaces, and addressing homelessness by adding more housing. He emphasises the importance of starting with small projects and gradually expanding them, while communicating possibilities and giving space for citizen initiatives. His efforts aim to create a more inclusive and vibrant community in The Hague.

Creating impact

Reflecting on their initiative's impact, Jesse and Amanda highlight the power of their story. Media coverage expanded their projects, emphasising social cohesion and reclaiming public space. Jesse notes that "The Bench Collective went viral." This attention increased involvement, showing that local initiatives can inspire global participation. Jesse stresses the importance of a clear story, a good website, and engaging images to facilitate participation. Their message is clear: it is not just about a bench or swimming, but about connecting with neighbours or citizens and reclaiming public spaces. Media attention supported a growth in the number of people wanting to be involved in the initiative, demonstrating the potential of local projects to have a broader impact.

Amanda reflected on how a small swimming initiative organically grew into a large cultural association by giving community members freedom to contribute to the initiative. She emphasised taking a step-by-step approach and trust the community to take responsibility for executing their own ideas. Members came up with ideas like adding food and offering ice swimming. This led to a shift in role for the four initiators: from being the organiser of the initiative to the facilitator providing support to every idea that made sense.

Starting small and giving room to other ideas is also one of the lessons learned by Matthijs who is engaged in larger placemaking projects. The redevelopment of a neighbourhood and the construction of new houses is impactful

for residents. How to tap into the energy that is present in the neighbourhood? Matthijs stresses building connections and giving space to citizen initiatives. "Start with a little project, communicate about the possibilities you offer, and give the initiatives time to grow. As a government we need to see how we can support it." Matthijs therefore brings together colleagues from different departments, and invites them to step out of the town hall, to interact with local communities, understand the needs, and implement ideas in the design. "In the end, it is a mix of giving opportunities and having our own ideas about what can be successful in this place."

Experts reflect differently on the role of the government within their placemaking initiatives. While Jesse experienced an original 'no' as an answer from the local government as to whether an open-air café would be allowed, he managed to find a way around agreeing that complaints would directly be sent to him. Matthijs, knowing the ins and outs of local government well, advises developing the skill to translate the demands and the wishes of people in the right way with the right frame. "There is always enough money at the town hall to make it a success," is his conviction.

Be humble, be curious

At the end of the panel discussion, panellists were asked for some crucial tips and lessons for students and other placemakers to use in follow-up steps of their interventions.

- *Gather information and go where the energy is:* Understand the existing energy and ideas in the location. There is already a past in any location. There are already people with ideas and energy. Try to soak up that information first.
- *Community involvement:* Make the project valuable for the people involved, rather than imposing ideas on them. Public spaces should reflect the needs and desires of the community, and continuous engagement is key to achieving this. Projects should thus be collaborative efforts.
- *Effective framing:* Presenting ideas in the right way (with the right words) can help secure funding and support.

Thus, when you aim for impactful social interventions, be humble, have a sincere interest and curiosity, be smart with framing, and do it together!

Photography

- Amelie Schlemmer (page 49 top)
- Christopher Mavric (page 48 top)
- Hiske Midavaine – Benches Collective (page 48 bottom)

World Leisure Organization

Expanding a global network
for a better society

Joanne Schroeder
&
Cristina Ortega Nuere



Joanne Schroeder is chair of the World Leisure Organization and Cristina Ortega Nuere is Chief Operating Officer of the World Leisure Organization.

In an increasingly interconnected and complex world, the World Leisure Organization (WLO) is strengthening its commitment to shaping a better society through the values and practices of leisure. As a global non-profit organisation with consultative status with United Nations, WLO promotes leisure as a force for human development, well-being, and social transformation. Over the past few years, the organisation has made significant progress in expanding its international presence and refining its strategic focus in alignment with global sustainability goals.

Global engagement and strategic partnerships

A cornerstone of the World Leisure Organization's current strategic direction is its dynamic expansion of institutional and regional engagement. By cultivating meaningful partnerships and leading strategic events across continents, WLO continues to position leisure as a powerful catalyst for sustainable development, innovation, and social transformation. These efforts are deeply intertwined - field-based programmes inform global discussions, and high-level events reinforce local initiatives - creating a feedback loop that advances the organisation's mission on multiple fronts.

In *Africa*, WLO has strengthened collaborations with universities, local governments, and civil

society organisations, most notably through the Leisure Experience Research Opportunity (LERO) in Cape Town. This fieldwork-based initiative brings together students and researchers to co-design inclusive recreation programmes that enhance health, foster youth leadership, and build community resilience in underserved neighbourhoods. The LERO programme has also become a focal point in WLO's event strategy, offering a participatory platform for engagement with public-sector actors and reinforcing leisure's role in local governance and well-being.

In the *Middle East*, particularly Qatar, WLO's influence has grown through its strategic involvement in the Qatar Travel Mart (QTM). In 2024, WLO curated the entire conference programme, addressing over 20 key topics within leisure-related industries and facilitating dialogue between global experts and national stakeholders. This initiative highlights WLO's ability to shape academic and professional discourse at the intersection of leisure, national development, and regional identity. The QTM also exemplifies how WLO's strategic events serve as incubators for policy innovation and interdisciplinary collaboration.

In *Asia*, WLO's S+R+D (Study, Research, and Development) programme in Thailand emphasises experiential learning and sustainable tourism. Students and early-career professionals engage directly with rural communities to explore the intersections of

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WLO's strategic events serve as incubators for policy innovation and interdisciplinary collaboration.

leisure, environmental education, and socio-economic development. These immersive experiences are often showcased at regional conferences and workshops, strengthening WLO's educational mission and reinforcing its commitment to youth empowerment and community-based learning.

In *Oceania*, the partnership with the World Leisure Centre of Excellence (WLCE) at the University of Otago represents a model for academic-practitioner synergy. Through research-driven fieldwork and student-led projects, the Otago WLCE has contributed





Projects centred on co-created tourism and cultural respect embody WLO's values of equity, sustainability, and decolonial practice.

significantly to leisure knowledge production in the South Pacific. Projects in the Cook Islands and Vanuatu, centred on co-created tourism and cultural respect, embody WLO's values of equity, sustainability, and decolonial practice. The Otago Field School Symposium has emerged as a key regional event, enabling scholars and practitioners to exchange insights and promote inclusive leisure practices rooted in local realities.

World Leisure Congress

Notably, the biennial World Leisure Congress in Europe - WLO's flagship event - brings global voices together to address pressing societal challenges through the lens of leisure. The upcoming 2025 edition in Breda, the Netherlands, themed 'Leisure for a Better Society,' will explore issues such as inequality, climate change, and mental health, reinforcing the organisation's mission at a global scale. Complementing the Congress, the World Leisure International Field School offers a unique learning experience that blends hands-on fieldwork with participation in the congress. This programme plays a vital role in nurturing the next generation of leisure professionals and this year centres on 'Redesigning Leisure: Creating Access and Inclusion for Everyone.' The programme

combines site visits, collaborative projects, and social activities, where students and experience experts work together to assess and improve accessibility to Breda's leisure venues.

Event strategy

These regional engagements are not isolated efforts but are dynamically interwoven with WLO's globally coordinated event strategy, which plays a vital role in sustaining and amplifying the impact of its work. Far more than opportunities for visibility, WLO's strategic events are deliberately crafted as immersive, participatory learning environments that foster meaningful dialogue, co-create knowledge, and seed long-term collaborations across sectors and geographies. Whether through academic congresses, practitioner workshops, or field-based symposia, these gatherings bring together diverse stakeholders - from students and researchers to policymakers and community leaders - who collectively examine leisure's evolving role in addressing contemporary societal challenges.

In synergy, WLO's regional programmes and global events form a cohesive and mutually reinforcing ecosystem of action, learning, and advocacy. Regional fieldwork and local initiatives generate grounded insights that inform high-level discussions, while strategic events offer a platform to elevate local voices and embed their lessons into broader policy and research frameworks. This integrated approach reflects WLO's bold, inclusive vision of leisure as a transformative force - one that bridges the local and the global, and champions community empowerment, youth leadership, cultural preservation, and sustainable development as core pillars of its mission.

A unifying vision

'Leisure for a Better Society' is more than just a congress theme - it is WLO's guiding vision. As we strive to align leisure practices with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, WLO works across disciplines to ensure that leisure contributes to environmental sustainability, social justice, inclusive education, and cultural participation.

In this sense, WLO's network acts as an ecosystem:

- *World Leisure Centres of Excellence (WLCEs)* at universities across five

continents lead research and education initiatives.

- *Special Interest Groups (SIGs)* connect professionals around specific themes.
- Partnerships with governments and institutions ensure that our work has policy relevance and societal impact.

The experiences presented in this edition - from Cape Town to Doha, Thailand to New Zealand - offer concrete examples of this global vision in action. Whether through sport-based development programmes, sustainable tourism practices, or youth-led learning experiences, these stories showcase how leisure can inspire new ways of living, working, and learning - more equitable, more sustainable, and more joyful. The Otago WLCE's contributions serve as a particularly illustrative case: its field-based model brings students into direct collaboration with local stakeholders, enabling real-time, participatory learning. This not only benefits the host communities but also cultivates a mindset of intercultural respect and planetary responsibility among future professionals.

Looking ahead

As we look toward the future, WLO is focused on:

- Strengthening regional hubs and institutional partnerships, particularly in China, Latin America, South-Africa, Middle East and Asia.
- Expanding our educational offer through training, mobility, and capacity-building.
- Facilitating cross-sectoral collaboration between culture, sport, tourism, recreation and well-being.
- Promoting youth participation through platforms such as the *World Leisure Youth Ambassadors* and field-based learning programmes.

With the support of our growing global community, WLO is committed to building a world where meaningful leisure experiences are accessible to all - advancing well-being, strengthening resilience, and unlocking human potential across borders. By advancing this vision through evidence-based research, capacity-building initiatives, and cross-sector collaboration, WLO continues to position leisure as a driver of equitable development, cultural vitality, and sustainable progress on a global scale.



The Otago approach for shaping sustainable tourism futures

Innovative teaching, inclusive research, and community partnerships

Anna Carr
Stu Hayes
Pooneh Torabian



Associate Professor Anna Carr, Dr Stu Hayes and Dr Pooneh Torabian are part of Ōtākou Whakaihu Waka Department of Tourism at the University of Otago.

The University of Otago Department of Tourism began as the Centre for Tourism in 1989. The Department is a member of several international tourism and hospitality organisations and is proud to be one of the nine World Leisure Centres of Excellence worldwide.

Teaching

The Department provides teaching at the undergraduate level through the BCom (Tourism, major or minor, and a hospitality minor) and BA (Tourism, Languages, and Culture) which attracts a variety of students to Otago. At the postgraduate level, the Department offers a PgCert (Tourism), PgDip (Tourism) and Master of Business (Tourism). Examples of specialised papers we offer include TOUR216 Sport Tourism, TOUR306 Ecotourism operations, TOUR 310 Leisure: Lives and Societies and TOUR522 (master's level) Tourism and Global Environmental Change which run alongside core papers on destination management, research methods, and ethics.

Student demand in tourism is rapidly increasing, as more people recognise the sector's potential for well-paid, meaningful careers. Many pursue postgraduate studies, aspiring to roles in planning, governance, academia, and consultancy. There is a strong demand for skilled graduates in this field, and we educate them to become forward-thinking policymakers and decision-makers, planners, and managers

in heritage, conservation, tourism, and leisure sectors.

Graduates work for destination management organisations and government departments e.g. the Department of Conservation, Heritage New Zealand, the Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and a variety of tourism operations. Many local graduates go on their 'Overseas Experience' working in tourism and related positions in London, India, China, Vietnam, Australia, Canada, Europe as well as major New Zealand tourism destinations or cities. Many of the international students fall in love with our city and country, staying on to live in Dunedin.

Our research-informed teaching explores issues including the UN SDGs, resilience and regenerative tourism, featuring case studies and work alongside communities at a range of Southern and Central Otago locations. Connection to and protection of our natural landscapes, cultural heritage and diverse coastal, alpine, and rural environments are central to what we teach. Visitor demand is important but not as much as the resilience of local communities and the environmental habitats that host the visitors. We are also interested in degrowth and the repositioning of the tourism sector in a manner responsive to local communities' needs and quadruple bottom lines (not just tourism industry demand and visitor demand).

Experiential learning and field-based opportunities are a cornerstone of all our programmes. A strong example of this is our undergraduate and postgraduate event management papers. These courses teach students how to plan, design, implement, and critically assess event experiences across diverse contexts. Blending theory with practice, students work in teams to create and

deliver real events - such as a Community Night Market and an Orienteering for Good event - born out of classroom planning activities.

Research

Following the 2023 World Leisure Congress, which took place in Otago, Dr Stu Hayes and postgraduate student Hannah McKeeman (University of Otago), in collaboration with Dr Willem Coetzee from Western Sydney University (WLCE), conducted research examining how - and to what extent - New Zealand leisure organisations foster inclusive environments for LGBTQIA2S+ communities. Through interviews with leisure providers, the study identified a range of personal, organisational, and societal barriers and enablers to inclusion. Participants emphasised that creating truly inclusive spaces requires a collective, sector-wide commitment to allyship, accountability, and the active dismantling of discrimination. They also recognised the importance of personal growth, noting that advocating LGBTQIA2S+ communities involves continually evolving

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Our research informed teaching explores issues including the UN SDGs, resilience, and regenerative tourism.



their own perspectives and practices. The report serves both as a call to action and a practical guide, offering concrete recommendations for leisure practitioners seeking to advance LGBTIQIA2S+ inclusion and belonging - both in Aotearoa New Zealand and globally.

Other staff members are active in interdisciplinary research addressing a range of complex social and environmental issues. One example is Good Nature, Bad Nature, a Royal Society of New Zealand Marsden-funded project led by Professor Brent Lovelock. This research investigated sociocultural values associated with invasive species and how these relationships differ across recreational and leisure settings such as hunting, fishing, and conservation volunteering. The project incorporated narratives from diverse participants, including Māori and Pasifika communities, recent migrants, and younger New Zealanders, exploring how invasive species are perceived and valued in different cultural and experiential contexts.

In addition to collaborative projects, individual academics also contribute actively to leisure research. Dr Pooneh Torabian has examined the role of arts and leisure in supporting community integration and the resettlement process for refugee women in Dunedin. Her recent study involved Afghan women participating in a series of art workshops facilitated by community-based artists. "With language being a barrier for some migrants, this series of workshops helped women with self-expression through art as an alternative way of communication," Dr Torabian said. "The women found the workshops to be therapeutic and some of them mentioned they were helpful in working through their trauma. The last workshop led to the formation of a group of women who get together to sew every Friday. We were thrilled to see that the workshops helped women with establishing a sense of belonging and network building. I see potential in expanding the scope of this project and am looking at different avenues to pursue funding." Dr Torabian is now exploring Māori men's experiences of participating in

an art programme to see how arts and leisure help with rehabilitation and in connecting the men with their culture. "My ultimate goal is to bring about change through my research both within and beyond academia."

Department staff provide supervision for individual research projects at the master's, Doctor of Business Administration (DBA), and PhD levels. Many of the PhD students are tourism educators or academics from overseas universities throughout the globe. As of 2025, the Department supports approximately 130 equivalent full-time (EFT) undergraduate students enrolled in tourism courses, in addition to over 50 postgraduate master's and PhD students.

Industry and community engagement

The department has alumni living all over the world. Many of our staff have blended academia with their prior tourism or leisure sector experiences as employees or business owners, so, our industry engagement is very organic and natural. This engagement is illustrated when we go on the several local and regional field trips as part of our teachings. Industry and community speakers contribute to such learning experiences as we explore the rich cultural and natural heritage of southern New Zealand. Our academic staff and research students undertake fieldwork around the world (e.g. Nepal, Indonesia, Vietnam, China, Europe, and the Pacific Islands), often in collaboration with local and Indigenous communities. Staff are active at a local level with Dunedin Host the local tourism, events and hospitality industry group in Dunedin and also volunteer their time with not-for-profits such as Southern Heritage Trust (Dunedin) or work alongside the domestic and international tourism sector.

Research conferences and symposia

Over the past 36 years, the Department has regularly hosted major conferences and symposia, including the 2023 World Leisure Congress, CAUTHE, ANZALS, and the ATRA International Adventure conferences. A flagship annual event is the Otago Tourism Policy School (TPS), held in Queenstown. Since its launch in 2017 under the leadership of Honorary Professor James Higham, TPS has grown into a nationally

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Connection to and protection of our natural landscapes, cultural heritage and diverse coastal, alpine and rural environments are central to what we teach.



recognised forum. TPS brings together leading voices from tourism, government, and academia to tackle some of the sector's most pressing challenges. With a strong focus on future-focused dialogue, the event welcomes international speakers, industry leaders, policymakers, and not-for-profit representatives for dynamic and solutions-driven discussions.

The 2025 TPS was fully booked, highlighting the event's growing relevance. Staff and postgraduate students opened the programme by showcasing current departmental research during the TPS Research Forum. Key sessions featured prominent speakers such as Tourism Minister Louise Upston, who highlighted tourism's central role in the Government's strategy to double exports over the next decade - aligning with the event's theme: How can we effectively resource our tourism system? In addition to formal sessions, TPS also hosts free public talks to engage the wider community.

In conclusion

At Otago, tourism is taught through real-world experience, strong research, and deep community ties. With a focus on sustainability and inclusion, the Department is helping shape future leaders ready to build a better, more thoughtful tourism industry - in New Zealand and beyond.

More information

- www.otago.ac.nz/tourism

Photography

- Dave Bull (page 53 left)
- Hagen (page 53 right)

Qatar advances towards Vision 2030

Becoming a stakeholder in the global leisure landscape

Fahad Ebrahim Juma Muhana
Denisa Spinkova
Mireia Iglesias



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Once a quiet peninsula known for its pearl divers and sweeping desert landscapes, Qatar has emerged as a bold global player - combining ancient heritage with futuristic ambition. Nestled along the shimmering coastline of the Arabian Gulf, the country's capital, Doha, has transformed into a dynamic hub of ultramodern architecture, cultural innovation, and world-class infrastructure. From the iconic Museum of Islamic Art - a limestone jewel inspired by centuries of Islamic design - standing proudly on the Corniche waterfront, to the country's expansive investments in sports, tourism, and cultural programming, Qatar has set its sights on becoming a global destination for excellence in leisure (tourism, culture, sports, and recreation).

While its urban centres pulse with modernity - from glittering skyscrapers to vibrant public spaces - Qatar remains deeply rooted in tradition. Falconry, artisanal crafts, and hospitality customs still shape its cultural identity, even as it opens its arms to the world. Today, Qatar is not just building stadiums and museums - it is building a narrative of resilience, creativity, and inclusive growth, where tourism, sports, and culture intersect to shape the cities of tomorrow.

The foundation of Qatar's transformation

Over the past two decades, Qatar has emerged as a dynamic and forward-thinking nation, driven by its commitment to economic diversification, sustainability, and cultural enrichment. At the core of this transformation is Qatar National Vision 2030 (QNV 2030), launched in 2008 as a roadmap for long-term development. Designed to reduce dependence on hydrocarbons and foster a knowledge-based economy, QNV 2030 promotes economic growth while balancing social development, environmental sustainability, and cultural preservation.

To realise this vision, Qatar has implemented three National Development Strategies (NDSs). NDS-1 (2011-2016) laid the groundwork for governance, infrastructure expansion, and institutional reforms, embedding long-term planning in government entities. NDS-2 (2018-2022) advanced economic diversification, private-sector growth, and resource sustainability, while strengthening education, healthcare, and public services. A key milestone was the integration of global partnerships, reinforcing Qatar's diplomatic and economic influence. NDS-3 (2024-2030) is now ushering in the final phase, ensuring Qatar's transition into a fully diversified, globally integrated economy that fosters innovation and sustainable progress.

Beyond economic strength, Qatar has positioned itself as a global hub for leisure, tourism, sports, and culture, enhancing its reputation as a premier destination. The country has invested in world-class hospitality, sports infrastructure, and cultural initiatives, blending modern luxury with rich heritage. From hosting the FIFA World Cup 2022, which showcased its ability to organise global mega-events, to launching the Qatar National

Tourism Strategy 2030 aimed at attracting millions of visitors, Qatar is redefining its presence on the world stage. As it advances towards Vision 2030, the tourism, sports, and cultural sectors will remain central to shaping Qatar's global identity and long-term prosperity.

Key forces: Qatar Tourism and Qatar Olympic Committee

With a strategic blend of vision, leadership, infrastructure, and institutional excellence, two of Qatar's most influential forces - Qatar Tourism (QT) and the Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC) - are at the forefront of shaping the nation's global leisure identity. In partnership with public and private sector stakeholders, they are cultivating a dynamic ecosystem where tourism, culture, sports, and recreation intersect to drive economic diversification, cultural diplomacy, and global engagement.

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Qatar is building a narrative of resilience, creativity, and inclusive growth, where tourism, sports, and culture intersect to shape the cities of tomorrow.



occupancy, increased participation in cultural and leisure events, and the growing diversification of source markets, all aligning with Qatar's Vision 2030 objectives.

Together, Qatar Tourism and the Qatar Olympic Committee are not only shaping the future of the nation's leisure landscape - they are advancing a bold and unified national vision where tourism, sport, and culture serve as powerful engines of sustainable development, international collaboration, and long-term legacy.

Running parallel to this, the Qatar Olympic Committee has been instrumental in cementing Qatar's global reputation as a leader in international sport. Since its establishment in 1979 and recognition by the International Olympic Committee in 1980, the QOC has worked in close collaboration with 23 national sports federations to support athletes from grassroots to elite levels. The Committee's leadership has enabled Qatar to host and deliver major sporting events, from the 2006 Asian Games and the FIFA World Cup 2022 to upcoming events such as the FIBA Basketball World Cup 2027 and the Asian Games 2030. Alongside its commitment to infrastructure development, athletic excellence, and the values of the Olympic movement, the QOC has also embedded sustainability into its strategic vision - ensuring that sporting progress aligns with environmental responsibility and long-term impact. Through these efforts, the QOC has elevated Qatar's international profile and positioned the country as a trusted, innovative, and sustainable sporting nation.

Qatar Tourism has spearheaded the country's bold and forward-thinking efforts to position itself as a premier global destination. Leveraging Qatar's rich cultural heritage, world-class infrastructure, and renowned hospitality, QT has implemented the National Tourism Sector Strategy to create immersive visitor experiences that blend tradition with innovation. From iconic landmarks like the Museum of Islamic Art and Katara Cultural Village to modern developments such as Msheireb Downtown Doha, the country's tourism offerings continue to expand. The sector's upward momentum is further supported by luxury resort development, visa facilitation, and enhanced connectivity through Qatar Airways. In 2024, international visitor arrivals surpassed five million for the first time, representing a 25% year-on-year growth – a milestone highlighted in the Qatar Tourism Annual Performance Report. The report also underscores rising hotel

WLO and Qatar working on an integrated leisure ecosystem

Since its inaugural edition, the World Leisure Organization (WLO) has played an active role in fostering the Qatar Travel Mart (QTM), reinforcing its position as a premier platform for global travel and tourism. Launched to bring together the world's top destinations and highlight key trends in sports, MICE, business, cultural, leisure, luxury, medical, and halal tourism. WLO's involvement has grown significantly over the years, with its contributions extending beyond participation to curating the event's conference scientific programme in 2024. By shaping discussions on over 20 key topics and engaging more than 40 international and local experts, WLO has strengthened QTM's intellectual impact, fostering knowledge exchange, industry dialogue, and strategic collaboration.

The Qatar Travel Mart (QTM) conference programme, driven by WLO in 2024, was a testament to Qatar's

emergence as a global leader in the leisure sector, where leisure - tourism, sports, culture, and recreation - is powered by a dynamic ecosystem that integrates academia, world-class infrastructure, and cross-sector innovation. The programme featured an impressive lineup of speakers, presentations, and discussions, including Qatar Tourism and Qatar Olympic Committee representatives, among many others, addressing key themes such as sustainable tourism development, sports as a driver of economic growth, cultural heritage preservation, and the role of technology in enhancing the visitor experience. Experts from across the globe, alongside local thought leaders, engaged in dialogues that not only highlighted Qatar's remarkable progress in the leisure sector but also positioned it as a model for integrated, future-focused tourism strategies.

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In 2024, international visitor arrivals surpassed five million for the first time, representing a 25% year-on-year growth.

We witness first-hand how this intellectual and strategic engagement is deeply rooted in Qatar's commitment to developing a knowledge-based leisure industry, where education, research, infrastructure, and professional networks work in harmony to drive innovation and long-term sustainability. This collaborative ecosystem, combined with Qatar's high-quality leisure and cultural infrastructure, has positioned the country as a hub for world-class attractions, including Katara Hospitality, Qatar Museums, and the newly opened Meryal Waterpark - offering visitors a unique blend of heritage, recreation, and modern experiences.

Building upon this strong foundation, Qatar's leadership in the leisure and tourism sector is further reinforced by a robust professional and institutional network that champions inclusivity, sustainability, and long-term impact. Strengthening its position as a sustainable tourism destination, Qatar continues to integrate innovation, health, sustainability, and mobility into its tourism strategy, with organisations such as Qatar Mobility Innovations Center (QMIC) and Enbat Holding spearheading smart technologies, wellness initiatives, and sustainable tourism solutions.

As Qatar advances towards Vision 2030, it is evolving into a global hub for leisure, tourism, sports, culture, and recreation, shaping a legacy of sustainable and culturally enriching experiences for visitors and future generations.

Photography

• Ahmad Alnaji (page 54)



Leisure Experience Research Opportunity in South Africa

Sustainable recreation programmes for active communities of the city of Cape Town Metropol

Marie Young
Makhaya Malema
Miklos Banhidi



Marie Young is a professor at the University of Western Cape Town, Dr Makhaya Malema works at the University of Western Cape Town, and Miklos Banhidi is a professor at the Hungarian University of Sports Science.

The Leisure Experience Research Opportunity (LERO) provided opportunities for World Leisure Centers of Excellence, the World Leisure Young Ambassadors, and students from other interested institutions to participate in an international-orientated field research project in South Africa aimed at assessing recreation programmes to foster active communities in the City of Cape Town Metropol (CoCT). LERO occurred in Cape Town in October 2024 and was hosted by the Department of Sport, Recreation and Exercise Science at the University of the Western Cape.

Cape Town, located on the south-west coast of South Africa, is renowned for its stunning natural landscapes, rich cultural heritage, and vibrant recreational opportunities. The City of Cape Town's Recreation and Parks Department plays a vital role in enhancing the quality of life for residents and visitors by managing and maintaining public recreational spaces, parks, and green areas. Their vision is to create a vibrant and healthy city by providing accessible and well-maintained outdoor spaces for leisure, sports, and community activities.

A wide range of programmes

The department's Active Communities programmes engage people of all ages in physical activities that promote health and well-being. Fun and social engagement are at the centre

of each programme, ensuring participants enjoy their time while staying active.

Various youth leadership programmes and annual camps are organised in partnership with organisations like Chrysalis Academy and Waves for Change. These programmes equip young people with leadership skills and provide opportunities for personal growth and social cohesion. During school holidays, the department offers Winter Holiday Recreation Programmes, which include activities such as board games, Indigenous games, hiking, and holiday camps, helping to keep children engaged in healthy behaviours. After-school programmes, conducted at recreation hubs and community centres every day, cater to about 25,000 children a month. These include activities such as football, arts and crafts, life skills, and reading. The Arts Awesh programme offers children opportunities to engage in various art forms, including the performing arts, visual arts, music, and drama.

Programmes for adults and seniors focus on activities like aerobics, walking clubs, fitness exercises, and educational talks, promoting active ageing. Inclusive programmes for people living with disabilities ensure that everyone has access to recreational activities. The success of these programmes is primarily attributed to community engagement, with volunteering opportunities promoting mental and physical well-being, contentment, and social connections.

Auto-ethnographic approach

LERO used an auto-ethnographic approach to understand the experiences and challenges of promoting sustainability and well-being through recreational activities. The project supported the UNESCO Sustainable Development Goals and involved students from

various universities worldwide. The methodology consisted of several phases, beginning with students visiting local community recreation programmes in their home countries. They then participated in online sessions to learn about Cape Town and its Recreation and Parks Department and attended workshops on research methods and academic writing skills. Additionally, they conducted fieldwork. The fieldwork phase involved students travelling to Cape Town, where they spent two days experiencing the community recreation programmes first-hand. They took extensive notes and pictures, drew maps, and made videos to document their observations.

After their fieldwork, the students analysed their notes under supervision, identifying recurrent themes and organising principles for their report and presentation. Finally, they prepared a written report and a presentation on their findings to the City of Cape Town's

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Fun and social engagement are at the centre of each programme, ensuring participants enjoy their time while staying active.

Recreation and Parks Department, offering valuable insights and recommendations.

The research identified several key themes and sub-themes related to the recreational programmes the City of Cape Town offers.

Theme 1: recreational programmes

Cape Town offers various recreational programmes to promote physical health, social interaction, and community engagement for all age groups. These include recreation leadership development, chair aerobics, kickboxing, support groups, arts and crafts, open play, sports, Indigenous games, skills development, out-of-school activities, holiday activities, early childhood development, after-school activities, aerobic fitness, and hiking challenges.

Field studies at the Cape Town Recreation Centres reveal positive outcomes, with participants noting improvements in physical health, stress management, social connections, and personal development. Programmes like aerobic fitness help manage chronic pain and enhance quality of life. Children develop teamwork, leadership, and social skills, while adults and seniors benefit from better mental health and stronger social networks. Participants report gains in physical fitness, mental well-being, social engagement, and crucial life skills such as leadership, communication, and problem-solving. Activities foster community, respect, and self-motivation, enhancing social skills and self-esteem.

However, there is a gap in programmes specifically for youth at risk of gang involvement. Challenges include ensuring participant safety, programme sustainability, financial constraints, and the need for more trained staff. Security concerns and financial limitations affect programme implementation. The department addresses these issues through community engagement, leveraging volunteers, and partnering with local organisations to ensure the success and continuity of recreational programmes.

Theme 2: target groups

The findings highlight the crucial role of recreational spaces in supporting various community groups in South Africa. For children

under 18, these spaces enhance cognitive, physical, emotional, mental, and social development, with programmes in Steenberg, Seawinds, and Coniston engaging young children and teenagers. Elders, defined as males over 65 and females over 60, benefit from activities such as chair aerobics and arts and crafts, which keep them active and socially connected. Inclusive programmes for people with disabilities foster a sense of belonging and independence, improving their self-image and social acceptance. Youth aged 18 to 34 face challenges such as substance abuse and gang involvement, but leadership development programmes at recreation centres aim to provide positive engagement and skills, although participation remains low. Additionally, these centres promote unity and cultural awareness by welcoming participants from diverse backgrounds, despite occasional disruptions from gangsterism and religious events.

Theme 3: facility management

The mission to enhance Cape Town's lifestyle through well-maintained sports and recreation facilities faces several challenges. Resource constraints, including financial, human, and technological limitations, hinder sustainability and implementation, often leading to pollution and budget cuts. Complex regulatory frameworks and environmental laws add to the difficulties, with community resistance and political interference complicating collaboration with local governments and stakeholders. Facilities like Facility No. 2, open to all community members free of charge, struggle with inadequate staffing and resources, impacting administration and programme delivery. Budget cuts further exacerbate these issues, reducing resources, operating hours, and maintenance, particularly affecting low-income communities. Despite these challenges, recreational activities promote physical activity, mental health, and community cohesion. Inclusivity remains a concern, with limited accommodation for people with disabilities. Safety and security issues, such as crime and shootings, also impact the use of recreational spaces. The need for sustainable planning, increased advocacy, and support from local governments, NGOs, and the community is crucial to preserving

these essential resources and ensuring they serve all community members effectively.

Theme 4: community and stakeholder involvement

The LERO student researchers assessed community and stakeholder involvement in three Muizenberg, Cape Town centres: Seawinds, Steenberg, and Coniston. Community stakeholders played crucial roles, including members, leaders, churches, South African police services, and gang members. The involvement of community members varied; in Seawinds there were active participants, with some facilitating programmes and assisting with children's activities. In contrast, Coniston lacked community support, hindering programme implementation. Steenberg benefited from strong community involvement, with programmes developed by locals. Community leaders advocated for better resources and infrastructure, ensuring the centres' growth. Churches contributed to moral and social development, offering after-school activities and mentorship for at-risk youth. Gang members had a dual impact: some disrupted activities, while others promoted anti-violence campaigns and youth programmes. South African police services ensured safety, collaborating with community leaders and staff to deter crime, though their presence was met with mixed reactions. The study highlighted the need for better community-police relations to improve the safety of recreational spaces. Overall, active community involvement was central to the success of these centres, but financial barriers and inconsistent access to facilities limited their impact.

To conclude

The recreational programmes offered by the City of Cape Town significantly enhance participants' health and well-being, playing a crucial role in improving the quality of life for residents and visitors. To address identified challenges, the department should increase funding, enhance security, develop tailored youth programmes, strengthen community engagement, and offer staff training. These recommendations will help sustain a vibrant, healthy, and inclusive community.



Learning by living in Thailand's coastal communities

Experiential education for sustainable development



Miklos Banhidi is a professor at the Hungarian University of Sport Science in Budapest, Dr Chenkan Chuchoet works at Thailand National Sport University, Dr Lee Kwan Meng works at the University of Putra Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur, and Marie Young is an associate professor at the University of Western Cape in South Africa.

Following the LERO project in South Africa, the second Study, Research, and Development project took place in Thailand from 17 to 26 January 2025. Organised by World Leisure Youth Ambassador representatives, the project involved students and supervisors from six countries exploring sustainable leisure activities, aiming to develop community models focused on environmental and social responsibility. Research centred on three areas: environment, health, and sustainable communities, with activities in Bangkok and its surrounding areas, as well as a low-traffic beach area at Thai Bay. The project provided participants with a field study experience. They explored various data collection methods, including observation, photo analysis, and measurement tools. Among the research methods, participants conducted structured observations on sustainability, took photos for analysis, and used measurement tools to assess the purity and temperature of the air and seawater. Here are some of the programme's main activities, results, and evaluations.

Observing the main tourist attractions

Tourist arrivals in Thailand reached 35.6 million in 2024, marking a 20.7% increase compared to the previous year. The primary motivation for these tourists was to visit the country's renowned cultural sites and seaside areas, these destinations are well known for their role in cultural preservation, educational value, and economic benefits.

The group's objective extended beyond simply seeing historical landmarks - they also aimed to analyse the tourist appeal of these sites. Sightseeing tours in Bangkok and Ayutthaya reaffirmed their popularity. These destinations are supported by modern and traditional

transportation options such as tuk-tuks, the lush tropical river landscapes bisecting the cities, and architectural elements that vividly reflect Thailand's history.

Additional attractions, such as dressing in traditional costumes around the temples to experience the country's cultural heritage and riding elephants, further enrich the tourist experience. However, the sustainability of these heritage sites is increasingly under pressure. The influx of tourists, fast-food chains, and souvenir shops threaten their authenticity.

Another significant tourism attraction in Thailand is the floating and train markets, which represent unique cultural phenomena not found elsewhere. Historically, these markets were established in locations that allowed residents convenient access by waterways or rail. While some vendors still offer traditional goods like fried bananas and handmade crafts, mass-produced souvenirs and international food options are becoming more dominant. This shift risks eroding cultural integrity and displacing indigenous traditions. Despite this, observing authentic cultural practices within these markets remains possible. This trend has not yet reached the small village visited by the group, where schoolchildren continue to learn traditional instruments and dances, warmly welcome visitors with flowers, and serve authentic local dishes. However, there are concerns that these traditions may gradually fade as tourism expands into the area.

Measuring the environmental sustainability

The group measured seawater and drinking water purity and monitored soil temperatures to evaluate environmental sustainability. Findings from international studies have raised concerns about rising water pollution levels in coastal areas vital for tourism. The quality of drinking

tap water has notably improved following implementing a modern water treatment system that meets the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) standards with total dissolved solids (TDS) levels below 500 ppm. Seawater salinity was recorded at 3.02%, slightly below the global average, with similar results in treated tap water.

A local family-run farm exemplified sustainable agriculture. Five years ago, it transitioned to organic practices and used crop rotation and cow manure instead of chemicals. It produces up to six harvests annually, supplying local markets and hotels, and processes surplus into products like chips and pizza. This model integrates traditional farming with sustainable tourism.

Coastal sand temperatures ranged from 29°C to 36°C, with similar readings observed on a sweet potato farm 300 metres inland. This farm, which can yield up to six harvests annually,

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The World Health Organization emphasises the importance of spirituality in health.

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Beyond its function as a traditional plantation, the farm has evolved into a visitor centre, offering tourists experiential learning opportunities.

increasingly relies on irrigation to manage water supply and elevated daytime temperatures. Research indicates that temperatures above 32°C can hinder tuber growth, while optimal conditions are around 24°C. Palm plantations also show promise, as pineapples and coconuts thrive between 20°C and 30°C.

Workshops on physical and spiritual health

The World Health Organization emphasises the importance of spirituality in health. Regarding the role of spirituality in preventing and curing diseases, 55.22% of doctors opined that a spiritual person falls ill less frequently. A large majority (87.39%) also believed that a spiritual person copes better with illness, and 80% thought they recover faster.

The research group considered Buddhist temples a spiritual site, and once, the local abbot was invited to lead a short meditation session. After a brief introduction, participants could try the practice, which was instructive for everyone. However, there was some language barrier, and there was not enough time for a detailed explanation. Still, it was enough to understand the basic meditation techniques used by the monks in their daily lives.

The programme offered essential insights into Thai massage, which combines elements of folk medicine, acupressure, yoga-like stretches, and deep tissue techniques. The benefits of this practice include enhanced flexibility, improved blood circulation, reduced muscle tension, and support for energy balance and overall wellness. A qualified instructor led the



workshop but could only offer limited explanation due to the technical skills required and the need for a solid grasp of human anatomy, muscles, and the nervous system. Furthermore, the instructor encountered challenges in conveying her instructions effectively in English for all participants to comprehend. Participants gained foundational knowledge about the effects and applications of this ancient treatment technique.

Observing sustainable ecotourism models

One of Thailand's best sustainable tourism sectors is ecotourism, which has significant economic, social, and environmental impacts on Thailand. Considering this, the group sought to explore model projects capable of attracting tourists while promoting sustainability. One such initiative visited was a banana and coconut plantation known as the *House of Thinker and Maker*. Over 15 years, the owner established a thriving agricultural enterprise, distributing crops through an extensive dealer network. Beyond its function as a traditional plantation, the farm has evolved into a visitor centre, offering tourists experiential learning opportunities such as dyeing textiles with banana flower sap, crafting traditional sweets, and making toy boats from palm leaves. This innovative model highlights creative, sustainable applications for banana plants beyond fruit production, thereby contributing to cultural preservation and long-term viability of the plantation.

The purpose of visiting another ecotourism visitor centre was to learn about the project to save the coastal mangrove forests from massive extinction, which was initiated and supported by King

Rama IX. The centre, which presents scientific knowledge, offers visitors a walking trail and a water tour to learn about local flora and fauna, which lay their eggs here, ensuring their survival. Mangrove forests provide a sustainable habitat, but lacking such habitats would reduce the ecological balance. The group wondered how the project could be actively connected internationally and why the centre is not better advertised, even among ecotourists.

Conclusion

Overall, the project was very successful, with participants reporting that they learned a lot while also having the opportunity to contribute to local development and collect research materials. The organisers understood that the participants' expectations were primarily focused on tourism experiences, but they were also open to learning more about sustainability issues. A professional study is being prepared to summarise the research results in more detail, which we intend to publish in an international journal. According to the participants, it was an interesting and good programme overall. However, for any learning purposes, it should be more focused. From a learning context, this model of extension education, experiential learning, action learning, and non-formal learning is fun and appealing, especially to young people and learners. The shared experiences also made the learning more exciting and absorbing and enhanced the relationships among group members. They all expressed their wish to get involved in the following projects if similar activities are organised in Thailand again or elsewhere.

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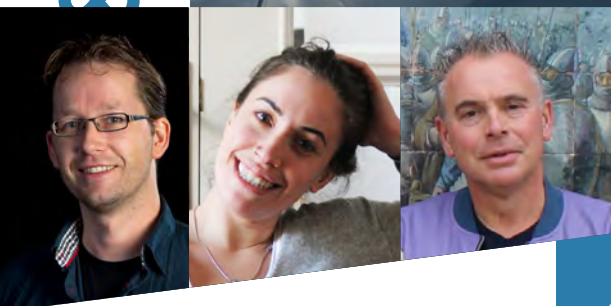
This shift risks eroding cultural integrity and displacing indigenous traditions.



The World Leisure Field School 2025

The value accelerator in creating accessible leisure and events

Marco van Leeuwen
Mireia Iglesias
Peter Horsten



Marco van Leeuwen is a lecturer and researcher in Ethics and Research Integrity at Breda University of Applied Sciences. Mireia Iglesias is Communication & Events Officer at the World Leisure Organization. Peter Horsten is a lecturer and researcher at Academy for Leisure & Events, Breda University of Applied Sciences.

In August 2025, the city of Breda hosts the 2025 World Leisure Congress. The theme of the congress is 'Leisure for a Better Society'. Just before the congress, the World Leisure International Field School will focus on concrete ways of creating 'a better society'. Students from the hosting university, Breda University of Applied Sciences, and from various World Leisure Centers of Excellence around the world, will work together to develop ideas to answer the following question: How can Breda become an accessible, welcoming, and inclusive leisure city for people with disabilities?

The schedule will feature a diverse mix of company visits and project design sessions. Field School students, from different cultures, contexts, and academic backgrounds will work together with experiential experts (people with disabilities, who are experts in understanding and navigating their specific conditions) to assess the accessibility of several leisure organisations and attractions in Breda, and co-create ideas for improvement. The outcomes of this collaboration will be showcased during the World Leisure Congress.

For ambitious young academics, the benefits from participating in this Field School includes

contributing to a socially relevant project. Young leisure specialists hoping to expand their professional network will be immersed in a vibrant community of enthusiastic peers and leisure professionals and scholars, enabling them to make friends and establish professional contacts that might last a lifetime.

This project aligns with ambitions that have already been gaining traction in Breda. The local organisation *Breda voor Iedereen*, for instance, published their 'Manifest Breda van en voor Iedereen' ('Breda belongs to and works for everyone' Manifesto) in 2022, in which they outlined their ambitions for an optimally accessible Breda. The underlying ambition was - and still is - to make Breda win the Access City Awards election in 2030. The World Leisure Field School 2025 will do its part in making this ambition more achievable.

Talent and inclusion in the business events sector

The Field School is itself part of a larger project aimed at making business events more accessible for people with disabilities, funded by the BE>FUTURE Accelerator Grant Programme, co-funded by the European Union.

The business events sector is a key link in the ecosystem of exchanging capital - economic, social, and cultural. We aim to help it prepare for the future by co-developing a fair, evidence-based approach to accessibility and inclusion.

Collaboration between future professionals and experts with disabilities will integrate universal design into business events, enhancing accessibility for all. For people with disabilities, participation as either event visitors or event creators (at the organisational and/or operational level(s)) is often still a problem today. This project aims to remedy that problem by co-designing accessibility and inclusion

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Young professionals from a variety of nationalities and cultural backgrounds will work together with experiential experts with disabilities.

solutions with future events and leisure professionals, including students, experts with disabilities, industry professionals, and scholars. Our aims are:

- 1. Full inclusion:** Business events must move beyond passive accessibility to actively integrate people with disabilities, ensuring inclusion in leisure, work, and career growth.
- 2. Equal participation:** Inclusion goes beyond attendance, people with disabilities must shape event planning, operations, and leadership, ensuring a fairer, more dynamic industry.
- 3. Restoring the human dimension:** As business events embrace digitisation, prioritising accessibility that ensures genuine human interaction, empathy, and meaningful engagement.

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The tools developed in this process will form a scalable, shareable framework for addressing future accessibility and inclusion challenges in the industry.

The project

The project itself is a co-creative design process. Step 1 is centred around the World Leisure Field School 2025, connected to the World Leisure Congress 2025, in Breda, the Netherlands, in the second half of August 2025. The Field School includes online pre-sessions to collect insights into event accessibility from around the world; on-site visitor journey assessments with international Field School students and experiential experts of two leisure facilities in Breda, plus the World Leisure Congress 2025 business event; and inviting input from the hundreds of international leisure and events experts attending the congress, through participatory action research and design research interventions.

Building on Step 1, in Step 2 BUAs students will develop a strategic plan to enhance business event accessibility for people with disabilities, both as attendees and contributors. They will collaborate with other universities from the World Leisure Centers of Excellence network to integrate intercultural insights. Step 3 will consist of a trial event at BUAs to test prototype solutions and refine plans based on the recommendations from Steps 1 and 2. An international jury, including experiential experts, business event professionals, and researchers, will assess these plans.



Innovative scope

In this project, we strive for a substantial, significant improvement of business event concepts by integrating accessibility without disrupting established practices or sidelining industry veterans. By leveraging best practices and co-designing solutions, we merge experience with fresh perspectives, fostering innovation while ensuring inclusive participation, particularly for people with disabilities.

This project will drive significant progress by embedding universal accessibility assessments into business events, tourism, professional gatherings, and urban leisure spaces, enhancing existing services and infrastructure to create a fairer and more forward-thinking industry.

Value first, revenue will follow

There are considerable market opportunities for business events if they include people with disabilities in a more systematic manner: the Global Economics of Disability Report 2024 values the 'global disability market' at over US\$18 trillion. There is also growing scholarly interest in the events sector for including participants with disabilities. In addition, there is cross-sectoral potential if we consider similar access-and-inclusion initiatives in tourism and aviation - essential partners for the business events sector.

However, at its core, this project is not about profit but about creating value - ideas, recommendations, and concepts that enhance business events for visitors and improve labour market opportunities for people with disabilities. By fostering accessibility and inclusion, we help retain industry expertise while enriching the event experience

for all stakeholders. We will provide concrete specifications and prototype event designs, refined through user experience insights from MICE organisers, future professionals, and people with disabilities. The tools developed in this process will form a scalable, shareable framework for addressing future accessibility and inclusion challenges in the industry.

The project's budget reflects its priorities, with the majority of funding dedicated to those at the heart of this project's impact: people with disabilities. They will be paid for their experiential expertise. As we have already done in previous projects, we will collaborate with LFB, an advocacy organisation for (and run by) people with mild cognitive disabilities. This organisation supports a programme in which its members are trained as *experiential experts* (also called 'self-advocates') - people with first-person expertise in the challenges of specific disabilities, intimate knowledge of which accessibility solutions might be feasible (and which might not be), and the training to operationalise this expertise to assess and advise on accessibility challenges of businesses. This unique expertise deserves real recognition - experiential experts should be compensated at a fair market rate for their specialist knowledge.

Meaningful change as a value accelerator

We intend to help the business sector to prepare for the future by co-creating an evidence-based, tested and testable, ethically grounded and fair operationalisation of the oft-used concepts of accessibility and inclusion. We will experiment with co-designed solutions to find the best approaches to the main accessibility challenges of the business events sector. By investing in people, ideas and technology, we drive meaningful, lasting change. We will develop a fair, ethical, and respectful approach to integrating people with disabilities in the business events sector. In this way, the project serves as a value accelerator: the value we aim to co-create does not benefit merely the stakeholders directly involved in the project, but also constitutes a pay-it-forward scheme in which we develop innovations, solutions, and concepts that we will make available for free to everyone. Improving the accessibility of the business events sector for people with disabilities, in order to include them more effectively, fairly and ethically both as business event visitors and organisers, can truly be seen as a value accelerator.

Photography

• Ruben Klink (page 60 top)



Building bridges between science and industry

Centre of Expertise in Leisure, Tourism & Hospitality

Anke Arts
& Ton Vermeulen



Anke Arts is interim director at CELTH.
Ton Vermeulen is editor-in-chief at NRIT.

Centres of Expertise (CoE) are public-private partnerships between universities of applied sciences and the professional field, with a distinct focus on societal challenges. Within these centres, investments are made in research, innovation, and lifelong learning. In the domain of leisure, tourism and hospitality, the Netherlands has one CoE: CELTH. This centre works with thematic research agendas under which projects are developed to address urgent issues in the domain. Bringing this knowledge back to the industry is an important task of CELTH, effectively building a bridge between science and industry. Events such as the Industry Day of the World Leisure Congress play a significant role in this knowledge dissemination. In this article, we will describe Dutch tourism policy, the role of CoEs and CELTH in it, CELTH's research agendas, practical implementation in projects, and how this knowledge is returned to the industry.

Dutch tourism policy

The Netherlands embarked on a major tourism focus change in 2019 with 'Perspective 2030'. In this widely supported national vision, leisure, tourism and hospitality should contribute to the Netherlands as a popular, valuable and liveable destination in 2030 as well as to solving major social issues that affect the prosperity and well-being of the Dutch population. The Netherlands has been at the forefront of this paradigm shift in the approach towards the sector and the population. However, it has also created new knowledge gaps and left policymakers

lacking the necessary tools. As one of the players in implementing this vision, CELTH has established itself as an increasingly relevant research and sparring partner for the sector and its research departments.

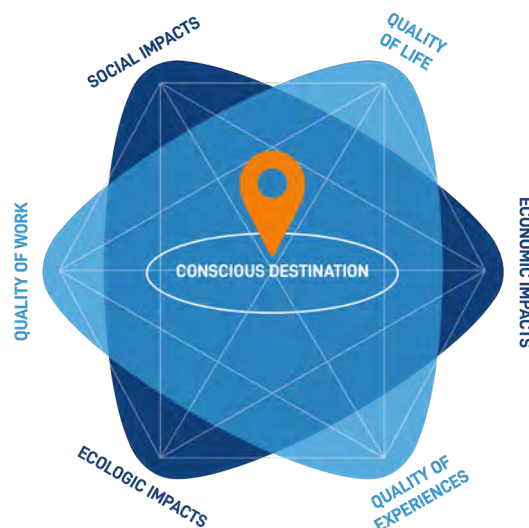
What is the Centre of Expertise - CELTH?

There are approximately 50 Centres of Expertise in the Netherlands, which play an important role in research and focus on societal challenges and changes. CELTH is a network organisation that brings experts from the universities of applied sciences in Vlissingen, Breda and Leeuwarden together with national and international industries. With independent practice-oriented research, CELTH aims to contribute to the transformation of the leisure domain towards a socially, economically, and ecologically sustainable future. CELTH studies

therefore focus on three overarching themes: conscious destinations, sustainability transitions, and leisure for a better society.

Agenda Conscious Destinations

The core of CELTH's research programming is the *Agenda Conscious Destinations* (ACD). CELTH has chosen the destination level explicitly because it is at this level that all subsectors and actors come together. A destination is - or should be - created for residents, visitors and entrepreneurs. A conscious destination places the social value of the hospitality domain at its core, aiming to maximise positive economic, social, and ecological impacts - in line with the Triple P values (people, planet, and profit). These impacts are experienced by residents (as their quality of life is directly affected), visitors (in the quality of their experiences), and employees and companies within the hospitality domain (quality of work).





In the optimisation process that characterises a conscious destination, all of the above impacts and qualities are consciously recognised and acknowledged in design processes, deliberations, and (political) decision-making. CELTH acknowledges that a conscious destination operates within a complex, multi-level context (macro, meso and micro) involving a variety of actors across several domains that develop at different speeds, each with their own agenda. CELTH also recognises that each destination must be approached in a way that is specific to its political, economic, legal, and socio-cultural situation. By developing knowledge that contributes to solving challenges and improving understanding of how destinations function as complete systems, CELTH is able to help them develop into conscious destinations.

Conscious destinations

A conscious destination is carefully considered: it has a story, a vision, a strategy, data and knowledge, and the skills to deal with these things. A conscious destination is proactive, there is leadership, initiative, and innovation, each contributing to a high level of organisational capacity. Interests are consciously dealt with, and there is alignment between the various stakeholders. A conscious destination is also adaptive. People are sophisticated and sensitive to change, both near and far. They are innovative and can use data and expertise to consciously anticipate or deal with developments such as the global network society, the globalising economy, technological developments, and natural processes. They know that this requires the right circumstances, so that destinations can remain resilient.

Sustainability transitions

Sustainable transitions are a key priority for local, national and international political agendas, as well as for CELTH's research programme. To further focus on sustainable research, CELTH has developed a *Sustainable Research Agenda on Leisure, Tourism & Hospitality*. This research agenda identifies the most pressing themes around six key challenges to be addressed by the sector. Most pressing are communication and business models for sustainable products and consumption.

Hospitality transitions

CELTH, together with four partner universities of applied sciences, has launched a booster programme for the sustainable renewal of the overarching hospitality sector. Hospitality transitions as a theme focuses on initiating, facilitating and leveraging targeted collaborations for transition issues in the hospitality domain. Lecturers, researchers and the industry will take the lead in driving systemic innovation and identifying and exploiting sustainable solutions and practical applications. In four regional transition arenas, they will work on themes such as climate neutrality, broad prosperity, a healthy region, and regenerative area development.

Leisure for a better society

The leisure for a better society research programme is all about developing smart, sustainable and people-centred leisure, tourism and hospitality experiences that contribute to major societal challenges. This is essential because the industry is facing major challenges nationally and internationally around climate, energy, housing, digitalisation, mobility, and accessibility.

Leisure can be a testing ground for innovations and the introduction of new solutions on the one hand, and is a prerequisite for the success of other sectors on the other hand. For instance, leisure contributes to the business climate of regions and the happiness of residents. The latter is becoming increasingly relevant as leisure is more and more a determining factor of both individual and collective well-being.

From research agendas to impactful projects

CELTH's research, which focuses on these themes and is accompanied by projects, is developed in close collaboration between researchers and industry. For example, during the launch event of the Conscious Destinations Agenda, knowledge gaps were identified and potential projects addressed, and the sustainable research agenda was based on an extensive consultation process to determine knowledge priorities.

Since then, many projects have been initiated together with the industry that support Dutch tourism policy with knowledge and offer policymakers the right management tools and instruments. Regarding the Conscious Destinations Agenda, this includes, for example, measuring the impact and carrying capacity of

a destination, methods for measuring resident benefit and successful interventions for resident involvement, developing interventions for more equitable tourism, and effectively dispersing tourists. Regarding sustainability, we are working on the climate impact on tourism and recreation in the Netherlands, risk analyses due to climate change, and a vision for tourism in a climate-neutral world. Around leisure for a better society, we are working on the role of volunteers, healthy placemaking, and inclusiveness. All these projects are designed, implemented, and evaluated together with the industry.

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CELTH research and projects focus on three overarching themes: conscious destinations, sustainability transitions, and leisure for a better society.

Building bridges

CELTH's output finds its way into articles in academic journals, trade magazines for the industry, and the yearbook for the Dutch leisure sector: *Tendrapport toerisme, recreatie en vrije tijd*. The output is also widely shared on social media such as LinkedIn, which is a very valuable channel to share knowledge.

Live meetings such as the Industry Day of the World Leisure Congress are also valuable to get in touch with the industry to share knowledge and exchange experiences. CELTH does this at many national and international events, such as the Trend Congress and Tourism Summit, but also at regional conferences attended by many entrepreneurs. During these events, the sector mainly shares and gathers information on applicability.

Summarising

Since the launch of the new national tourism strategy in the Netherlands in 2018, CELTH has been able to make a real contribution to the knowledge base, and we have given stakeholders tools to make that vision a reality. CELTH's knowledge is reflected in education, policy agendas, action plans, and the future strategies of policymakers and entrepreneurs.



Hearing everyone

Designing attractions
and measurement instruments
for auditory accessibility

Peter Horsten, Wim Strijbosch
& Karin Stikma, Marco van Leeuwen



Peter Horsten, Marco van Leeuwen, and Wim Strijbosch are lecturers and researchers at Breda University of Applied Sciences. Karin Stikma is leisure strategist and researcher of Joint Projects.

Despite the high density of visitor attractions in the Netherlands, many are not (fully) accessible. Where attention is paid to accessibility, the focus is often on technical and operational aspects, and hardly on the experience. This is surprising, as experience is often regarded as leisure's 'core product'. While universal design principles can enhance attractions, adapting well-established ones with long-existing facilities is not immediately straightforward. We therefore suggest working with evidence-based (re)developments on the basis of experience measurements that consider all types of visitors to effectively inform design interventions. However, experience measurements have been developed mainly by, for and on people without disabilities. In a research project co-funded by CELTH and leisure industry partners, we aimed to study how these measurement tools can be redeveloped to validly capture the experience of everyone, regardless of the challenges they might have.

As a starting point, we chose to focus on a group of people who share one type of disability: people with challenges in the auditory realm. The World Health Organization and the World Bank (2011) estimate that worldwide 124.2 million people have an auditory disability. Hearing loss is considered the most prevalent form of all disabilities, with an increase in

hearing loss prevalence expected for the upcoming years (United Nations, 2011).

Nevertheless, it appears that there is still little attention for this group of visitors. If leisure providers could redesign their attractions to make their offerings more inclusive for this group, it will make the world a bit better for many people and as such will have a positive impact on both personal, social, societal, and economic levels.

Research design

This article presents the outcomes of the first phase of the project. In this phase, the scientific literature and earlier project work by Joint Projects informed a conceptual framework intended to cover experience elements relevant for people with challenges on the auditory spectrum. This yielded the input for a first draft of a survey: the project's measurement instrument. Following a transdisciplinary research approach valuing scientific insights just as much as those from practice and experts by experience, researchers of BUAs and Joint Projects discussed the outcomes of these efforts with experts by experience with auditory disabilities in order to develop a survey instrument that does justice to the leisure experience of everyone on the spectrum of auditory capabilities. Experts by experience can provide much more detail from their own experiences of being hearing-impaired. Involving them in the project is not only the morally right thing to do, it also helps to filter out any bias based on prejudices or sympathetic feelings from the researchers who do not deal with these disabilities in their own lives.

Based on the interviews, the conceptual framework (see Figure 1) and associated survey instrument were adjusted to match the interview findings. In a second project phase, this revised survey instrument will be calibrated

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Having to be on guard and not knowing where noise comes from creates an unpleasant feeling and costs a lot of energy.

in a pilot study and triangulated with both in-depth interview data and physiological data (i.e. skin conductance, a measure of emotional agitation) to obtain a picture of the experience that is as complete as possible. In parallel, the survey is offered online to collect insights about experiences from the broader leisure industry. All outcomes will be reported at the WLO Congress in Breda (August 2025). Below, we present some findings from the first phase and its consequences for the measurement instrument we intend to calibrate.

Characterisation of the role of hearing loss
Among our informants, we see a variety of personality types, auditory function levels, attitudes towards their auditory limitation and coping strategies. The group's biggest differences lie in personality and attitudes towards their auditory functioning, ranging from acceptance and pragmatism through various levels of denial to frustration and hostility towards a society perceived as unwelcoming to those with auditory challenges.

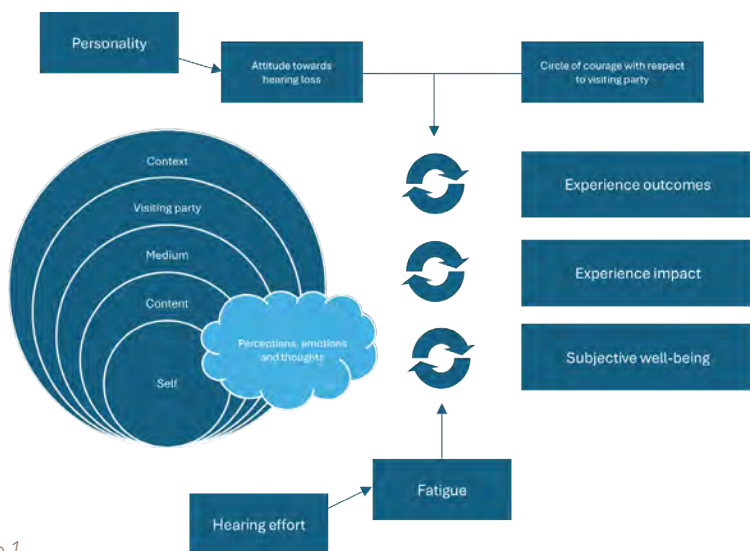


Figure 1

The greatest similarities we see in a desire for social acknowledgment. This can take different forms. It is often expressed as an outright desire for social connectedness. Yet especially in audio-rich environments this can be physically and emotionally draining due to the need for constant overperformance and compensation. Fundamentally, there is a desire for acknowledgement and understanding from hearing people regarding differing communication needs and the efforts required to navigate in audio-rich contexts.

Leisure behaviour

The informants value leisure in various ways, based on how well available activities meet desired effects like relaxation, social connection, or escapism. Audio-rich activities that our informants enjoy include orderly classical concerts or loud movies at the cinema - but with hearing aids turned off to avoid overstimulation of sound sensitivity. Social activities (parties, going somewhere with one's family) can be pleasant, if certain conditions are met. Noisy environments (cafés, amusement parks, birthday parties) with many conflicting auditory signals are particularly unpleasant. This tends to lead to selective participation or avoidance of certain activities. Regularly, the net result is

that people with auditory challenges lower their expectations about the quality of social interactions. Some participants can accept this; for others, this leads to isolation and loneliness - albeit self-imposed, but interpreted as unavoidable.

Coping

Nevertheless, a desire for social connectedness was found to be an important driver for the leisure behaviour of people with an auditory disability. Compensating the difficulty of understanding in noisy, chaotic environments - trying to lipread, voice-viewing, paying close attention to body language, heightened attention, compensating for others who do not contend with auditory problems - takes a lot of energy, leading to tiredness or frustration. Most informants indicate that they can function in their daily lives at a satisfactory level, as long as people around them are aware of their divergent communication needs. However, they also indicate that they adapt their own behaviour routinely - both in interactions with those who can hear without impairments and in selecting or avoiding certain environments.

In visitor attractions, safety-related information is often auditory. Not being able to hear accurately what is going on when there is a calamity, but noticing that something is happening due to

bystanders' behaviour, or being startled by loud noises while nothing unsafe is happening and feeling on edge as a result are both distressing sensations that cause many experiences in public spaces to be generally unpleasant. Hearing sounds is different from discerning words, which in turn is not the same as grasping or understanding the meaning of the full scope of shared information in time to react in a socially appropriate way. People with auditory challenges can miss out on essential information to understand who says what, where and why, and what is expected next.

Implications

First, the findings confirm that (hearing) efforts and the resultant fatigue are relevant items to include in a survey designed to measure experiences of people with different auditory capacities. Second, the findings indicate the relevance of several other constructs, such as the stance toward one's challenges, the connectedness to one's immediate social environment and feeling whether one's (hearing) needs are met.

In discussing several options for the calibration phase of the project, informants highlighted the gorilla feeding presentation at Apenheul, a primate-focused zoo in the Netherlands, as a highly suitable case. Other suggestions, such as a motion simulator attraction and a cursed house attraction were indicated by some to be unbearable due to likely balance issues for people with hearing impairments. Enhancing accessibility at zoo attractions, which are already popular visitor attractions among visitors with hearing impairments, would make these places even more inclusive. We look forward to the next phase at Apenheul and the opportunity to present our work at the World Leisure Congress.

This research is funded by the Centre of Expertise Leisure Tourism & Hospitality (CELTH) as part of the 'Leisure for a better society' grant. The following sponsors also funded this project (in alphabetical order): BoldMove Nation, Gemeente Berg en Dal, Ginder, Mack Rides, Stichting Apenheul and Vekoma Rides.

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I am not disabled, but a user of facilities. I am just like you, but my perception is different, and therefore I have different needs.

Volunteering in Dutch leisure, tourism and hospitality organisations

Sustaining engagement in a changing society

Licia Calvi
Frederike van Ouwerkerk
Bertine Bargeman



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In the Dutch Leisure, Tourism and Hospitality (LTH) sector, most heritage institutions and organisations rely on volunteering for their functioning, and ultimately, for their survival. At least two-thirds of the staff in these organisations consist of volunteers and volunteers are tasked with activities and roles at different levels in the organisation (Păceșilă, 2020). Beyond the traditional welcoming of visitors, they guide tours (that for some of these organisations is in fact the specific task of paid tour guides) and perform support tasks. For this reason, volunteerism can without any doubt be considered one of the pillars a civil society is based upon.

That volunteering is so much needed to guarantee the functioning of a civil society raises the question of how to maintain and collaborate with a healthy pool of engaged and committed volunteers, in view of the challenges that our changing society is facing (Pahus, 2020). Challenges in terms of ageing of the current volunteers pool (Duursma, Losekoot, & De Jong, 2023), of growing diversity in the population (Koolen-Maas et al., 2023), of rapid technological developments, of changes in the motivations for volunteering (Thibault, 2020) and of the restless times we are living in at many levels. A further challenge pertains to the relationship between paid and unpaid staff within these organisations, where volunteers need to work side by side with personnel that is part of the organisation chart and is on the payroll of the institution (whereas volunteers can only receive a standard minimal compensation per year that is defined nationwide), without taking over the paid staff's tasks and roles (see Arnon, Almog-Bar, & Cnaan, 2023).

CELTH co-financed a project in which Breda University of Applied Sciences and NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences collaborate to study the current situation of volunteerism in Dutch LTH institutions and to offer some recommendations to make volunteering sustainable in the future. While in the literature a quantitative approach to gathering data is mostly used to understand volunteerism, in this project we adopted a qualitative approach. We organised workshops and conducted interviews and focus groups with managers and volunteers of five LTH organisations in Brabant. The information we collected was analysed through thematic analysis. The resulting insights are being discussed and finetuned in a final co-design workshop with managers and volunteers to make sure that they are meaningful in their own practice.

Interactions in the volunteering practice

In our research, we adopted an integrated practice approach (Bargeman et al., 2024), through which to understand the interaction between volunteers, paid staff and management during volunteering. This is also where our project has differed from the literature so far, which has mostly been focusing on either the volunteer's or the organisation's perspective and paying little attention to the interactions among all actors and the context-related conditions in these dynamics (cf. Arnon et al., 2023). In our analyses, we focused on the characteristics of the practice itself, such as the relationship between the volunteers and their organisation (i.e. the management) in general and also with the volunteers' coordinator in particular (where one exists, which was indeed the case in most of the organisations we considered), the relationship between the volunteers and the paid staff, and also the relationship within the volunteers' community, with specific

attention to whether this is felt as a community where people feel at home and well.

Diversity and motivation

What emerged from the Brabant context is that the volunteering pool is little diverse in both their profile (that is age and ethnicity) and also in their motivation for volunteering, which remains their urge to stay socially relevant, to give back and to deploy their knowledge and skills. More social reasons like the need to have or increase one's social contacts and even a form of escapism were also mentioned. Almost all volunteers expressed their positive experiences of being part of a close-knit community. The few Gen Z volunteers that were approached consider volunteering a springboard to their future career, and the few ones with a migration background mainly volunteer to improve their language understanding and to speed up their integration process. But both profiles remain scarce. This is where more interventions need to be made.

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Volunteerism can without any doubt be considered one of the pillars a civil society is based upon.



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Volunteering has become more professionalised than it used to be.

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More flexibility and diversity are needed to keep volunteers happy and committed.

Flexibility and involvement

Volunteering is perceived as a rather flexible activity in terms of the time required to dedicate to it, less when it comes to the activities that volunteers are tasked with. With more flexibility on the side of the organisation, younger people, who notably have less time to dedicate to this, would also be more inclined to volunteer, for example with specific and time-bound tasks. Precisely because the majority of volunteers are aged, they would appreciate more involvement in the definition of the vision of the organisation they volunteer at and also, simply, in the choice of activities and changes to be implemented on a day-to-day basis. Our respondents refer to the fact that volunteers have become more articulate citizens. The current generation aged 65+ is different from the previous generations: they have different values and wishes, are often highly educated and had responsible roles during their professional lives.

Professionalisation and human touch

Volunteering has become more professionalised than it used to be in the past: it is regulated by the rules in the Diversity & Inclusivity Code, the Fair Practice Code and the Code of Governance. In addition, volunteers need to sign a contract setting out their tasks and rewards, and progress interviews are held regularly because volunteering is not without obligations: volunteers are bound by the agreements they have made with the organisation. While they feel valued by the management and by their

dedicated coordinator, and this is often expressed through tangible signs of appreciation like a New Year's party and gift, dedicated activities during the year, and a yearly compensation in some cases, they mainly want to be seen as human beings. They expect transparency in communication, and a clear vision of what the role of volunteers and related rules and restrictions are in the institution they volunteer at (cf. Arnon et al., 2023). They want to be listened to, they want management to allow them to implement their own initiatives and ideas, to develop their talents and to use their career-long competencies more than what is done in most organisations at the moment.

More flexibility and diversity, openness to different voices within the organisation even if not 'authorised' by their institutional role, and clear and transparent communication between all actors involved appear to be the aspects LTH organisations need to pay more attention to if they want to keep the volunteers they currently have (in number). And, if they want to make sure they remain happy, committed and well (so they need to care more explicitly about their well-being - volunteers are not a given) and if they want to acquire new and more diverse ones to face the challenges that are increasingly emerging in our society.

While these conclusions are mostly acknowledged by the actors involved in their practice, it is the first time that they have been studied systematically through a research project.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the following heritage and leisure organisations that participated: Alliantie Zuiderwaterlinie, Nationaal Monument Kamp Vught, Van Gogh Village Museum Nu-enen, Stichting Wildlife from Safaripark Beekse Bergen, and Het Markiezenhof in Bergen op Zoom. Additionally, we would like to thank Annemiek Messer from MOOIWERK Breda and our partners from NHL Stenden Dr. Rodney Westerlaken and Dr. Geesje Duursma.

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Photography

- Brabant Partners - Willeke Machiels (page 66 top)



Tourists go to the place they know

Is overtourism mostly a problem of information?

Ondrej Mitas
&
Jeroen Klijs



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Everyone wants to experience a beautiful environment, especially when they are on vacation. Some places are more beautiful than others, however, leading certain visually or culturally attractive areas to become overwhelmingly popular with tourists. When either the sheer physical number or the behaviour of tourists starts to damage physical surroundings or the routines of people going about their daily lives, people describe it with the now-trendy term 'overtourism.'

Some examples

The village of Giethoorn in the Netherlands. Once a tranquil place of canals and small thatched-roof houses, it is now frequently clogged with selfie sticks and bumper-to-bumper canal boats. And yet, just a 15-minute drive away lies the charming village of Blokkzijl, quaint, peaceful, steeped in history, and with just as many scenic photo opportunities. Most tourists have simply never heard of it.

Or take the case of Volendam. Each year, hundreds of thousands of tourists crowd along its dike for a photo in traditional costume, a serving of fried fish, or a visit to the Volendam Museum. It is the kind of charming, historic fishing village people imagine when they think of 'authentic Holland' except here, the atmosphere often buckles under the weight of its own popularity. Yet, less than an hour away lies Enkhuizen, a town with an equally rich maritime history, a picturesque old harbour, and the impressive open-air Zuiderzee

Museum. In Enkhuizen, you can stroll through a historical fishing village without having to queue for a selfie. You will find timber-framed houses, old crafts, and boats bobbing in the water. Everything people are looking for in Volendam, but with more space, more calm, and more room for genuine discovery.

Information problem

In this context, it is crucial to remember that most tourist attractions, within most destinations, in most regions, would be deeply grateful to attract more tourists, their attendant spending, and their (potentially) positive socio-cultural impacts. It is just that you and I have never heard of these lesser-known attractions. Thus, one might see overtourism mostly as a problem of information. Too many people have heard too many good things about places that are now 'overtourism' hotspots, while not enough people have heard enough good things about lesser-known attractions and locations. Perhaps these lesser-known attractions might be just as enjoyable.

Experiment to test assumptions

Reasoning from this starting assumption, much could be learned from making specific changes in information sent to tourists and then seeing where they actually go. A team of researchers and industry leaders teamed up in 2021 to do just that. We set up an experiment in the Dutch province of Overijssel in cooperation with their Destination Management Organisation, Marketing Oost, and the tourism information company Travel With Zoey. Travel With Zoey blends artificial intelligence systems with

human input in direct messages to tourists over services such as WhatsApp.

We recruited 155 participants who had booked stays in the late spring and summer of 2021 at 10 large campgrounds in the Vechtdal and Sallandse Heuvelrug areas of Overijssel. These areas are comparable to the fragile natural environments that could potentially suffer from too much tourist impact as mentioned earlier. Each participant was randomly assigned to receive information about either heavily visited or lesser-known attractions, and to receive these actively from a WhatsApp number operated by Travel With Zoey, wherein they could reply, discuss, ask questions, and receive fully personalised advice, or to receive these tips via a passive map-based app, of the sort destinations often promote. We wanted to know two things: would people go where we sent them? And, would it affect the quality

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Perhaps the lesser-known attractions might be just as enjoyable.



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Organisations do not want to or do not dare to stop their marketing of well-known attractions.

of their vacation? In addition to participants filling in daily questionnaires, we used GPS tracking software from Mobidot to track participants' movements.

Caveats

Before going into the findings, we must mention two caveats. First, this was obviously a convenience sample, which cannot be broadly generalised to tourists in other destinations, or even to other tourists to the same area who might be less open to destination information. Thus, the effects in the experiment are probably somewhat stronger than the effects in the entire population of tourists. Second, the first half of the data were collected (May and June 2021) in the environment of a strict pandemic lockdown, and featured extremely poor weather as well. Thus, participants were truly puzzled about how to spend their time besides merely sitting in a soggy tent. Needless to say, these are not the usual conditions tourists encounter in Overijssel in the late spring. How that may have affected the findings is not obvious, however.

Results

Simply put, no matter what information tourists received, their experience of the vacation as a whole was exactly the same. The groups only differed in their evaluation of the information source itself: Zoey or the map. Zoey received a 7.5, while the map received a 5.5. Also, participants reported using Zoey much more. In terms of where tourists actually went, the information made a dramatic difference. Tourists hearing about the lesser-known attractions were about twice as likely to be moving near these attractions, and only 20% as likely to be moving near heavily visited hotspots. In short, tourists go where you send them. This may seem a bit obvious, but if it were that obvious, the crowding sometimes labelled 'overtourism' would already have been solved.

Overcoming obstacles in destination marketing

One problem is that some organisations do not want to or do not dare to stop their marketing of well-known attractions. As one DMO manager put it, speaking on condition of

anonymity: "If we remove the big hitters from our brochures or website, our stakeholders call us immediately. They think we've gone mad". We have even encountered this ourselves. When news spread about a possible repetition of this experiment in Amsterdam (see below), some local policymakers were contacted by tourist attractions worried that some 'crazy scientists' were about to scare off their visitors.

A second issue is that lesser-known (potential) attractions are sometimes not equipped to handle an influx of visitors. For example, directing tourists to a quieter walking trail might unintentionally lead to wear and tear on the path, parking problems in nearby residential streets, and complaints about missing signage or waste bins. Even with the best intentions, the necessary infrastructure is often not in place yet.

Third, and perhaps most seriously, a common unfortunate political consequence of discussions around 'overtourism' is to defund the local DMO. Paradoxically, and frustratingly, this destroys their ability to change their information strategy and inform really wide populations of potential visitors about lesser-known attractions.

A fourth issue, and the one we will address next, is that other destinations may work differently, and information interventions like this one may play out differently there. That is why this project has a follow-up, which is currently in the data analysis stage. Visitors to Amsterdam and Copenhagen in November and December 2024 provided us with exactly the same kind of data as in Overijssel. And just like in Overijssel, we assigned them to one of four conditions: getting information about the must-see attractions, or about lesser-known attractions; via Travel With Zoey, or in a more traditional way. In Copenhagen, the traditional info source was a website; in Amsterdam it was a (rather pretty) paper map.

More information?

You can read the full results of the Overijssel experiment in the article "Tell Me Where to Go" by Mitas et al. in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*.



Tourism-driven resident benefits beyond the surface

A multi-dimensional guide to measuring resident benefits

Elisa van den Heuvel
Jeroen Klijs



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Tourism can bring jobs, economic growth, and cultural exchange - but how do we understand whether residents truly and inherently benefit? Tourism evolves and weaves into everyday life in ways seen and unseen for people who call these destinations home. Have you ever thought about how tourism subtly shapes your community for the better? Perhaps a once-quiet park has been revitalised with better facilities, or new restaurants have opened, offering more dining options for visitors and residents alike. Maybe you have enjoyed a restored heritage site, or you feel a strong sense of community and pride - even if you have never consciously linked it to tourism. While public discourse often highlights challenges such as overcrowding, rising housing costs, and commercialisation, the positive, subjective and sometimes hidden, contributions of tourism are often overlooked.

Increasingly, residents are being recognised as essential stakeholders in destination development, influencing visitor experiences, destination appeal, and long-term competitiveness. In line with Perspective 2030 (NBTC, Netherlands Board of Tourism & Conventions) and CELTH's Agenda Conscious Destinations, the Netherlands aims to ensure that every resident experiences benefits of

tourism by 2030. Improving resident benefit - rather than merely securing support - should be a primary objective of destination development. This evolving perspective has created a broad need among provinces, municipalities, and DMOs for methods to measure the perceived value that residents derive from tourism. CELTH initiated the project of 'Measuring Resident Benefit: Exploration of Indicators and Methods' to support decision-makers with a guidebook on selected methods to measure resident benefits, bringing together academic institutions and destination management organisations (Breda University of Applied Sciences, HZ University of Applied Sciences, Hotelschool the Hague, NBTC, and Eilandmarketing Schouwen-Duiveland).

'Resident benefits' as a multi-dimensional approach

While research frequently explores topics such as tourism impacts, quality of life, subjective well-being, attitudes, and support, the concept of *resident benefit*, as distinct from resident support (which reflects public approval of tourism), and residents' involvement (which measures active participation in tourism-related initiatives), remains underexplored.

Resident benefit refers to the positive impacts that tourism generates for local populations across three key dimensions - economic, socio-cultural, and the living environment. The framework of resident benefits is multi-dimensional and incorporates these overarching impact dimensions by integrating the experiential dimensions by which residents perceive these benefits (individual versus collective, conscious versus unconscious, factual versus perceived). See Figure 1.

The hidden contributions of tourism - a hypothetical, yet applicable example

A valuable approach to understanding this

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The Netherlands aims to ensure that every resident experiences benefits of tourism by 2030.

concept is through a hypothetical example of a resident of Schouwen-Duiveland, Zeeland, the Netherlands - Johan. Johan owns a small café in a coastal village and experiences both economic and social benefits from tourism. On a personal level, the influx of visitors enhances his business revenue while also providing him with the opportunity to engage with individuals from diverse backgrounds. On a broader scale, he and his fellow residents collectively benefit from the financial contributions of tourism, which support local initiatives such as beach clean-ups and the maintenance of walking trails.

These benefits manifest themselves in different ways. Some are objective and quantifiable - such as the direct economic gains from increased tourism. Others are more subjective - Johan perceives a heightened sense of community due to the growing number of cultural events. Additionally, certain impacts remain unnoticed: for instance, the local supermarket where Johan shops weekly depends on tourism - it generates income to sustain operations all year round, yet he does not consciously associate this with tourism.

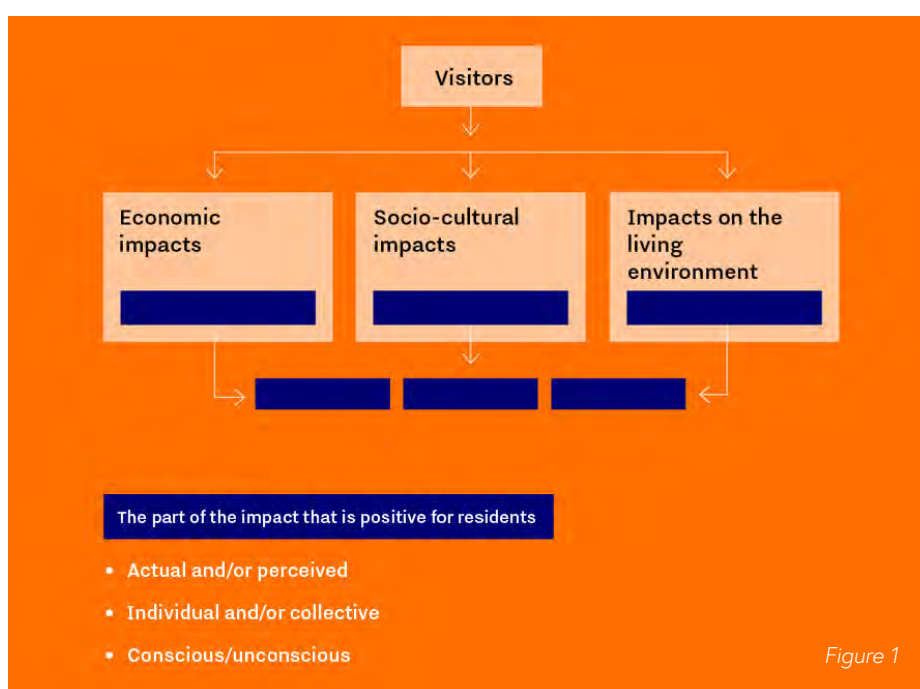


Figure 1

This example highlights the intricate nature and complexity of measuring resident benefits of tourism. It visualises the distinctions between factual and perceived, individual and collective benefits, and benefits that are consciously acknowledged versus those that operate unnoticed in daily life.

Challenges in measuring resident benefits

Given the complex interplay between experiential and impact dimensions, accurately measuring and uncovering resident benefits poses a challenge. Frequently, the impact of tourism is evaluated through measurable, factual, and hard metrics such as job creation, local investments, and infrastructure improvements. Many destinations still rely on traditional research methods, such as surveys and interviews, which, while valuable, often fail to capture the full spectrum of resident benefits. How residents perceive these benefits is just as crucial as the numbers themselves.

Assessing resident benefits requires an integrated, multi-dimensional, context-specific and mixed-method approach, recognising that individuals experience and evaluate tourism benefits differently from each other and, ultimately, from factual data. A more nuanced approach is needed - one that not only measures perceptions but also considers the perceived importance and actual value of specific indicators.

When linkages between tourism contributions and beneficial developments go unrecognised, tourism's role for the destination can be undervalued. What methods can destinations employ efficiently and effectively, beyond the conventional approaches, that recognise the diverse ways in which individuals experience and evaluate tourism benefits?

Moving beyond measurement as usual

Using literature, expert interviews and experiments, the project evaluated and compared multiple research methods to assess their effectiveness in measuring resident benefits and their applicability for destinations. As a practical tool for destination management, the publication *Wegwijzer voor het meten van bewonersprofijt* (Guide for measuring resident benefits) expands upon traditional methods by evaluating and introducing more creative research approaches. Each method is assessed for its relevance to the dimensions of resident benefits, considering factors including but not limited to representativity, trustworthiness, validity, complexity, speed, cost, privacy concerns, and potential for real-time monitoring and benchmarking.

Two particularly promising methods are:

Art-based research methods, like encouraging participants to express themselves with a drawing, offer a powerful way to explore emotions, experiences, and abstract ideas

such as pride and connection. Drawing helps participants to go beyond words and become more conscious of their experiences, making it a holistic and transformative research tool. It may tap into the unconscious and emotional layers of experience. However, interpreting artistic expressions can be challenging, and the method's inherent subjectivity makes it difficult to control. While drawing can be an inclusive and impactful tool, it may not be suitable for every participant or research setting.

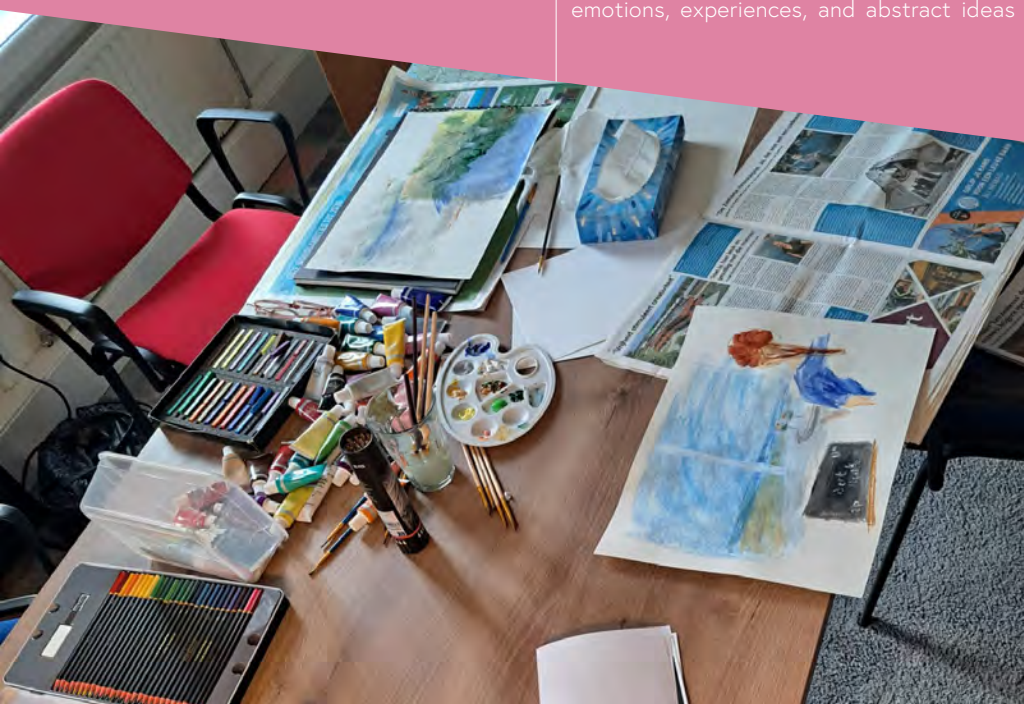
Participatory mapping combines cartography with qualitative research such as interviews and focus groups, allowing residents to actively create, edit, and use maps to document their spatial knowledge, experiences, and perspectives. Going beyond traditional mapping this approach may reveal the interaction between tourism and living environments, offering a deeper understanding of how spaces are felt, experienced and navigated. It provides a dynamic, visual representation of local experiences, fostering dialogue and engagement while bridging personal narratives with broader spatial patterns.

Conclusion

The effects of tourism are highly localised, varying across different regions and timeframes. This underscores the necessity of destination-specific evaluation methods when assessing resident benefits. A one-size-fits-all approach is ineffective. While a standardised framework with clear indicators is essential, it must also remain flexible, recognising that each destination has unique characteristics and priorities. Factors such as the length of time tourism has been present, the scale of the destination, and the feasibility of conducting large studies must all be considered.

To obtain a well-rounded understanding of tourism-driven resident benefits, comparing different types of data is essential. Aggregating qualitative and quantitative findings provides a more comprehensive picture of resident benefits, cross-validating findings and uncovering patterns that might be overlooked when using a single research method.

The '*Wegwijzer voor het meten van bewonersprofijt*' provides a structured overview of different research methods, outlining their advantages and limitations while offering practical case studies. This enables policymakers to choose the most suitable approach based on their specific objectives, context, budget, and capabilities.



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While public discourse often highlights challenges, the positive, subjective and sometimes hidden, contributions of tourism are often overlooked.

Healthy placemaking

More than just a buzzword?

Iris Kerst
&
Ko Koens



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Can urban design truly make people healthier and more connected? The concept of healthy placemaking suggests it can, and that thoughtfully designed spaces can enhance physical well-being, mental resilience, and social interaction. Rather than focusing on aesthetics or adding green spaces - healthy placemaking argues for deliberate strategies to create environments that foster positive health. This extends beyond the mere absence of illness, as it also incorporates helping people feel in control, adapt to challenges, and form meaningful connections. Hart van Zuid, Rotterdam, is putting this concept into practice with several interventions; to see to what extent a redesigned urban space can truly empower residents, improve well-being, and strengthen social bonds, or whether healthy placemaking is likely to be yet another buzzword.

What is healthy placemaking?

Healthy placemaking integrates public health principles into urban design, promoting physical activity, mental well-being, and social interaction. It goes beyond aesthetics - walkable streets, green spaces, and accessible public areas foster healthier behaviours, social cohesion, and a sense of belonging. As Fred London (2020) and others note, these environments support not only physical health but also mental resilience and community connection. This aligns with the positive health

model (IPH, 2024), which includes six dimensions: physical health, mental well-being, social participation, meaningfulness, quality of life, and daily functioning. Achieving this requires collaboration between planners, communities, and a broader network of local stakeholders often overlooked in traditional planning processes.

Hart van Zuid: a vision for community and connection

Hart van Zuid, including neighbourhoods like Zuidplein and Carnisse, has seen major redevelopment in recent years - new housing, commercial spaces, and amenities have transformed the area. Yet many long-term residents and newcomers feel disconnected from these changes. The risks of disconnection are social isolation, lower civic engagement, and weakened community ties (Putnam, 2000; Kawachi & Berkman, 2000). Gentrification adds pressure, with rising costs and limited integration of new residents, reducing the vitality of public spaces. Key stakeholders - Rotterdam Ahoy, Sportbedrijf Rotterdam, Winkelcentrum Zuidplein, and Theater Zuidplein - are working together to counter this. Their goal is to rebuild pride and belonging through inclusive, community-driven initiatives.

Healthy placemaking in practice

The Foundation Zie Hart van Zuid reached out to the Expertise Network Sustainable Urban Tourism to explore the potential of healthy placemaking in Hart van Zuid. Using a mixed-method research and design approach, they aim to understand how urban design can contribute to health and well-being.

In the first phase, initial research, using a variety of existing data sources (e.g. municipal annual resident surveys), assessed resident sentiments with a view to appreciating how the local environment has influenced the six dimensions

of positive health. While some improvements were noted, significant challenges remain, particularly in social participation and meaningfulness. These findings indicate that more work is needed to foster a sense of belonging, engagement, and purpose among residents.

To address these issues, the consortium collaborated with artists and local residents to implement three key interventions: Mi Lobi Zuid, The Hopscotch, and Host Your Neighbourhood.

Mi Lobi Zuid

Mi Lobi Zuid (Surinamese for "I love Zuid") was the first intervention designed to explore how creative placemaking could foster a sense of belonging in Hart van Zuid. This initiative used street art to transform the former ABN AMRO building near Zuidplein into a collaborative mural involving 377 residents, students, and passers-by. Led by artist Naomi King, the project was inspired by Inholland graduate Joris Sauerbier's research on safety perceptions, which suggested that adding colour to public spaces could improve security and well-being.

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It prioritises the broader impact of the built environment on health and quality of life.



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For healthy placemaking to be truly meaningful, it must move beyond temporary interventions and top-down planning.

Beyond its visual impact, Mi Lobi Zuid created an opportunity for participation. The collaborative painting process allowed people to connect, share experiences, and develop a stronger attachment to their neighbourhood. It helped generate positive media attention for the area and was celebrated by the mayor in a video message and during one of her working visits. Researchers gathered insights into how residents envision future interventions, highlighting the need for inclusivity, personal connections, and ongoing engagement.

The Hopscotch

Building on these lessons, The Hopscotch was introduced to encourage physical activity and social engagement. Unlike traditional hopscotch, it features words reflecting Hart van Zuid and its surrounding neighbourhoods, prompting discussions about local identity. Placed on a temporary vacant lot, it transforms an in-between space into a reason to pause, interact, and reflect. The final changes in the design are currently being made, as the original design had to be amended at the last minute due to concerns that it would harm traffic safety.

Host Your Neighbourhood

Host Your Neighbourhood connects residents and visitors through guided tours during major events in Hart van Zuid such as conferences at Rotterdam Ahoy. More than a tourism initiative, it focuses on stimulating community participation and local pride. Volunteers from different neighbourhoods share their perspectives, strengthening social cohesion and belonging. By collaborating with local businesses and institutions, they can help empower residents by providing them with new skills and opportunities to actively engage with their community. However, finding local volunteers is not proving to be easy, as residents are very busy and can be unsure whether the neighbourhood offers plenty to explore and discover or whether they have the skills to guide visitors.

Healthy placemaking: a lasting impact?

The experiences in Hart van Zuid suggest that healthy placemaking must go beyond surface-level design changes. While well-planned public spaces can encourage positive behaviours, the true measure of success lies in how deeply residents connect with their environment. Creating inviting, accessible places is only the first step; lasting change happens when people feel a sense of ownership and agency over their surroundings. Projects like Mi Lobi Zuid, The Hopscotch, and Host Your Neighbourhood demonstrate that engagement and participation are just as crucial as physical infrastructure. These initiatives worked not only because they altered the built environment but because they actively involved the community in shaping those changes.

However, for healthy placemaking to be truly meaningful, it must move beyond temporary interventions and top-down planning. Long-term impact requires an ongoing process in which residents and local businesses take the lead in shaping their own neighbourhoods and are supported by the municipality and other top-down stakeholders. When communities have a say in their environment, this can help strengthen social cohesion, and a shared sense of purpose (Hernandez-Santin et al., 2020).

That this is not easy is exemplified by The Hopscotch experiment where despite continuous efforts to engage with higher level policymakers who supported the intervention, last-minute amendments were still needed. The challenge remains: how can the right conditions for this bottom-up approach be created in a system that is focused on top-down control?

Together with the consortium, ways are being explored to further shift initiative and ownership to residents and entrepreneurs. The key question now is: how can we make the principle of designing *with* instead of *for* communities a common rule?

In conclusion, our project findings suggest healthy placemaking has the potential to transform urban environments by fostering well-being, social cohesion, and empowerment. Hart van Zuid serves as a living laboratory for these



ideas, showing that intentional, participatory design - coupled with meaningful leisure opportunities - can create more connected, resilient communities.

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Photography

- Joyce de Vries (portrait Iris)

Creating equitable destinations

Five equity types to guide outcomes and interventions

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Though it may seem hard to envision, imagine a 'just destination' - a place where tourism is not solely about pleasing visitors and generating profit, but also contributes meaningful value to its residents. In such a destination, workers receive fair wages and local entrepreneurs enjoy real opportunities. Facilities put in place for tourism enhance residents' quality of life. Environmental costs are not ignored; they are acknowledged and managed responsibly rather than burdening vulnerable groups with them. Moreover, local communities have a say in how their cultural heritage is used in tourism.

Although this vision is ambitious, it is not pure fiction. Destinations are gradually shifting from marketing to management. Placemaking and benefit-sharing become key parts of the tourism agenda, recognising that good places to live are also good places to visit. There is a trend of destinations focusing on residents' needs and becoming aware of the distribution of both the costs and benefits of tourism.

Simply more income, spreading tourism, creating jobs, or attracting high-spending visitors does not automatically make tourism fairer. Often, tourism benefits a few while relying on public resources, placing burdens on the wider community and sometimes putting residents' needs in competition with visitors'. For more equity in tourism we need to better understand how value is created and distributed, especially for underserved and marginalised groups.

The project and report 'Creating Equitable Destinations' aims to help Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) and local government bodies to manage and distribute tourism's value to better serve communities.

What was done?

Researchers from Breda University of Applied Sciences, NHL Stenden, and the Travel Foundation embraced this challenge with funding from CELTH. In addition to a literature study, the research includes 25 international case studies where tourism aims to meet local community needs. The research identifies 25 equitable outcomes from tourism, linked to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and 40 interventions ('mechanisms' in the report) to better distribute tourism's value, ensuring more communities in destinations benefit. These interventions include practices like taxes and revenue sharing, business incubation and training, licensing and zoning, community enterprises, and product development. The research also highlights the need for monitoring frameworks to better account for the distribution of costs and benefits, the quality of benefits (such as jobs), and access to opportunities and local resources. The new KPIs in the report will help destinations to identify issues early and demonstrate the contribution of tourism.

Common language

One need established during the project was creating a common language to build productive dialogue. This began, for example, with understanding equity. Equity is not the same as equality. Equality means treating everyone the same, while equity focuses on fairness and justice, ensuring disadvantaged groups get what they need based on their specific situation. This means equity is not a top-down process, but it is about listening to what is necessary. The report establishes that in tourism, equity is a key principle of sustainable tourism that addresses fairness in access, use, and distribution of goods and benefits (and costs) from tourism development to meet the needs of both current and future generations. Another important aspect of this common

While equity may be elusive, transitioning to a more equitable tourism model is essential and demands bold, deliberate actions.

language is the use of the word 'community'. It is easy to see communities as one big group of similar people, but they are far from homogeneous. They consist of subgroups with varying interests and power levels. Some groups may benefit from tourism while others bear its costs. Inequalities exist among social classes, genders, ethnicities, and between residents and visitors. Recognising the diversity and differing needs within local communities is crucial when considering the benefits and costs of tourism.

Equity types

Based on the literature research, five types of equity were distinguished and used to categorise the previously mentioned outcomes and interventions.

Economic equity

One equity issue in tourism is the concentration of economic benefits among a few. Economic leakage, where tourist expenditure does not stay in the destination's economy, is a major



Touristification
can cause feelings
of alienation
among residents,
undermining their
sense of belonging.

obstacle. High international investments and low local business participation result in high leakage. Another concern is the labour market, which often attracts unskilled or semi-skilled workers, including young people, women, and migrant workers for low-wage, seasonal jobs. The report explores ways to reduce leakage and create local economic opportunities.

Economic equity refers to ensuring access to economic opportunities, promoting a broader and fairer representation of the local workforce and locally owned businesses within the tourism supply chain.

Environmental equity

While tourism can pose environmental risks to local communities, it also has the potential to promote nature conservation by sharing best practices and raising awareness about environmental standards. Additionally, tourism stakeholders can contribute to climate adaptation efforts benefiting vulnerable local communities.

Environmental equity refers to fairness in the distribution and maintenance of environmental resources and amenities to ensure sustainable development, preventing any group from being disadvantaged by environmental burdens or risks due to tourism. Currently major issues include climate justice, ecological health, and resource distribution.

Spatial equity

Destinations refer to places, and tourism can enhance these places by investing in public facilities like transport, healthcare, and infrastructure. However, concentrated tourism can also lead to the creation of tourist enclaves, to replacing everyday infrastructure with services focused on tourists, and even to displacing residents. These issues can arise from prioritising tourist needs or privatising land, such as when residents lose access to beaches for leisure or fishing. Equitable destinations can protect and increase availability and access to public or shared infrastructure, public spaces and facilities.



Spatial equity refers to the way public space and amenities are used, developed, distributed, or restricted by tourism development and the resulting advantages or disadvantages for different groups and destination communities.

Cultural equity

Cultural equity is often less tangible but highly sensitive due to its ties to value systems. Debates about cultural appropriation are not uncommon in tourism, as there is a delicate balance between using and exploiting cultural authenticity. The lack of clear ownership of traditions, rituals, or traditional skills makes some communities vulnerable. Commodification of cultures can be an unintended result of developing tourism products. Additionally, touristification can cause feelings of alienation among residents, undermining their sense of belonging. To ensure culture is respected, it is crucial to involve a broader range of stakeholders, including marginalised groups who are already facing social exclusion and discrimination, in how cultures are represented within tourism development. Museums, for example, are increasingly embracing this challenge by offering multiple local perspectives on history and art.

Cultural equity refers to fair representation and acknowledgment of all communities (different ethnic or religious groups, people with disabilities, various socio-economic or citizenship statuses, etc.) and their values in the development of tourism policy, products, and communications.

Tourism experience equity

This category highlights the stark contrast between opportunities available to tourists and the (harsh) everyday realities of local residents. Tourists often enjoy leisure, relaxation and experiences that locals might not afford or be allowed access to. With caution against social washing, this dynamic can support individuals in need.

Tourism experience equity refers to the values and initiatives that enable local participation in tourism experiences with particular focus on those who would not otherwise have access to these opportunities, for instance due to high costs.

Easier said than done

Creating greater equity within communities is complex and depends on specific contexts and societal structures. Understanding the interventions is just the first step; there's a long road ahead, and continual adaptation and development are necessary. This is a significant task for DMOs, and municipalities especially, since decision-making can be challenging. Who decides which interests to prioritise? Redesigning destinations might mean prioritising local community rights over tourists' rights or tourism businesses' profits, or focusing on long-term benefits over short-term returns. Moreover, most equity-promoting interventions require a huge commitment and cooperation between public, private, and community groups. DMOs can lead, support, and coordinate these efforts.

While equity may be elusive, transitioning to a more equitable tourism model is essential and demands bold, deliberate actions. Emerging cases provide hope. For instance, the impactful case study 'Toxic Tours' at Tar Creek, US, transforms a neglected, polluted site into an educational resource by raising visitor awareness of industrial pollution from indigenous perspectives and highlighting environmental injustice. The project, appreciated by tourists, has spurred clean-up and community development.

More information

For case studies and recommendations, and access to the full report, please visit: www.thetravelfoundation.org.uk/equitable/.

Events as a tool for driving social change

Perspectives on the future of events for business

Dorothe Gerritsen

Dorothe Gerritsen is lecturer of Event Marketing at Academy for Leisure & Events, Breda University of Applied Sciences.

Events have long been powerful tools for driving social change and fostering community engagement. By bringing people together around a common cause or interest, events can raise awareness, inspire action, and create lasting impacts. One of the key strengths of events is their ability to create a sense of unity and shared purpose. When people gather in support of a cause, they are more likely to feel a sense of belonging and commitment to that cause. In addition, events can have a direct economic impact on communities. This economic boost can be particularly significant for marginalised or underserved areas, helping to address inequalities and promote social equity (Events – dossier on Social Impact, November 2023, Gerritsen and Van Oolderen, 2020). In this article we show perspectives and examples of this development from the perspective of the business event industry, the educational programme of Events for Business, and from the student perspective.

Industry perspective

D&B Eventmarketing is the oldest B-to-B event marketing agency in the Netherlands. It has existed for 42 years now. In 2023, it merged with digital experience agency FX Agency in the Daymakers agency group. Its business consists of about 60% employee engagement and 40% relationship marketing for a wide range of clients and stakeholders. Pieter Bas Boertje (interviewed on 14 February 2025, CEO of Daymakers and founder of D&B Eventmarketing) explains how they got involved in events for the good cause. It grew organically, starting about 18 years ago with a benefit gala for *Fonds Gehandicaptensport*. In addition, D&B works for the *Helen Dowling Institute* (psycho-social healthcare for people who suffer from

cancer and their relatives and friends) and for *Right to Play* (organisation founded by Olav Koss, speed skating champion in the eighties), who use sports and games for children to learn in difficult parts of the world, like war zones (Gaza). *Stichting Papageno* (founded by Jaap and Aaltje van Zweden) organises events for people who suffer from autism.

Last but not least, there is the *Amsterdam City Swim*. D&B has changed this into a community event with a year-round communication process and swimming in the Amsterdam canals as the climax. It is a really meaningful community event. It is organised for the benefit of people who suffer from ALS. Some 3,000 people swim two kilometres through the Amsterdam canals. There are 30 so-called 'waves' and each of them has an ALS hero(ine) (a patient, or someone who already passed away). This is shown not only during the event but also before and after it via (social) media. A lot of money is raised through this. Big sponsors are also involved and they adopt a 'wave' as well (like Picnic, Basic-Fit, Ola, Atradius, Cupra, and Versace).

The main learning effects are:

- Younger generations feel far more connected to the good cause and find it very important to also be meaningful in their (working) life.
- Nowadays, you see more creative ways and twists to these galas, because the story of the good cause needs to be told. This way, it is far more meaningful and appealing. So storytelling and using the story in all touchpoints of events has become more important.
- Events provide a powerful platform for telling authentic stories that touch the heart and create meaningful experiences after the event too.

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Events are effective tools to ingrain your message in the audience's mind.

- One last thing which is very important is the fact that event managers tend to think the event is over when the time slots have come to an end. But in fact, this is just the start of it! You should focus not only on the event and the people being there but also on making content during the event that you can use to involve the ones who are not there!

Jolanda Jansen is CEO of Rotterdam Ahoy. Ahoy is known as a venue hosting many events, ranging from entertainment, sports and trade shows to corporate events and conferences. Furthermore, Ahoy organises a number of events such as ABN AMRO Open, Six Day Cycling and trade fairs such as Europort and Infratech. Jolanda sees the potential and power of events like this: "In the past years, we have learned that 'live events' fulfil a desire to meet, to be inspired, to share memories, to have fun; whether it concerns B-to-B events like conferences and trade shows or sports and entertainment. People love to connect, meet new people and get energised by live experiences. As an industry, we have an economic value, but even more importantly, we bring social values."



Education perspective

At Breda University of Applied Sciences, Academy for Leisure & Events, Events for Business specialisation, we have made a shift like the whole industry towards events being more and more a platform for impact on all kinds of topics and levels. For instance, diversity and inclusion, sustainability (food waste, no-show, etc.), not only in the production of events but also the events as a platform for people to meet and discuss important topics in our society. One of the examples of projects we are working on include the *SDG Action Festival*. This is a long-term collaboration

between five universities all over Europe on the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The main objective is to improve the students' international competences, more specifically, their commitment to global engagement. This is a win-win situation since students involved collaborate with different cultures on a global level, and they develop and execute an event themselves connected to one or more SDGs.

Student perspectives

There are many (social) media and the public's attention is very fragmented. What will the future bring? Let's have a look at some views and visions of the future generation on events as a driving force for social change and community engagement. And what will be or should be their impact for our education?

Mia Milkovic (fourth-year student of Events for Business) sees it like this. "Simply put, people want to be included in society, the easiest way to be exposed to that environment is through events, therefore, events have a huge impact on society and can influence social change. The future is unpredictable. However, I am confident events are here to stay and make a difference. Events can be used in many ways and imagination is the greatest tool used for creating and designing an experience. Without a doubt, the education of Events for Business prepares us for the future, with a curriculum that includes practical components like the SDG Action Festival - designed to engage with real clients, tackle current challenges, and step into leadership roles.

And finally, *Ella Olsena* (fourth-year student of Events for Business) has this view. "With a large part of our daily activities moved to the digital space, people are constantly overwhelmed with information overload and personal interactions are becoming less frequent. The rapid development of technology and AI has transformed online environments to the point where it is often difficult to distinguish real and synthetic content. And even though events have also adapted to digital environments, personal contact during offline events brings the most value to people. Digitalisation is already making people want to 'disconnect' and I believe this feeling will continue to grow as more aspects of our life will become digitalised. There will be a newfound appreciation for in-person interactions, and events

will play a significant role in fostering these interactions."

Conclusion

All in all, events are becoming more relevant and important to make the difference. Especially, in the society we live in these days. Future generations see and feel this and this provides great opportunities for the future of events as a driving tool for social change.

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When people gather in support of a cause, they are more likely to feel a sense of belonging and commitment to that cause.

Special thanks

To *Pieter Bas Boertje*, *Jolanda Jansen*, *Mia Milkovic*, and *Ella Olsena* for their contributions.

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Making a sustainable change to the future of theme parks and attractions

Putting preaching into practice with industry-academic co-creation projects

Wim Strijbosch
& Klaus Hoven

Wim Strijbosch and Klaus Hoven are lecturers of the Attractions & Theme Parks Management track at Breda University of Applied Sciences.

The theme parks and attractions fields comprise a sector of the leisure industry that caters to large masses of people. The top 20 theme and amusement parks in Europe welcome over 60 million visitors combined annually (TEA/AECOM, 2023). Catering to large crowds provides memorable experiences to many and enhances subjective well-being for many in turn. Nevertheless, being popular also comes with significant demands from the local environment, society and government structures. These structures are not inexhaustible. Sustainability is therefore one of the top priorities for the themed entertainment and attractions industry.

Change and challenges

While ecological concerns such as climate change and biodiversity loss are the most apparent, there are numerous other intricate developments that threaten the sustainability of our environment, society, and governance. Demographically, advanced nations are grappling with issues stemming from an ageing population and declining birth rates, which affect labour markets, healthcare systems and pension schemes. Economically, high inflation and rising living costs are pressing issues, compounded by significant economic disparities between countries. Socially, newer generations (e.g. generations Z, alpha, and beta) introduce different value systems, leading to notable shifts in leisure and tourism behaviours. Technologically, challenges such as the digital divide, cybersecurity threats and the rapid evolution of technologies like artificial intelligence (AI) and its myriad applications pose significant concerns. Additionally, current geopolitical tensions influence many of these aspects in turn.

From a co-creative path together with the themed entertainment and attractions industry, executed as part of the development of a master's programme on sustainability within themed entertainment (see case 3), it came to the fore that immediate concerns encompass alterations in rainfall patterns, rising sea levels, heatwaves, floods, droughts, and fires, alongside issues related to inflation, energy costs, interest rates, and political instability. Furthermore, a boost in visitor numbers has heightened the demand for employees, resulting in a notable labour shortage across all professional levels. Many attractions are worried about the availability of skilled labour and employee retention. Over one-third of operators foresee a reduction in available labour for 2025 (IAAPA, 2024). Europe is also experiencing a natural outflow of attraction leaders and executives due to retirements, with small and medium-sized family-owned facilities facing challenges in business succession. Regarding the current labour pool expectations over the next six months, particularly for professional and managerial staff, 23% of regional IAAPA members (i.e. IAAPA, the Industry Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions, is the themed entertainment and attraction industry's leading industry association) anticipate a decline in available candidates at this level (IAAPA, 2024).

Awareness of these sustainability issues has grown rapidly in recent years, but relatively nascent actions are still being taken to address these concerns. Industry platforms strive to highlight these issues annually by showcasing best practices, such as during the IAAPA Expo Europe Sustainability Day, IAAPA's initiative to award sustainability programmes at an exclusive IAAPA Honours event or Blooloop's online/virtual Greenloop conference.

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Socially, newer generations introduce different value systems, leading to notable shifts in leisure and tourism behaviours.



Analysis of the sustainability actions and ambitions of attractions

Beyond these more event-based and thus anecdotal efforts, an independent study conducted by Camurri Fiães in 2024 analysed the sustainability actions and ambitions of attractions more systematically using publicly available information from operators, manufacturers, and suppliers, as well as sustainability reports, websites, and webinars. The study revealed that leading operators do align their goals with the UN Global Compact principles or the Sustainable Development Goals. Following the ESG framework (Environmental, Social and Governance framework), the analysis categorised theme parks into three ambition levels: beginners, influencers, and shapers. Shapers have comprehensive ESG initiatives, influencers focus on Environmental, and beginners on Social. Of the 622 initiatives identified, 6% fall under Governance, 41% under Environmental, and 53% under Social. Yet Camurri Fiães (2024) also observed that while some theme parks offer effective and inspiring solutions to major industry problems, there is still much progress to be made in sharing best practices and the knowledge underlying these practices. His study emphasises the importance of collecting more data and creating a shared database to support data-driven decisions. This aligns with a broader consensus that companies should collaborate towards a greener future, as shared efforts benefit everyone.

Cases from BUAs' Attractions & Theme Parks Management track

BUAs' Attractions & Theme Parks Management track has several initiatives aligning with the industry-wide promotion of sustainability efforts and the dissemination of knowledge on the subject matter. As an interfaculty initiative, it integrates insights from the leisure, tourism, and hospitality domains to enhance cross-domain collaboration. Below, we are highlighting three cases: 1) the hackathon that is part of the minor programme on Strategy & Design for Themed Entertainment, 2) the newly developed Industry Challenge that is part of the Attractions & Theme Parks Management curriculum, and 3) the development of the Master IDEAS: an Erasmus Mundus master's programme that is currently under development and which is dedicated towards sustainability in themed entertainment and attractions. Through these cases, among many others, the Attractions & Theme Parks Management track hopes to contribute to the collaborative effort of the themed entertainment and attractions industry towards a more sustainable future.



Case 1: Hackathon

For three years in a row now, a three-day hackathon is being organised as part of the minor programme on Strategy & Design for Themed Entertainment. During the minor track, students attend courses on business management, sustainability, and futures and foresights related to the themed entertainment field. The hackathon, a co-creative effort between BUAs and IAAPA, with the latter acting as a commissioner, puts that freshly gained knowledge to the test. Students work in groups to develop a future-proof concept for a theme park, water park or zoo, with sustainability and ethics at the core. Students analyse existing organisations and trends, conduct research, and create a prototype that emphasises sustainability and ethical development. During a final showcase event, students present their concepts to a panel of both industry experts and representatives as well as academics, and include presentations and workshops on business models, future visions, and strategic design, demonstrating BUAs' Attractions & Theme Parks Management's commitment to providing the themed entertainment field with innovative and sustainable practices.

Case 2: Industry challenge

The Attractions & Theme Parks Management track traditionally included only one practical work placement. Over the past year, the curriculum has been updated to include an additional regular industry assignment. This new assignment connects students to the industry by embedding them in small project groups within organisations to create sustainable engagement reports. Students have been positioned in various themed entertainment organisations across Europe and work on tactical-/strategic-level projects, applying their knowledge of stakeholder management, change management, and sustainability. The course emphasises co-creation with the industry, encouraging students to collaborate with companies and stakeholders to develop and implement sustainable strategies. The project, linked to an earlier Innovative Organisations & Engagement course, ensures that theoretical knowledge is applied in real-world settings, turning preaching into practice.

Case 3: Master IDEAS

BUAs is currently developing an international master's programme in attractions and theme parks management, collaborating with Universitat Rovira I Virgili in Spain, Università IULM in Italy, and various industry partners. The IDEAS programme (Innovative Design for themed Entertainment and Attractions for Sustainability) focuses on tourism, hospitality,

entertainment, leisure, sustainability, and international business management. It aims to prepare students for senior and executive roles in the themed entertainment and attractions industry. IDEAS emphasises sustainability in both corporate strategy, business management, and creative leadership as core modules. While sustainability is a core focus in shorter-term courses such as in cases 1 and 2, the IDEAS programme is a two-year master's weaving sustainability into every aspect, aiming to produce executive-level professionals who can put their knowledge into practice at top levels in the themed entertainment field to make a meaningful contribution to the future of the industry.

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Many attraction parks are worried about the availability of skilled labour and employee retention.

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Photography

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Contributing to liveable and loveable cities

Urban Life and Placemaking now and for the future



Fereshteh Adi Saatlo Anzures and Simon de Wijs have been involved in the core team of the Urban Life and Placemaking specialisation since the beginning.

In 2020, the Urban Life and Placemaking (ULP) specialisation was launched as part of the Academy for Leisure & Events portfolio. From the start, ULP has focused on the dynamic nature of urban contexts and the role leisure and events can play within them. With the vast majority of the world's population living in cities - a number that continues to rise - urban areas are increasingly the places where people shape and experience their everyday lives. Cities are also sites of contrast: they offer vibrant leisure opportunities that cater to diverse lifestyles, yet they simultaneously struggle with pressing societal issues. It is precisely this dual nature that positions leisure and events as powerful tools for urban transformation. At ULP, we view leisure and events not only as experiences, but as instruments for building more inclusive, just, and joyful cities - or, as we say, loveable and liveable cities.

Since the programme was launched, nearly 100 students (20-25 annually) have joined ULP. Five years in, we are reflecting on what has been achieved, what is changing, and what lies ahead - for both the programme and the urban contexts we aim to shape. In an ever-changing world, reflection is key to staying relevant and impactful.

Bridging theory and practice

Our curriculum is designed around the interplay between (academic) knowledge and real-world

application. Courses such as Community Development, Concepting, Place Branding, and Vision provide students with theoretical grounding, but always link back to practice. Assignments are based on real-life urban challenges presented by external partners including Bühne in Breda, the City of Eindhoven, Groot Rotterdams Atelier Weekend, and Festival Popmonument. These collaborations are more than just assignments; they are stepping stones to professional networks.

A defining feature is the *Urban Scope* course, during which second-year students go on field trips, each shaped around a theme (Eventful Rotterdam, Inclusive Amsterdam, Sustainable Tilburg, Creative Nijmegen, Futureproof Eindhoven, Safe Gent, Youthful Antwerp, Narrative Bergen op Zoom, Hospitable Den Bosch, Playful Breda) and involving visiting multiple locations and organisations. These field trips expose students to the multiplicity of urban stakeholders, reinforcing one of our core competencies: learning to act with and by stakeholders. This principle underpins all of our partnerships and builds the foundation for sustainable collaboration.

What becomes clear is that cities are complex ecosystems of people, interests, identities, and environments. Learning how to navigate these systems is not something that can be taught solely in a classroom. It requires experience, conversation, observation, and trial and error in real contexts.

Projects for the City

And that is where the *Projects for the City* (PFTC) course comes in, where students recruit and execute their own projects in real urban contexts. These projects range across topics such as experience design, community development, event production, marketing, and promotion. The course encourages

initiative, creativity, and ownership while offering students the chance to build professional portfolios.

Over the years, ULP students have completed around 60 projects, commissioned by more than 45 partners including city marketing organisations, cultural events, hospitality companies, and municipal departments involved in urban planning and regeneration. Many of these collaborations continue beyond the project itself, showing how meaningful and lasting connections can be formed between students and the field.

Live and study in a European City

The third-year international semester provides a unique opportunity to live, study, and work in European cities such as Bologna, Krakow, Thessaloniki, and Trondheim. Our motto is *live like a local, act like a professional*. In these cities our students undertake real-life projects embedded in local contexts ranging from city exhibitions based on Urban Scope perspectives to hands-on interventions addressing local issues. These

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We are the connectors. We join forces to create cool places making urban life better and more fun.



activities culminate in our own yearly *Social Interventions Conference*, held both in Breda and online, where students present their work to a broad audience of stakeholders. During their stay abroad students in earlier years did projects with local organisations such as Torino Stratosferico, Tourne Bilbao, Booklovers Club Valencia, Erasmus Student Network, and Porto i/o.

Alongside these projects, BUAs weekly delivers online courses, creating a European classroom that connects all cities involved. This results in a rich learning environment that fosters intercultural exchange and collaboration. In doing so, students do not only gain professional experience; they also expand their personal horizons. Living abroad fosters resilience, open-mindedness, and a deeper appreciation of diversity - qualities that are vital for professionals who want to shape urban life with empathy and creativity.

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If leisure and events are to be understood not just as a goal but as a means to improve urban life, we must ensure they remain central to our teaching and projects.

Placemaking Week Europe

We also engage with external platforms like *Placemaking Week Europe (PWE)*, which brings together a large group of placemaking experts and enthusiasts from across Europe every year to share insights and practices around greening, mobility, inclusion, and more. When visiting the PWE with students and lecturers, we often notice, however, that leisure, despite its potential, is not as foregrounded in the discussions as it could be.

This observation encouraged us to reflect more critically on our own curriculum. If leisure and events are to be understood not just as a goal but as a means to improve urban life, we must ensure they remain central to our teaching, projects, and research. This reflection became an important moment of co-creation with our students.

Futures literacy with students

Looking ahead is just as vital as looking back. We invited our current second-year students to reflect on possible, probable, and disruptive futures (for ULP). While many aspects of our programme are already outward-looking and collaborative, students even called for more activities beyond the classroom, diverse and real-life learning environments, and deeper collaboration with stakeholders. This desire is mirrored in their preferences for themes such as diversity, inclusion, social cohesion, and cultural collaboration, all of which highlight the human and social dimensions of urban life.

Students also expressed a wish to engage more broadly within BUAs - collaborating with other specialisations, academies and programmes, and learning in open, flexible environments. One particularly resonant suggestion was to engage with multi-stakeholder environments, such as living labs that apply multiple helix models of innovation.

When it comes to disruptive futures, students demonstrated awareness of macro challenges. From over-construction, lack of space and housing shortages to loneliness, social media, AI, climate change, and political instability. While this shows a strong connection to current global trends, many voiced concerns and a

somewhat pessimistic outlook. This feedback inspires us to foster greater futures literacy, helping students imagine alternative, more optimistic scenarios where their role as change makers is possible and relevant.

Some also expressed concern about the job market, questioning whether their ULP background would be recognised or outperformed by other, perhaps more conventional, programmes. This only reinforces the importance of positioning leisure clearly and confidently at the heart of urban innovation.

Putting leisure centre stage

Together with our students and partners, we are reasserting the centrality of leisure and events - not just as outputs of the urban experience, but as drivers of positive change. We aim to educate students who can work across scales and contexts: from specific neighbourhoods and projects to macro-level urban strategies.

To help reinforce this approach, we have developed the *Wheel of Themes* (Figure 1), a curriculum design tool that keeps liveable and loveable cities at its core. Each semester or term then takes on a leisure-driven theme, such as *The Creative City*, *The Eventful City*, *The Attractive City*, *The Fantasy City*, *The Playful City*, as focal point. This structure gives students clear thematic grounding while keeping the programme vibrant and relevant.

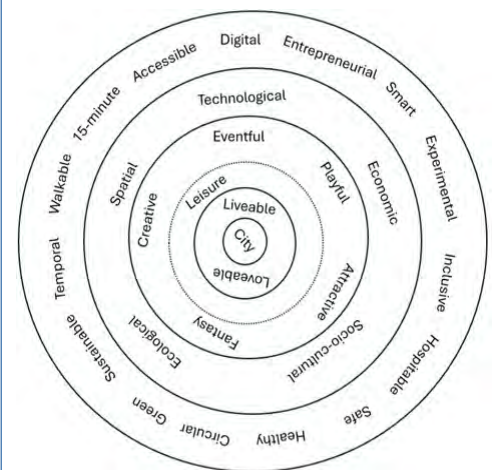


Figure 1

These central themes (the core rings) then allow us to explore a wide range of urban dynamics through a leisure lens, connecting theoretical and practical dimensions from the other rings. In this way, the themes act as creative frameworks that open up new questions, ideas, and partnerships within each combination of rings.

Urban Living Lab Breda

It is no coincidence that at this very moment we have the opportunity to deepen our collaboration with Urban Living Lab Breda. The lab is at the intersection of research, education and practice and facilitates collaborations with public, private, and societal stakeholders. Here, we learn from others and share our belief: leisure is essential to build better cities.

This is our passion: we are the connectors. We join forces to create cool places making urban life better and more fun. By continuing to be curious, to learn, experiment, and co-create in ways that celebrate both the complexity and joy of urban life. And above all, to continue striving together with our students, partners, and the community for cities that are not only more liveable but also more loveable.

Resilience LABs

Harmonious development towards holistic education in the Social Innovation specialisation

Jacco van Mierlo



Jacco van Mierlo is a lecturer of the Social Innovation programme of Breda University of Applied Sciences.

Students are experiencing more and more problems to meet the expectations held by society, and are struggling to find ways to cope with the associated mental health issues. Higher education tries to provide guidance on this, but it usually does not tackle the root of the problem. The Social Innovation specialisation has been taking a different approach to education for twenty years, and with Resilience LABs is taking the next step towards education that aligns with today's needs.

Problem exploration

Students experience a lot of pressure from study commitments, social activities, work, and other responsibilities. This may cause both physical and mental stress. Teaching staff are increasingly noticing that students are struggling to meet societal expectations. This picture is confirmed by research carried out by the Trimbos Institute (2021), which shows that half of students (51 per cent) experience mental health issues (such as anxiety and gloom), 12 per cent of whom to a severe degree. Students' mental well-being (resilience, positive mental health, and life satisfaction) is often out of balance. It is therefore not surprising that, partly due to the *Landelijk Kader Studentenwelzijn 2023-2030* (2023-2030 National Framework for Student Well-Being), universities of applied sciences are making an effort to raise awareness and offer plenty of initiatives to promote a healthy lifestyle among students. Think of

one-on-one counselling, extracurricular activities such as well-being weeks, mindfulness and yoga courses, and curriculum activities such as soft-landing periods and additional coaching. These are often extracurricular activities offered outside school hours and are not mandatory. As a result, only a small percentage of students participate in them, and the real challenge of providing education that prepares all students for a healthy, balanced lifestyle, both professionally and privately, is not being addressed.

Searching for new paths

The higher education system has difficulty exploring alternative approaches that are more in line with new demands from society. In education, it is time to let go a little more and listen to the younger generation, going beyond setting up staff and student participation councils and asking students for their opinions in evaluations and surveys. It is about working with students to develop education that integrates their desire for an understanding society. A society in which their concerns are recognised and in which they find the support they need to face the future with resilience. By doing so, we offer students the opportunity to meet their need for a positive outlook and a sense of agency: the ability to exercise control over their own lives and living conditions, and to contribute to substantial 'alternative futures'.

A perspective that aligns with the above needs is the holistic approach. This approach focuses on the students' full development – intellectually, socially, emotionally, physically, and spiritually. Instead of emphasising only academic performance, this approach integrates different aspects of living and learning, such as creativity, social skills, and emotional well-being. This helps students to develop a feeling of connectedness and well-being in addition to qualification and socialisation, which is

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The holistic approach focuses on the student's entire development – intellectually, socially, emotionally, physically, and spiritually.

essential to 'feeling comfortable in their skin'. The importance of holistic education lies in promoting a balanced and harmonious development. If all facets of being human are paid attention to in education, students are encouraged to explore and make use of their full potential. This leads to self-aware, resilient and happy individuals who are better prepared for the challenges of life and therefore, their working lives too.

Harmonious development at Performatory

Within Performatory, we take a holistic approach that is better suited to today's needs. Performatory is a physical environment within the Social Innovation specialisation, where there is room for education based on different pedagogical principles. Room for seeing, thinking and doing things differently, thereby contributing to students' mental and physical resilience.

Within Performatory, the Harmonious Development of Students in Higher Education project focuses on holistic principles such as attention to the whole person, individual needs and diversity, and connection with social issues. Ways are being sought, together with students, to pay more attention to well-being in the curriculum. The preliminary research led to a focus on 'sense of meaning', 'sense of purpose', and 'sense of belonging' in order to improve students' mental and physical health.

'Sense of meaning' evolves around values that are important for students and their personal development, relationships with others, and the world. Students search for what is important, asking questions such as: What is my essence as a person? What do my actions mean?

This gives direction to their 'sense of purpose', which focuses on students' goals, such as improving mental and physical health. We create space for students to set their own goals and experiment, so they can learn and grow.

'Sense of belonging' is about the feeling of being accepted and appreciated within a group. This is crucial for the students' self-confidence and involvement. Therefore, a lot of attention is paid to creating a learning environment where students feel at home, with many social activities aimed at Performatory and in which we involve students in developing education.

In the project, the focus on the said items requiring attention led to all kinds of experiments, such as conversations with students about student well-being (the so-called 'biscuit tin' conversations); experiments with 'entry and exit tasks' during our labs to enter into discussions about their well-being in a different way; organising 'walky-talkies' during which topics that students encounter are discussed during walks; and a 'fast dopamine challenge' in which students are encouraged to avoid 'fast dopamine kicks' for a week. Eventually, this led to a Resilience LABs Cycle being developed, a step towards holistic education in which attention to developing resilient students is organically woven into the curriculum.

Resilience LABs

In March 2025 we started the first cycle of ten 'Resilience LABs' based on the 'Wheel of Life' and the 'PERMA(H) model' from positive psychology, both models focus on how to improve a balanced, resilient



Figure 1

and satisfactory life (see Figure 1). The LABs consist of weekly 90-minute sessions and are fully organised by students. The LABs focus on understanding of and contribution to a personal behavioural change with regard to their own well-being, and are intended for both students and lecturers.

Each Resilience LAB has a standard set-up and contains: preparation; introduction; explanation; core in the shape of a leisure activity (such as boxing or painting); judgement-free feedback; and closing off. Participants make preparations, discuss the topic, experience it by carrying out activities, and share their insights without any judgement. This promotes personal development and offers new perspectives on the personal goals that were defined at the beginning of the cycle.

It is important that a safe environment should be created during the Resilience Labs in which participants can be themselves. Although we want to work with as few rules as possible, we agree that personal matters discussed in the LAB will not be shared outside the lab and that you do not have to share anything if you do not feel comfortable doing so. Participation in the activities is mandatory; just watching is not allowed. This

prevents participants from feeling observed and being less open.

The students' responses have been largely positive so far, and it is great to see that they are contributing ideas to improve the next cycle of Resilience LABs and expand it to other students.

Conclusion

With the Resilience LABs, the Performatory has taken the next step towards a more harmonious curriculum. This is a curriculum component in which both students and lecturers actively work on gaining insight into and contributing to personal behavioural change with regard to their own well-being. The next step is to integrate this approach into other curriculum components.

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We take a different approach within Performatory, in a way that aligns with today's needs.



Niki Hendriks is a lecturer of Leisure & Events Management at Breda University of Applied Sciences.



In today's fast-changing world, leisure is more than just a break from work, it is a space where people create meaning, strengthen communities, and explore who they are. From debates around fireworks bans to the decline of community centres, leisure touches on many urgent societal issues. In the general track of Leisure & Events Management (LEM-GEN), we believe that leisure has the power to shape both individual lives and society as a whole. That's why our programme encourages students to explore how leisure connects to emotional well-being, inclusion, business, and social responsibility. More than ever, students are driven by a desire to make an impact and not just to build skills, but to contribute to a better, more connected world.

Leadership through real-world learning

At LEM-GEN, leadership means the ability to navigate complexity, embrace change, and act with purpose. We foster this through a curriculum grounded in core knowledge of subjects like marketing, stakeholder management, experience design, and change management, paired with real-world client projects. These challenges push students to apply theory in meaningful contexts, sharpening their critical thinking mindset, decision-making and leadership skills.

For example, in the Experience Design and Marketing course, students designed inclusive

activities. One group organised 'Heel Breda Bakt', a baking event inspired by 'The Great British Bake Off', blending their love for baking with community-building. They learned to lead with authenticity and empathy. In the Stakeholder Management course, students addressed alcohol-free experiences for under-18s during Carnival. They developed strategies to help young people enjoy festivities without peer pressure, targeting parents, entrepreneurs, and teens. This project highlighted the complexity of alcohol policy and the importance of listening, researching, and responding to real-life issues. A student describes: "I've never realised how many people are involved in alcohol policy: schools, parents, supermarkets, even festival organisers. It's way more complex than just telling teenagers not to drink. This project really opens eyes to the bigger picture."

Personal development as a foundation

Beyond project work, at LEM-GEN we invest in personal growth. We guide students to align their values with their professional ambitions through mentorship, coaching, and reflection. In workshops with partners like Young Impact,

students explore their strengths and aspirations, culminating in a personal compass for their future. Our international study trips add another dimension to this journey. Students conduct 'Human Portraits' by informally interviewing locals, gaining new perspectives and practising empathy and intercultural communication. These moments often spark deep self-awareness, helping them grow into reflective professionals and compassionate leaders.

The future: Leisure for Change

LEM-GEN's educational vision comes to life in our Leisure for Change course. This third-year course invites students to apply everything they have learned to create meaningful, lasting impact within the sector by creating their own business or organisation. One of the most important elements of the course is Futures Literacy, based on the paper *Leisure Futures: A Hybrid Approach Integrating Generative AI and Design Futures* (Bevolo, 2025), as well as research by Bevolo & Draeger (2025). Developed in collaboration with the UK-based firm Shaping Tomorrow, a leader in automated foresight since the early 2000s, the course introduces students to the understanding that there is not one fixed future, but many possible ones.



Figure 1

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Before this programme, I thought 'the future' was just science fiction. Now I know I can shape it.

Through scenario development and trend analysis, students cultivate a proactive mindset - learning not just to anticipate the future, but to actively shape it. At the very start of the project, with no prior context, students were asked one bold question (It is the year 2050 and your business changed the world; what problem did you solve?) and their responses revealed what truly matters to them and what challenges they feel are most urgent (see Figure 1). This powerful moment served as the foundation for their journey: to design ideas that go beyond theory, and tackle real-world issues they genuinely care about.

Envisioning multiple futures

The next step in the journey is for students to envision a 'preferable future' to inspire positive impact through leisure. They explore probable, possible, and preferable futures, gaining the confidence to act rather than react. Leadership is crucial: with strong leadership and future design skills, students can create something amazing. The course is grounded in 'societal resilience,' as defined by the new professorship in Leisure in a Social Context at BUAs. It is about how individuals, cultures, and communities anticipate challenges and build networks to strengthen society and create resilience.

Once students lay the foundation of their dreams, they learn to use AI to explore and broaden their ideas. Through 'scaffolding' in prompting, they generate future 'signals' on GEN-AI Leisure Signal Cards, inspired by the Shaping Tomorrow format. Each card offers a glimpse into potential trends, highlighting optimistic and pessimistic scenarios, uncertainties, and possible actions. These cards are plotted on the Futures Quadrant, helping students cluster signals into trends and map out coherent future scenarios. See the two elaborated examples presented as an illustration. This exercise helps them critically assess how to move forward towards a resilient, preferable future, influencing their professional ambitions and personal choices. *Leisure for Change* prepares them to create future-proof, socially valuable enterprises and make a difference in the world.

In conclusion

By combining academic rigour with creativity, community engagement, and personal reflection, LEM-GEN prepares students not just for the leisure industry, but for reshaping it and navigating its complexities. By accelerating their talents and equipping them with the necessary tools, we empower our students to use leisure as a force for positive change, ultimately contributing to a better world.



Stichting Klavertje Vier (The Four-Leaf Clover Foundation)

This project is dedicated to supporting children living in poverty by creating access to sports, play, and creative activities. The foundation was initiated by Robin, Renske, Romee, and Neeltje, students who observed that far too many children are excluded simply due to financial barriers.

Motivated by a belief in equal opportunity, the students formulated a *guiding star*: a future where all children, regardless of background, can fully participate in leisure activities. They recognised that participation is not just fun, but it also plays a vital role in a child's development, confidence, and well-being.

To translate their vision into future-ready action, the students used generative AI tools and foresight methods to explore trends. This led to the creation of **Leisure Signal Cards**, such as:

- **Mental Mentor Buddy & AI Talent Camps** – envisioning personalised, AI-supported learning pathways that nurture the unique talents of children in underprivileged situations.
- **The Neighbourhood as Playschool** – imagining public spaces that blend technology, creativity, and physical activity to transform learning through play.

These Signal Cards were used to map out optimistic and pessimistic futures, explore uncertainties, and identify actionable strategies. They became powerful tools for envisioning how leisure can build societal resilience and *future-proof impact*.

By connecting a social mission to foresight, Klavertje Vier is more than just a student project, it is a future-driven initiative aimed at lasting, meaningful change.

Emotional Gyms for boys

Inspired by themes from Adolescence, the manosphere and concerns around toxic masculinity, this student group explores how leisure can become a catalyst for gender equality and emotional intelligence. Their foresight work identifies two emerging Signal Trends focused on structured emotional development in youth, especially boys aged 12 to 25.

Signal Trend 1: Active emotion regulation as a learning format

Young people (aged 12 to 25) are not only encouraged to feel their emotions but are taught to actively and consciously regulate them. This happens through structured methods that combine self-observation with behavioural boundaries. Emotion regulation becomes a learned skill - much like sport, music, or language. This trend represents emotionally structured personal growth with a growth mindset. Awareness and behavioural guidance form the foundation of mental resilience.

Signal Trend 2: Emotional self-discipline in gym-like settings

Especially targeted at boys, this concept envisions emotional gyms - mental fitness spaces where emotional awareness is trained with the same intensity and structure as physical workouts. These gyms integrate personal reflection with rules and routines that help build self-control and inner strength. This trend shifts the focus from 'feel whatever you want' to 'learn how you feel, and what to do with it'. Discipline is not a restriction - it is the framework within which resilience can grow.

The key question that these students now have is:

"How do we turn self-awareness into a collective, appealing ritual for boys - without losing its depth and authenticity?"

From grassroots to the top

Building ecosystems in sports and esports



Luca Rijneveld is a student of Applied Data Science & AI at Breda University of Applied Sciences. Liedewei Ratgers, Jur van de Graaf and Fiona Verspoor Feeney are staff members in the Sports and Esports (SES) community within Academy for Leisure & Events.

At SES, students are educated for the changing world of sports and esports, including studying transitions that occur between grassroots and professional levels and understanding the wider ecosystems these sectors exist within. In our learning community, we look to connect and cross-fertilise ideas, knowledge, skills and insights between sports and esports, supporting students in shaping the future of these sectors. In learning to create meaningful experiences, students ask questions such as "Where do you find the community and how do you build, grow and maintain it?" The cases 3x3 basketball and Level Up, which are described in this article, are examples of current collaborations that the SES community are engaged in.

3x3 basketball in the Netherlands

The moment that Worthy de Jong secured Olympic gold for the Netherlands at the 2024 Paris Olympics represented an unrivalled achievement in Dutch sporting history, and was 'watched far and wide'.

In 5 vs 5 (traditional full-court) basketball, the Netherlands had struggled to compete with the top on the European and world stage and in 3x3 they reached the pinnacle, with the national women's team getting gold at the 2023 FIBA (International basketball federation) Europe Cup and the men's national team winning Olympic gold in Paris in 2024. What can other sports federations learn from the approach taken by 3x3 basketball in the Netherlands?

Long-term investment

Firstly, it did not happen overnight as it was the result of long-term investment. Just like the

decisions we are taking now are shaping our future, the decision that the NBB (Dutch basketball federation) made to invest in 3x3 basketball in 2009 led to where it is today. In that sense, the Netherlands, along with France, are seen as front-runners and held up as examples internationally. The main reason for investment in 3x3 was to make basketball accessible to a wider audience. In 3x3, you do not need to be a member of a club or an association to be able to participate in the tournaments, which are organised by FIBA.

Visibility

3x3 tournaments take place on squares in neighbourhoods and at prime locations in cities. This opens people up to the sport and triggers their interest. "That's why it is also very suited to expressing the lifestyle of basketball in addition to the sport. Music, clothing, sneakers, urban, everything can be found in the outdoors around 3x3 basketball," explains Liam Brouwer (events officer and placement supervisor of a SES student at NBB).

Creating perspective on and off court

3x3 also recognises the power it has to make an impact, with the NBB working closely with 3x3 Unites, an organisation that looks to "... move, unite and empower youth to create perspective on and off the court" (*Over 3x3 Unites*, 2025). This collaboration aligns with the vision for 3x3 From the Streets to the World Stage and the NBB sees great potential in working together to develop 3x3 and the social impact it can have.

Diversity

3x3 basketball feels like it belongs to everyone, because it brings together various groups within the 3x3 community at recreational tournaments. There are several different levels and age groups across wheelchair basketball and standing

basketball. The FIBA 3x3 Women's Series is the world's top competition for professional female 3x3 players and the FIBA 3x3 World Tour is the most prestigious event in men's 3x3. Recognising the importance of gender equality in the sport, the 2024 Amsterdam World Tour event marked the first time that a 3x3 top tournament for men and women took place side by side. 3x3 showcases possibilities to organise tournaments in a different way from what we have traditionally seen and it has connected with a growing fan base in recent years.

Training programme

Although 3x3 originated as a street sport and amateur athletes do not need to be members of a club or federation, there are training and talent development programmes in place. The NBB provides hybrid training programmes that cater for 3x3 as well as 5 vs 5. The Dutch approach is proving fruitful, as seen in the growing professionalisation of 3x3 basketball and in the momentum it is gaining as a recreational sport.

The future is now; the approach of the NBB to step into 3x3 basketball has proven to be

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3x3 also recognises the power it has to make an impact.



successful.

Pioneering in an urban sport may lead to growth professionally and be worthwhile for society. This is in line with the approach taken in SES, which aims for an integrated approach to creating value for various stakeholders in the sports and esports communities and the ecosystems that they exist within. Let's hope more associations follow this example where athletes can develop from the streets to the world stage, with benefits for society more widely incorporated in their design for advancing the sport.

Levelling up leisure: esports in Brabant and beyond

Esports has gone from living rooms to global stages, soon even the Olympic stage. The first Esports Olympics are set to take place in Saudi Arabia in 2027, formalising what many already see as a legitimate competitive domain. Yet, for all its growth at the elite level, the real opportunity lies at the grassroots. Building from the bottom up is essential to create inclusive, sustainable systems that help young people

develop not just as players, but as people.

In Noord-Brabant, that philosophy is driving a growing esports movement. In cities like Breda and Eindhoven, the Level Up initiative is rethinking how young people engage with digital play. It is not about chasing sponsorships or turning every participant into a professional gamer. It is about creating environments where everyone, regardless of background or skill, can participate meaningfully, grow technically and socially, and connect with others through shared interests.

A system from the ground up

While esports often appears fragmented, shaped by commercial interests, publishers, and hype cycles, projects like Level Up provide something steadier: community, structure, and growth paths. Participants in Level Up can play competitively at their own level, with support that goes beyond the game itself. The Brabantsport vision for Level Up-MDT is simple: 'from player to achiever'. They receive training in game strategy and production, but also in health, nutrition, and communication. These are transferable life skills, and applicable whether they go pro or not.

Here, too, a model is emerging in esports. Grassroots, who provide local tournaments, community events, and casual clubs. Developmental aspects, with coaching roles, content production, and small-scale team involvement. And professionals, high-level team play, international competitions, and career opportunities in media, marketing, and event management. The goal is not just to move people 'up the ladder' but also to build a strong base, ensuring that the system is sustainable and beneficial at every level.

Esports as social space

In Peru, esports developed in LAN cafés - physical places where players gathered to



compete and socialise. Gaming became a public, communal experience, not just a private online one. This helped create a uniquely social form of gaming culture, rooted in real-world interaction.

A local example of this is the Breda Guardians, a place for people that work, live, and study in Breda to come together as a community, play video games, and partake in local tournaments. Breda Guardians has partnered with Brabantsport in their new Level Up initiative, offering their facility, located at The HIVE at BUAs as a training ground and home to foster these grassroots. The aim is to use gaming as a means to connect people, build confidence, and cultivate community, all of which strongly aligns with the Breda Guardians' vision.

What does all of this mean for the future of leisure?

Esports has long outgrown the stereotype of isolated players staring at screens. Today, it is a platform for development - offering skills in leadership, strategy, storytelling, and collaboration. Projects like Level Up represent a shift in how we define leisure itself. Not passive consumption, but active participation. Not just entertainment, but education and empowerment. Whether at a keyboard in Breda or in a café in Lima, young people are shaping their futures, and their communities through play.

The SES specialisation has designed a programme that develops students from *enjoyers of*, to professionals, connecting students to the broader ecosystem that drives the continuous evolution of sports and esports.

Our special thanks go out to David Brouwer Muñoz (SES student) and Liam Brouwer (events officer and placement supervisor at NBB) for their contributions.

Photography

• Jesper Jobse (page 86 top)

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Esports is not just passive consumption, but also active participation. It is not just entertainment, but also education and empowerment.

MBA Imagineering: present and future directions

Key competencies of business and societal innovators



Margo Rooijackers, Nicoline de Heus, Anneloes Henskens, Stifani Herpich, and Wesley Put are lecturers and researchers at MBA Imagineering, Breda University of Applied Sciences.

The MBA Imagineering programme at Breda University of Applied Sciences, launched in 2006, was created to meet the increasing demand for innovative and creative approaches in business leadership and management. Over the years, the programme's focus has expanded beyond traditional business perspectives to also encompass societal and community change and innovation initiatives in its curriculum.

Stakeholders as co-designers

The world we live in is often described as a VUCA environment - Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous - presenting significant challenges such as climate change, technological advancements, shifting population patterns, and social issues like equality and inclusion. Addressing these challenges requires innovative approaches to thinking and acting. This includes fostering innovation at all levels - within business and organisational contexts, communities, and even across entire social systems. Linear methods of managing change often fall short. Instead, there is a growing need for skilled professionals who cannot only respond to complex challenges but also build organisational resilience and foster creativity to shape the future of organisations, communities, and society as a whole. The MBA Imagineering programme fully aligns with the BUAs vision and mission to educate professionals 'for and in a

continuously changing world'. Based on the Imagineering strategic design approach, it enables students to intervene in organisational and social systems and become effective system innovators. By involving a wide range of internal and external stakeholders, transformation processes have been ignited extending beyond traditional organisational boundaries. In essence, it is an iterative process, grounded in three core activities of design thinking, namely Inspiration (discovering the generative core), Ideation (designing for behavioural change) and Implementation (enabling the co-creation of value) (Nijs, 2019). This holistic approach aims to ensure that innovation is not just a top-down directive, but a collective and co-creative effort involving all stakeholders as co-designers of the future.

Innovation Circle with alumni

The MBA Imagineering was innovative and distinctive in its time. However, over the last two decades, numerous change and innovation programmes have emerged, making it more challenging to pinpoint the exact uniqueness of the MBA Imagineering programme. To address this, the Master Imagineering team hosted the Innovation Circle event in January 2024. This event was attended by over 20 alumni, Dutch as well as international ones, representing student cohorts ranging from 2008 to 2022.

The central question of the gathering was: 'What competencies do Imagineers need, today and in the near future, to match the needs of the market?' This question was addressed via a World Café session at four tables, followed by a LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® workshop. The outcomes provided valuable insights into how alumni reflect on their study experiences and how these shaped them into the innovation professionals they are today. These results illustrate the strength and value of the MBA Imagineering programme, clearly identifying

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It is an iterative process, grounded in three core activities of design thinking, namely inspiration, ideation and implementation.

the key competencies to be cherished in the programme's future profile.

In this contribution, the results of the event are visualised through artist impressions and written explanations related to four consecutive topics: (1) Networks & Communities, (2) Sustainability, (3) Systems World and (4) Digitisation. We conclude by synthesising these outcomes through a visualisation of 'metaphors connected to the Imagineering Professional', which underscores the unique aspects of the IMA programme compared to other change and innovation master's programmes.

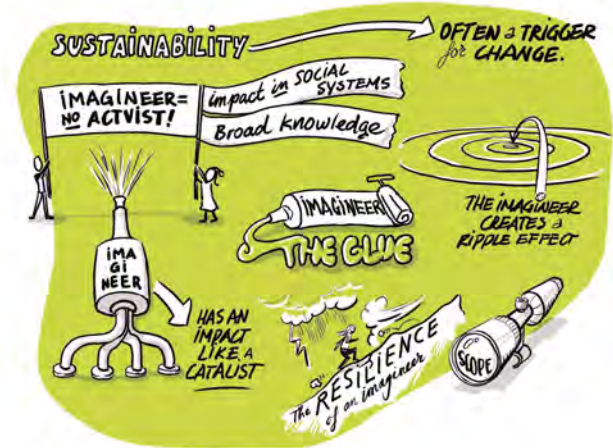
Outcomes: Networks & Communities

Imagineers recognise the crucial role of learning communities and stakeholder networks in tackling complex issues. However, they often encounter obstacles such as time constraints, financial limitations, and human behaviour that impede commitment. Alumni shared that in

their professional practice they face various challenges and discussed five of them in detail. Firstly, the lack of senior support was addressed. Bottom-up efforts to create valuable communities often lack senior-level support due to a focus on KPIs and profit. While collaborative cultures enhance problem-solving skills, their impact is not immediately reflected in KPIs. Imagineers must articulate and visualise the benefits of engaged communities. Secondly, remote work comfort was mentioned as an issue. Employees are comfortable working remotely, making it difficult to build physical communities. For example, attempts to create a learning community around AI faced resistance when physical meetings were required. Another point put to the fore was labelled as 'fake' communities. This label referred to commercial-oriented communities, created by organisations, lacking genuine engagement. Lastly, human behaviour was discussed. Many people simply resist change and prefer to associate with similar individuals, making diverse community building challenging.

supporting them in transitioning while emphasising value co-creation and economic growth. Social entrepreneurship and sustainable business models emerge as central pillars of Imagineers' entrepreneurial endeavours, making them experts in fostering resilience through Strategic Design.

The debate persisted on the positioning of Imagineers in relation to sustainability, particularly regarding climate change. While recognising its significance, diverse perspectives and priorities among Imagineers worldwide necessitate self-awareness regarding personal biases and cultural backgrounds. Whether adopting an activist stance or a pragmatic approach, professional Imagineers focus on fostering collective understanding while remaining culturally sensitive and striving for neutrality in mediation.



Takeaways regarding the key competencies of an Imagineer:

- Articulating value: be able to demonstrate the value and impact of nurturing co-creative communities beyond short-term KPIs, emphasising the importance of relationship-oriented goals.
- Self-organisation: act as a catalyst to ignite community participation. Designing inspiring physical gatherings can create a fear of missing out and encourage involvement.
- Diverse perspectives: building communities with diverse perspectives enriches learning and addresses complex issues. This requires effort, commitment, and the ability to facilitate high-quality dialogues, including difficult conversations. Empathy is a crucial competency in understanding stakeholders' psychological and social contexts.

Outcomes: Sustainability

The notion of an 'Imagineering Centre for Sustainability' was explored. This centre could serve as a pivotal hub where Imagineers collaborate with practitioners and organisations in transition on sustainability research and development initiatives. At the same time, this concept raised important questions, for instance 'what does sustainability entail for Imagineers in terms of knowledge and action?', and 'should Imagineers position themselves as experts or remain impartial facilitators of dialogue, guiding stakeholders in any chosen direction?'

For Imagineers, embracing sustainability means adopting a mindset geared towards long-term thinking, consistently considering the lasting effects of innovations and changes within organisations. This mindset presents an ongoing challenge. Rather than merely possessing knowledge, Imagineers prioritise continuous learning. They are inherently motivated professionals and forward-thinkers who readily embrace change. Yet, when interacting with organisations, resistance is often encountered and the impact realised is limited, particularly in endeavours related to global challenges.

One vital competency Imagineers must hone is behavioural design, closely intertwined with their existing linguistic and narrative approaches. This involves enhancing their ability to influence and shape new social systems, employing language and narratives to reframe perspectives and provoke critical thinking, thereby fostering mindset shifts - a cornerstone of the Imagineering ethos, also known as Designing for Emergence.

Additionally, Imagineers must cultivate a business-savvy, entrepreneurial mindset concerning sustainability challenges faced by companies,

Takeaways regarding the key competencies of an Imagineer:

- A profound comprehension of human and systemic behaviour, coupled with expertise in influencing mindset shifts through linguistic, narrative, and behavioural design.
- Mastery in fostering resilient entrepreneurship to guide organisations through transitions.
- Forward-thinking with a keen sensitivity to intercultural nuances.

Outcomes: Systems World

The concept of transitioning 'from a systems world to a more human-centred world' was explored. Over the past years, organisations and society have increasingly built systems for greater efficiency, leading to fragmentation. Given the complex challenges we face today, remaining organised in this fragmented manner is counterproductive. Imagineers refer to this as systems thinking. To address these complex problems, Imagineering professionals must re-establish the human connection across these systems.

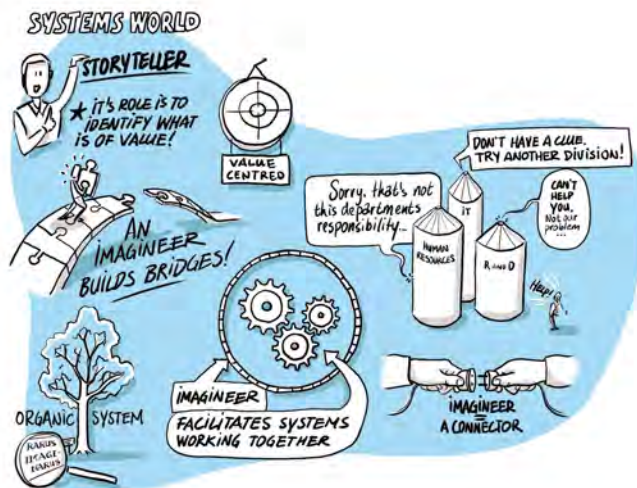
The dialogues among alumni evoked strong emotions. Some expressed concerns, such as: "Please don't put humans at the centre again." This sentiment reflects the belief that focusing solely on human benefits has led to numerous problems. Instead, we need to recognise that we are part of a larger, interconnected organic system.

In exploring the role and competencies of an Imagineer, the role of the 'storyteller' emerged as particularly significant. Imagineers should engage freely with individuals across different silos and departments

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Many people simply resist change and prefer to associate with similar individuals, making diverse community building challenging.

within organisations, as well as with internal and external stakeholders. By highlighting positive similarities rather than differences, Imagineering professionals can help people from various silos understand shared purposes and foster meaningful connections.



Takeaways regarding the key competencies of an Imagineer:

- Building bridges between systems (and silos).
- Empathy for all people involved.
- Being the 'glue' that facilitates connections.
- Acting as the storyteller.

Outcomes: Digital Transformation

In recent years, the world has undergone significant digitalisation. We use social media daily, and almost everyone has experimented with AI at work or school. Nowadays, much organisational change is driven by technology and its advanced applications. Many market disruptors are fuelled by technological innovation. Due to these rapid developments, organisations must develop new business models to survive.

What does this mean for the work of Imagineers? How do we navigate the complexities of working with various technologies? Imagineers must learn to use digital tools to facilitate processes effectively. However, ethical considerations surrounding technology must not be overlooked. Implementing new technologies ethically is a delicate process that requires careful facilitation within organisations. It is crucial to maintain the human touch and ensure that digital advancements complement, rather than overshadow, human interactions. Both aspects must go hand in hand.

AI represents the ability of computers or robots to perform tasks typically associated with intelligent beings, even though it may not yet fully replicate human cognitive abilities. Human beings are still essential for interpreting the information generated by AI, and society needs critical thinkers to ensure this information is understood correctly. Misuse of these tools can have significant consequences. Imagineers play a vital role in adding a human perspective when working with technology and digital tools. Effective use of technology can help maintain connections with people and build sustainable communities of peers. Imagineers can play a crucial role in fostering the development of these sustainable communities.



Takeaways regarding the key competencies of an Imagineer:

- Using technology effectively.
- Adopting an ethical approach to technological transformation, including AI.

Outcomes: Metaphors Connected to the Imagineering Professional

Overall, it was fascinating to observe the diverse metaphors alumni use to describe their roles as Imagineers in professional contexts. These metaphors range from 'bridge builder', 'connector' and 'fertiliser' to 'disruptor', 'change-maker' and 'storyteller'. "As an Imagineer I see myself as a fusion cook. In a sense, you function as an organisational therapist. You are bold and brave enough to set the stage for conversations that are needed and to design the right interventions. You know yourself and your strengths. And you know what you are not, which you subsequently need to organise around you". Alumni see themselves as catalysts for change, which requires a specific subset of Imagineering leadership competencies ranging from 'nurturing collaborative communities and networks', 'facilitating dialogues of good quality' to 'creating a sense of belonging'. And from 'boosting of collective creativity' to 'embracing diversity and inclusion'.

These rich metaphors are insightful and clearly demonstrate that the Imagineering master's programme is not a traditional MBA but has its own unique focus. It is precisely this focus that we aim to preserve and cherish in our educational innovation journey. At Breda University of Applied Sciences, and specifically within the MBA Imagineering programme, our goal is to educate the visionary, creative, and innovative professionals of the future.

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Illustrations

- Created by Sander Mercx.

WHAT COMPETENCES do IMAGINEERS NEED today and in the near future in order TO MATCH the NEEDS of the MARKET?



Column

Ajay Kapur



Ajay Kapur is director of Academy for Leisure & Events, Breda University of Applied Sciences.

The question of whether leisure should be understood as a means to an end or as an end in itself is a fundamental inquiry when examining the concept of meaningful leisure experiences. This duality highlights the diverse ways individuals perceive and engage with leisure activities, reflecting a broad spectrum of subjective and contextual interpretations.

Meaningful leisure

The meaning attached to leisure is highly individualised. For some, leisure serves primarily as a form of escapism or hedonistic pleasure - a necessary retreat from the demands and stresses of everyday life. For these individuals, the purpose of leisure lies in its capacity to recharge emotional and mental reserves, offering moments of temporary relief and rejuvenation. Importantly, the experience of leisure in this sense transcends socio-economic status; it is neither confined to nor dictated by the amount of wealth or material resources an individual possesses. Whether in affluent societies or among less privileged communities, leisure functions as a universal human need, manifesting across all social classes and geographic regions.

Conversely, there exists a perspective that associates leisure with deeper, more purpose-driven experiences. For many, leisure activities gain significance when they are connected to personal growth, social contribution, or broader societal impact. Examples of such meaningful leisure include volunteering, participating in environmental conservation activities, or engaging in cultural and educational pursuits that enrich both the individual and the community. Again, this form of purposeful leisure is not restricted by economic standing and is observed globally across various demographic groups.

Given these differing perceptions, a central question emerges: what factors contribute to our experience of leisure as meaningful, and to what extent is such meaningfulness necessary or desirable? While some theorists and practitioners argue that leisure should contribute to the betterment of the individual and society, it is equally important to recognise the intrinsic value of leisure pursued for its own sake. Simple enjoyment, without any ulterior purpose beyond personal satisfaction, can be profoundly beneficial for mental health, creativity, and overall well-being.

A balanced approach

Thus, it seems reasonable to advocate a balanced approach that acknowledges the importance of both types of leisure experiences. At one end of the spectrum, there are individuals and groups who view leisure primarily through the lens of activism and social transformation. For them, leisure activities are valuable insofar as they contribute to systemic change and the promotion of social justice. At the opposite end are those who embrace leisure as the ultimate form of escapism - a deliberate detachment from social responsibilities and a pursuit of personal pleasure without broader social implications.

Finding a middle ground between these extremes appears to be a pragmatic and inclusive solution. A balanced perspective allows for leisure experiences that are simultaneously enjoyable and meaningful, supporting both personal fulfilment and societal progress. It encourages individuals to seek leisure activities that not only bring them happiness but also contribute, even in minor ways, to the greater good.

This balanced approach can also be applied to the leisure industry itself. Organisations within the sector face a similar dichotomy: should they prioritise generating social impact through their services, or should they focus primarily on maximising shareholder value and commercial success? Here again, striving for equilibrium offers a compelling strategy. Leisure enterprises that root their business models in both social responsibility and economic viability are likely to appeal to a broader audience. Consumers increasingly seek out brands and experiences that align with their personal values, suggesting that companies can achieve sustainable success by integrating meaningfulness into their core operations without sacrificing profitability.

In conclusion, the conceptualisation of leisure as either a means to an end or an end in itself is not a binary choice but rather a continuum along which individuals and organisations can position themselves. Recognising and respecting the

diversity of leisure experiences - ranging from purely pleasurable to deeply purposeful - allows for a more inclusive and dynamic understanding of leisure in contemporary society. By embracing a balanced approach, both individuals and the leisure industry can foster environments where leisure activities contribute to personal well-being, social cohesion, and collective progress.

Contribution to education and research

My final thought considers the potential contribution of the presented idea to both education and research. Internationalisation has long been a foundational pillar of Breda University of Applied Sciences, by engaging in transnational networks (e.g. KreativEU) that emphasise a European focus while maintaining a global outlook. In the current geopolitical climate, Europe plays a central role in global affairs, which in turn shapes the perspectives of European citizens - particularly in relation to leisure consumption. Anecdotal evidence suggests a growing preference among European consumers for purchasing regionally produced goods and spending holidays within the continent. This emerging trend positions European leisure not only as a form of recreation but also as a symbolic expression of cultural heritage and geopolitical identity.

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Leisure as an end or
leisure as a means.

This intersection of leisure, culture, and geopolitics presents a compelling avenue for classroom discussion and scholarly inquiry. Engaging students with these kinds of themes offers an opportunity to develop their critical thinking skills and their ability to navigate and appreciate complex, nuanced perspectives, their identity - competencies essential to their future professional endeavours. In this context, educators and researchers are encouraged to explore how we can create meaningful experiences in education with both leisure as a means and as an end.



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