Creative Districts and Creative Tourism: Greg Richards in conversation with Jorge Piqué

Distrito Criativos e Turismo Criativo: Greg Richards conversando com Jorge Piqué

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ABSTRACT

This interview presents a conversation between Greg Richards and Jorge Piqué on the development of creative districts and their links to creative tourism. The discussion ranged from the genesis of creative districts and creative tourism to contemporary challenges of creative placemaking. It includes a consideration of the development of cultural tourism, and how creative tourism emerged as a separate field of analysis in the new Millennium. As places have sought to distinguish themselves in an increasingly competitive global market, they have turned to creativity as a source of inspiration. Tourists tired of standardized products and crowded cultural sites have sought out the more localized experiences provided by creative districts and creative tourism. Creative districts have therefore become a vital tool for placemaking, providing access to the "extraordinary everyday" and generating new models of creative tourism.

Keywords: Creative districts. Creative tourism. Creative placemaking. Cultural tourism. Sustainability.

RESUMO

Esta entrevista apresenta uma conversa entre Greg Richards e Jorge Piqupe sobre o desenvolvimento de distritos criativos e suas relações com o turismo criativo. A discussão variou desde a gênese dos distritos criativos e do turismo criativo até os desafios contemporâneos do placemaking criativo. Inclui uma reflexão sobre o desenvolvimento do turismo cultural e como o turismo criativo surgiu como um campo separado de análise no novo milênio. À medida que os lugares procuram se diferenciar em um mercado global cada vez mais competitivo, eles se voltam para a criatividade como fonte de inspiração. Turistas cansados de produtos padronizados e locais culturais lotados buscaram as experiências mais localizadas, proporcionadas pelos distritos criativos e pelo turismo criativo. Os distritos criativos tornaram-se, portanto, uma ferramenta vital para o placemaking, proporcionando acesso ao "cotidiano extraordinário" e gerando novos modelos de turismo criativo.

Palavras-chave: Distritos criativos. Turismo criativo. Placemaking criativo. Turismo cultural. Sustentabilidade.

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INTRODUCTION

In November 2020, Professor Clarissa Stefani Teixeira and Jorge Piqué organized the 1st Conference on Creative Territories for Sustainable Development, within the International Year of the Creative Economy for Sustainable Development, proposed by the United Nations and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). On the one hand, UrbsNova Social Innovation (URBSNOVA SOCIAL INNOVATION, 2022) is the management company of Porto Alegre Creative District, the first and largest creative district in Brazil (PORTO ALEGRE CREATIVE DISTRICT, 2022). On the other hand, *Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina*, through the *Via Estação Conhecimento* group, has a tradition in research on the themes of innovation habitats, smart cities, creative cities, creative hubs, etc. (VIA ESTAÇÃO CONHECIMENTO, 2022).

Our main objective was to bring together three groups of people to promote a high-level debate: managers of creative territories, policymakers, and researchers on the subject. Among the researchers, we invited Professor Greg Richards, for his well-known research over many years, which brings together two important fields for sustainable development: Creative Districts and Creative Tourism. Greg Richards is a leading expert in the fields of cultural and creative tourism, events and place-making. His major works include *Cultural Tourism in Europe* (1996), *Cultural Tourism: Global and Local Perspectives* (2007), *Eventful Cities* (2010), *Reinventing the Local in Tourism* (2016), the *SAGE Handbook of New Urban Studies* (2017), *Small Cities with Big Dreams* (2019), and *Rethinking Cultural Tourism* (2021). On the other hand, Jorge Piqué created in 2013 the Porto Alegre Creative District, the first and largest creative district in Brazil, with around 90 participating entrepreneurs and which also develops creative tourism initiatives. Professor Richards' participation in the conference was in the form of a conversation, in which we sought to highlight the main points to understand his conception of these two themes and their relationships. The text below reflects this conversation more succinctly and has been refined in more detail by Professor Richards.

Jorge Piqué (JP): You have been researching tourism and leisure for many years. We'll talk about this later. But in 2014, you published, together with Lénia Marques, a set of case studies, called Creative Districts around the World (MARQUES; RICHARDS, 2014). What made you interested in creative districts? What was your view back then about creative districts and what is your general view today? Have there been changes?

Greg Richards (GR): Our work on Creative Districts relates to a long-standing interest in the relationship between the creative industries, tourism, and place. Our specific interest in creative districts stems from a course we were developing at Breda University of Applied Sciences on creative industries a few years ago. We didn't have any textbooks or papers that provided an overview of how Creative Districts were developing, so we decided to produce our own. At the same time, an opportunity

arose to get involved in producing a text related to the 500th anniversary of Bairro Alto, in Lisbon, one of the first creative districts in the world. My colleague Lénia Marques contacted a large number of colleagues in different countries to generate case studies, which became the book *Creative Districts Around the World*. We used this very interesting set of case studies for teaching as well as for our research. But that wasn't the first moment at which we became interested in the theme of creative districts. At the University of Tilburg, I conducted research on creative districts in Amsterdam and Rotterdam with Erik Hitters (HITTERS; RICHARDS, 2002) and worked with Hans Mommaas, who wrote one of the first analyses of cultural districts in a paper in Urban Studies in 2004 (MOMMAAS, 2004). Thus, our research activities go back 20 years or so. We started examining the contexts in which Creative Districts were emerging and, in particular, the policy agendas linked to them. In those days, the main drivers were economic, because the creative industries were being identified as an increasingly important area of economic activity.

There was a lot of attention for the work of Richard Florida, and he was invited to Amsterdam to talk about the creative class and creative cities, which stimulated developments in the Netherlands. Over time, attention for creative districts has also increased, and became an important area of leisure and tourism activity in general. The Creative Districts we were looking at in the beginning were fairly small and mainly centred on creative production. Since then, they have become larger, more focused on consumption and attracting visitors. So, in the past 20 years Creative Districts have moved from the margins to the center of academic enquiry as well as urban policy.

JP: Have you noticed during these last decades a shift in creative territories from an elite culture to other more popular cultural manifestations? Do you see a course of action for greater sustainable development in the objectives of the creative districts you currently know, in terms of seeking to reduce inequality? It seems to me that this is one of the themes of your most recent book, from 2021, Rethinking Cultural Tourism (RICHARDS, 2021).

GR: The book *Rethinking Cultural Tourism* is not about Creative Districts specifically, but it has a strong link. Our analysis of culture in the book is based on Pier Luigi Sacco's work (SACCO; FERILLI; BLESSI, 2018) on the cultural economy in general. He argues there has been a historic shift in the focus of culture from Culture 1.0 (basically high culture as a form of education) such as painting, sculpture, and fine arts. This was the origin of cultural tourism and the backbone of the Grand Tour in the 18th and 19th centuries. In the 1980s, cities and regions discovered cultural and creativity as engines for economic growth, which is a phase Sacco calls Culture 2.0, when cities began to use museums as ways of stimulating economic growth. This became a familiar system, based on attracting cultural visitors who would spend money and boost the economy. The large numbers of cultural tourists attracted before the Pandemic also led to problems of so-called "overtourism" in many major

cities. Culture 2.0 was basically linked to the mass consumption of culture, but in more recent years there has been a democratization of cultural production (Culture 3.0), where we can all use the Internet and other new technologies to produce our own culture. This means a wider range of actors entering the cultural and cultural tourism systems. We no longer need the tourism industry to produce cultural tourism, which is now also facilitated by Airbnb and other collaborative economy platforms and budget airlines. As we argued in the book *Reinventing the Local in Tourism* (RICHARDS; RUSSO, 2016), Airbnb offered tourists the opportunity to "live like a local". More recently, integration of new technologies and the hybridization of experience has led us into Culture 4.0, where we are constantly surrounded by digital and online experiences. The Covid Pandemic also shifted our lives online and boosted hybrid experiences, speeding up digitalization and the creation of digital tours of cultural attractions using augmented and virtual reality. In Culture 4.0, therefore, we are moving into the production of virtual, hybrid culture.

These major phases in culture have also been paralleled by shifts from the consumption of tangible to intangible culture, and from high to popular culture. This change has also been marked by the rise of creative tourism. Tourists increasingly want to become involved in making craft objects, cooking local food, weaving textiles, developing their creative skills, etc. This has become easier with new technologies. These changes have also been reflected in a growing role for the creative industries in tourism and a stronger relationship between tourism, creativity, and place.

JP: You have been thinking a lot about the issue of tourism. How do you see the relationships between traditional tourism models, where I include cultural tourism, and different types of creative territories, especially in large cultural centers such as Paris, Rome or Barcelona, which depend on mass tourism and overtourism?

GR: We are certainly seeing greater integration between tourism and culture in major cities, which is partly due to the co-incidence of creative and tourism spaces, but which is also related to the need of the tourism sector to provide new experiences and the need of the creative sector to find new markets. In this situation, creative tourism can be either an alternative to or an extension of traditional cultural tourism. Tourists who are tired of the traditional models are looking for more creative modes of tourism, and tourists who have already visited the major cultural sites want to connect more closely with local culture and creativity.

What we see is a number of drivers changing the articulation of culture and tourism. Attention has shifted from major cultural sites in the city center, and hotels and cultural tourism activity in the center. This has changed because tourist stays are now spread out over the city and our view of legitimate cultural objects has expanded. We are not just in search of the cultural highlights of a place, but also the "extraordinary everyday", as we put it in a recent report about urban tourism and cultural policy (MARQUES; RICHARDS, 2018).

People are disillusioned with crowded museums, and many have already seen the highlights, and are searching for something different and distinctive. They are no longer happy with passive consumption, but they increasingly want to relate to places and people on a more personal level. Relational tourism is a means of increasing knowledge and skills, including creative skills. This provides a contrast to the traditional form of tourism, with more equal and democratic exchanges, moving away from the idea of the "host" serving the "guest".

JP: These days, there are many different types of creative territories. This often generates vague terminology. For a better typology of creative territories, what would be the distinctive criteria you would point out?

GR: Creative production would be an important part of this. A creative territory should be a place where creative production processes take place, and not just a consumption space. A creative region should include a complete ecology of creativity — from design to production to consumption, with a feedback loop to the design process.

JP: A question that has arisen recently is whether creative territories should always be permanent, or can they also be provisional, with a beginning and an end. What do you think about it?

GR: The increasing pace of the economy means that the utilization of space is intensifying. This is leading to more multiple use of creative spaces, and also to pressures to share spaces. We see this reflected in cities through the growth in co-working spaces and the proliferation of pop-up concepts. Events are also becoming more important as creative drivers — for example in the role of knowledge-based festivals in driving regional development (PODESTÀ; RICHARDS, 2018).

JP: You are the author of the concept "Creative Tourism". Was this concept inspired by the ideas of Creative City, or Creative Industries, which were beginning to circulate at the time?

GR: It was not directly inspired by the creative city or creative industries. Although there was more attention for the creative industries at the time, the roots of the creative tourism concept lie in crafts, and a project we were running in the late 1990s. The Eurotex project (RICHARDS, 2005) was about sustaining crafts and giving young people a future in the craft sector, particularly in fragile peripheral regions. While working with craft producers, we noticed that the relationship between tourists and producers depended on the level of interaction. Direct tourist involvement in the creative process increased levels of interest, engagement, and satisfaction. So we developed workshops with active experiences. This was the origin of the concept and only later we began to make links with the Creative Industries because we saw this might also work in cities and could be a way of supporting

creative production. It didn't have much to do with the Creative Industries in the beginning, but it has many links.

JP: How has the definition of creative tourism changed?

GR: We've seen that Creative Tourism has changed a lot, and this has generated a lot of definitions, including from the Creative Tourism Network, CREATOUR and UNESCO. Each has developed their own definition. Personally, I think Creative Tourism is more about an idea than a strict definition. It's difficult to encapsulate it in one sentence. But the core of creative tourism is about participative, "authentic" experiences that allow tourists to develop their creative potential and skills through contact with local people and their culture. An emphasis on active rather than passive forms of consumption, and an emphasis on "living" or "intangible" culture rather than static, tangible cultural heritage. The essence of creative tourism lies in activities and experiences related to self-realization and self-expression whereby tourists become co-performers and co-creators as they develop their creative skills.

JP: How could Creative Tourism relate in general to creative territories, especially in districts and small towns, which are outside the traditional touristic circuit? I believe this was one of the themes of your book Reinventing the Local in Tourism.

GR: This has been a theme we have been working on for some time, which has developed into a more general interest in "placemaking". We started with a tourism focus, and an analysis of creative tourism, which provided the link to the Creative Industries. But it became obvious that you can't see these areas of activity as separate. There is a growing interest in the everyday, and the embedding of creativity in place.

Smaller places have to use creativity to compete, because of the lack of resources of larger places. Small cities now also have Creative Districts. This was a major theme of the book *Small Cities with Big Dreams* (RICHARDS; DUIF, 2018), which focuses on the Dutch city of Den Bosch, which used creativity to develop tourism and also creative production. Smaller places can also be at the leading edge of the Creative District, not restricted to larger cities because the challenges are the same. But smaller places have to get even more creative in their use of creative resources.

In the case of Den Bosch, our research shows that not only can creative programs help to animate the city in the short term, but they can also provide an important springboard for longer-term legacy (RICHARDS, 2021). As a result of the Hieronymus Bosch program that was staged in 2016, for example the city of Den Bosch not only attracted many visitors in the year itself, but it also put its museum on the map as a site for important international exhibitions. This, in turn, led to the museum staging further exhibitions, and eventually to purchasing and securing loans for artworks to support future growth. The development of the cultural institutions in the city has gone hand-in-hand with the growth of cultural districts which support grassroots culture and social innovation.

JP: Can Creative Tourism in creative territories play a role in sustainable development?

GR: I think creative tourism does offer a sustainable alternative for many regions because it has a different starting point. Examples from Asia, Africa, and Latin America include programs based on craft industries, many places with active craft production systems that need connection to global networks. In Thailand, there are creative villages where Creative Tourism has been developed on the basis of crafts related to the landscape. A national agency, DASTA, has been supporting creative tourism programs based around 20 creative villages. There are also initiatives in Africa, often on a smaller scale, and with support from NGOs based in Europe and North America, due to lack of local resources. Creative tourism is helping to transform traditional cultural tourism, moving from dance performances in villages and buying souvenirs made elsewhere to creative participation and making your own souvenirs. This supports more active involvement, and people spend longer, which means overnight stays and more spending.

In Latin America, the Colombian company 5Bogata has been developing experiences based on the 5 senses, providing tourists and backpackers with more time an entry point into local culture (STARTUP INFO TEAM, 2020). We also see the growth of tango tourism in Buenos Aires. The Brazilian network RECRIA, which is based in Recife, now works with a number of cities across the country to develop creative tourism. It is a pity that the initial program of Porto Alegre, which pioneered creative tourism in Brazil in 2013, was top-down and therefore lacked grassroot support and didn't become embedded. In Recife, local communities have been involved from the beginning, and they have gastronomic experiences in the favela, and tours based on Carnival that are available all year round.

Creative tourism can be sustainable when it supports the creative system, and when it stimulates creative collaboration between residents and mobile populations. It does not require new facilities or large numbers of tourists — only creative energy.

JP: Cultural Tourism, despite being important in educating people, has its problems. What are the difficulties of Creative Tourism, despite its advantages? How do you see the issue of authenticity of experiences?

GR: The main difficulty of creative tourism is convincing people that they are creative, or that their region or city has creative resources they can utilize. This is where tourism is useful as a tool, because it provides an external lens, and people come to see the "extraordinary everyday" as a source of creativity. The locals are like fish in water — they don't see the creativity they are immersed in. Creative tourism can increase pride in local creativity and make people realize the value of creativity in economic, social, and cultural terms. The UNESCO's definition of creative tourism talks about authentic experiences, but I think "authenticity" is a diversion from the real issue, which is embedding creativity into the everyday life of the region. Authenticity is not absolute, but relative. It can emerge, and it can be created.

Creative tourism is also relatively small scale, so it doesn't interest large companies. It is challenging to develop Creative Tourism based on one-to-one contacts which are difficult to scale up, so tour operators stick to more tradition models of cultural tourism, although Creative Tourism can be more beneficial to local communities.

JP: Finally, what is your advice for managers of Creative Districts who want to try out forms of Creative Tourism in their territories?

GR: I would start from a broader placemaking perspective. Creative Districts are not where creativity happens, but creativity as part of the ecosystem of a place. But this requires collaboration, and to pull people together around placemaking you need to develop a vision. You also need to specify a role for the Creative District in that vision. What is the Creative District doing for the city, what is the city doing for the Creative District? Sometimes it is difficult to see a clear vision, because many Creative District are copies of what is happening elsewhere. Strong visions tend to emerge from bottom-up development that reflect the character of the place.

We need to think about the creative aspects of place as a whole — all the people who live in and pass through the place, and how they relate to the place. There is often a shortage of resources — but making creative links can secure flows of resources. To get those resources to flow to you, however, means taking risks. If you are doing the same as everybody else, it will not work. Surprise is one of the biggest sources of creativity, and an essential element in developing distinctive experiences.

JP: Many, many thanks.

GR: My pleasure. Hopefully next time in Brazil!

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