

CUPIDO

CULTURE POWER: INSPIRE TO DEVELOP RURAL AREAS

WORK PACKAGE 3 —
THE POWER OF CULTURE, THE DNA OF A REGION,
THE STORY OF THE PLACE

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 THE GOAL

The CUPIDO project aims to:

- Develop new business and thus employment opportunities in the cultural and cultural heritage sector;
- Strengthen the economy, based on the social historic role and core qualities and values of the regions, cities and local communities involved – often rural communities with an ageing population.

The ultimate goal is to create vibrant, economically sustainable rural communities that attract people to live, work and enjoy life in and to visit.

1.2 INTENTIONS

The CUPIDO project intends to:

- Explore the potential of local culture for job creation and economic growth.
- Commercialise the cultural sector in each of the project partner regions.
- Encourage the public sector to stimulate innovation: the development of innovative solutions and the generation of demand for these solutions and create employment opportunities.
- Develop approaches to engage local initiatives and regional institutes in this process and foster collaboration.
- Contribute to the development and maintenance of a cultural infrastructure that ensures continuity beyond demographic shifts whilst engaging (new) groups of citizens in community building, cultural and economic activities.

1.3 CHALLENGES

Challenges the project partners face include:

- The design and maintenance of well-functioning local meeting places (Centers of excellence).
- The need to integrate regional and local interests and engage all relevant stakeholders. Rural communities need to connect their aspirations to regional policies and get access to regional assets for competence building as well as funding.
- The need to encourage the public sector and other stakeholders to engage in “cultural planning” as “an overall policy and method for development with a cultural signum”. Cultural planning is seen as a

method to strengthen the self-image of a local/municipal or regional authority by introducing the cultural perspective in societal planning and by catching the unique character of a place pertains to democratic, listening approaches and involves citizens in planning processes. It gives a holistic picture of local society and helps to keep and develop the quality of life as well as cultural resources and important values.

- To stimulate cross-sector cooperation, to co-create a start-up friendly climate and offer, for example, business coaching. Actors in the cultural sector have to get used to thinking in terms of business development. The business sector needs to see the potential of the 'soft' culture.
- To involve key actors in local and regional business development, including those involved in art education.

2. WORK PACKAGE 3 – APPROACH AND ROADMAP

The goal of WP3 was to act upon the above-mentioned intentions and realise the project goals whilst dealing with the challenges described. WP3 aimed at:

- Offering ways to cope with the above-mentioned challenges, in particular with the challenge to align interests and activities and together find innovative ways in keeping the old and combining it with modern global and regional trends and the needs and wishes of residents and visitors/customer.
- Focusing on what the culture – the cultural DNA and core values - is of each of the eight pilot regions and exploring how this can be developed for (internal, i.e. within a region) and external) communication and commercial purposes and contribute to job creation.
- The creation of culture incubators in each partner area. In these incubators local and regional authorities, educational institutions, businesses and citizens cooperate on the creation of employment opportunities in rural areas with an ageing population by working on strategy development, actual cultural planning, commercialising the cultural sector and offering support for start-ups.

The CUPIDO project did - in terms of time and budget - not allow for an elaborate process of research and analysis, definition, decision making, narrative co-creation and strategising for and planning of experience (and thus employment) development, the CUPIDO project partners were asked to gather information and analyse research already available and follow a simplified Seven Steps Roadmap.

2.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE NARRATIVE APPROACH

The municipality of Middelburg organised education in story-based resident and visitor experience development for the CUPIDO project partners. This approach was developed by consultancies, such as TEAM Tourism Consulting, EarthCheck and Elgin & Co. in collaboration with destination management and marketing organisations. The essence of this approach is depicted in Figure 1.



Figure 1: Example of a narrative approach to strategy and resident and visitor experience development based on building a story tree and an experience pyramid.

During meetings in Haarlem in the Netherlands in 2019, project partners were informed about the art and science of storytelling and narrative communication, the concept of the “experience economy” and ways to work on story-based resident and visitor experience development.

Knowledge of the art and science of storytelling is important for, for example, developing a joint narrative approach and engaging and aligning stakeholders. Skills in narrative management – that is, knowing who you are and how to tell it – are important in the culture- and community-based projects, which CUPIDO wishes to encourage.

Resident and visitor experience development is the art and science of delivering a consistent message that engages residents and inspires visitors (and/or other types of customers) throughout their travel or service/product purchasing process and creates memorable experiences. Ideally, the message extends through all stages of the entire visitor experience cycle or customer journey.

A story-based resident and visitor experience development plan takes as its point of departure the identity, DNA, core values, place and tourism destination brand and brand promise.

The concept of ‘Signature Experiences’ was introduced by Destination Canada (the former Canadian Tourism Commission) in 2011. In 2012 a similar concept together with ‘Hero Experiences’ was applied to Australia’s visitor economy. In 2013 Tourism Northern Ireland (formerly the Northern Ireland Tourist Board) referred to ‘Hero Assets’

in their experiential tourism toolkits. Since 2011 there has been a gradual evolution in the development of the underlying concepts, particularly in Canada and Australia. These inter-related concepts are fully defined in, for example, Fáilte Ireland's National Experience Development Framework.

2.2 WHY THE NARRATIVE APPROACH?

Narrative Communication and Storytelling

This section aims to elaborate a little on the choice for a narrative approach in which key concepts, such as culture, story, identity, brand, experience economy and value play a role.

The meaning of the term “culture” has been highly contested. Britannica Dictionary's definitions of culture include “the beliefs, customs, arts, etc., of a particular society, group, place, or time”; “a particular society that has its own beliefs, ways of life, art, etc.”; “a way of thinking, behaving, or working that exists in a place or organization (such as a business)”; “artistic activities (such as music, theatre, painting, etc.)” and also the “appreciation and knowledge of music, theatre, painting, etc.”.

Storytelling is a multi-layered, multi-purpose, multi-actor and multi-disciplinary phenomenon. Stories suit the way our brain processes information. It is through stories that we share knowledge and values. According to Scheringa (2013) stories have the power to connect, bond and bridge. They, therefore, play an essential role in co-creating, sustaining and changing cultures.

The CUPIDO project partners learned that a narrative approach can assist in overcoming two main challenges: the challenge to engage people (residents, visitors, customers) on a personal level and the challenge to overcome fragmentation and achieve alignment (Elgin-Nijhuis 2015), a critical success factor when working towards a competitive identity for a region, place branding and economic sustainability.

Places can be seen as storyscapes where meaningful and memorable experiences are (to be) co-created for and by residents and visitors. A ‘story tree’ and experiences overview in the form of pyramids helps to align and achieve consistency and coherence in storytelling and story-based resident and visitor experience development. One works from place identity and master narrative to thematic storylines and supporting stories and experiences and back in an iterative process.

The power of storytelling was to assist the CUPIDO project partners in a myriad of ways: in engaging stakeholders; in connecting with audiences and in inspiring and persuading possible visitors to come and visit; in creating culture-based products and services, meaningful and memorable experiences and thus value; in creating a competitive identity and work towards a stronger place brand.

2.3 ABOUT IDENTITIES AND BRANDS

Boisen (2022) distinguishes between:

- Place branding – “An identity-driven way of managing places. It is an inside-out approach that shape[s] the image that the place express[es] by on-brand behaviour and storytelling. The goal is to influence perception and reputation.”
- Place marketing – “A demand-driven way of managing places. It is an outside-in approach through which the offerings of the place are adjusted to appeal to selected market segments. To goal is to influence behaviour and choice.”
- Place management – “An area-based coordination of public and private stakeholders. In its most advanced form it implements both marketing and branding. The goal is to make places better for all their users.”

Anholt (UNWTO 2014:32; Anholt 2007, 2010) recommends working towards a competitive identity by focusing on “a central and defining purpose”, by developing strategy, policy, partnerships and “symbolic actions”. “Places must shape their behaviours around a central defining purpose in order to allow real actions and substance (policies, investments, events, etc.) to influence perceived place image”.

The competitive identity of a place and a brand can be seen as, in essence, a promise and require investing in and consistently delivering that promise across practices, behaviour and communications (linked to the place name and/or symbol of the brand).

Ideally, working on the competitive identity and developing a place brand starts by describing a place’s identity: “the unique distinctive characteristics and meanings that exist in a place and its culture at a given point in time”, “constructed through historical, economic, political, religious, social and cultural discourses” (Govers and Go 2009).

2.4 THE EXPERIENCE ECONOMY

Taking to heart the advice given in influential works such as “The Experience Economy: Work Is Theatre and Every Business a Stage” (1998, 1999) by economists Pine and Gilmore and “Dream Society” (1999) by futurist Jensen places, organisations and companies have made the shift from thinking in terms of products and services to staging experiences. Whenever an organisation engages in “a personal and memorable way” with a customer, it creates memories and therefore value for that customer.

This requires strategising and scripting and working in a structured way on creating authentic, meaningful and memorable encounters that the visitor/customer/inhabitant enjoys and values and which differentiates a destination or organisation from others.

Key experience design principles include, according to Pine and Gilmore, choosing a theme (“story-based, thematic or geographical”) that “unifies the experience in the customer’s minds“ and helps make memorable experiences which in turn contribute to the competitive identity of a place, company or organisation. Resident and visitor/customer experience development is the art and science of delivering a consistent message (stories) that engages residents and inspires visitors throughout their travel experience and creates memorable experiences.

2.5 APPROACHES TO COMMERCIALISING THE CULTURE SECTOR

The narrative approach described above was combined with other approaches to commercialising the culture sector and establishing economic sustainability, including the organisation of culture incubators, trend watching, research into stakeholder and visitor/customer needs and wishes, market/target audience development, the identification of Product Market Combinations, the conceptualisation of value chains, product/service and business development and thus the creation of employment opportunities and (marketing) communication.

As mentioned above, the CUPIDO project did - in terms of time and budget - not allow for an elaborate process of research and analysis, definition, decision making, narrative co-creation, strategising for and planning of experience (and thus employment) development and (marketing) communication. The project partners were asked to gather information and analyse research already available; to engage and collaborate closely with local stakeholders (business and culture

providers) and use these encounters as well as in-depth interviews with them to identify their values, wishes, needs and expectations. They validated the outcomes in a joint peer review process.

Working on CUPIDO related tasks in general and collaborating in Work Package 3, in particular, was done following a simple step-by-step plan. The Seven Steps Roadmap described actions and deliverables and encouraged project partners to commence what should be a continuous iterative review process taking into account the narrative approach visualized and described above, and work towards culture- and community-based innovation, the creation of employment opportunities in an attractive region and overall economic sustainability. The Seven Steps Roadmap is provided in the next section.

3. THE SEVEN STEPS ROADMAP

Step 1 - Describe the identity of the region

- Describe the core values which define the region or city.
- Describe the cultural and (tangible and intangible) heritage in which these values are embedded.
- Describe the current cultural activities expressing the values.
- Sketch of the current tourism offer.
- Explore how the identity could be developed into a more competitive identity and how the cultural DNA of the region could be leveraged to achieve this.
- Already commence identifying stakeholders to involve in the next steps.

Step 2 - Engage in perception analysis

- Engage in stakeholder consultation by in-depth interviews (with 1. those involved in the field of culture and heritage and 2 those owning a business or employed by a company) and peer review.
- Gather the perceptions of the cultural DNA characterising the region.
- Gather information about:
 - The needs and expectations as to improving the region's or cities attractiveness.
 - Ideas for innovation and business development and thus job creation.
 - Ideas for roles, tasks and responsibilities stakeholders can take on.

Step 3 – Start strategizing and planning

- Collect all the information gathered to describe the identity of the region or city and its core values, the cultural DNA, the cultural activities and heritage and the stories people share.
- Think in terms of place/destination branding and see whether you can define a brand purpose/promise.
- Commence conceptualising on story-based resident and visitor experiences.

Step 4 - Identify relevant trends

- Identify relevant trends and developments (global and local).
- Link these trends to the values that characterise their region.
- Identify existing best practices.
- Identify opportunities (local and cross-border) for product/service and business development and thus job creation.
- Identify target audiences/market segments.
- Identify possible Product Market Combinations.
- Elaborate on positioning scenarios for the region based on a combination (i.e. a match between) the region's core values and relevant trends.

Step 5 - Conceptualise value chains

- Elaborate on the opportunities/ideas identified.
- Conceptualise value chains.
- Describe the value chain activities to be performed by stakeholders.
- Engage with business developers on product/service development and delivery.
- Elaborate further on positioning the products/services and the region.

Step 6 - Describe the (future) experiences

- Work on the experience pyramid.
- Decide on themes (logical clusters).
- Script (where appropriate) existing and new/to develop signature, supporting and ancillary experiences.
- See to congruency and alignment with the identity, brand, brand promise, core values etc. of the region or city and the stories told.
- Remember this is an iterative process to come to story-based resident and visitor experiences development and thus simultaneously...

Step 7 – Elaborate on the storytree and share the (new) stories of the place

- Co-create the (new) master story for the region or the city.
- Co-create (where appropriate) signature stories, supporting and (possibly) ancillary stories.
- Focus on (marketing) communication:
 - Train stakeholders in storytelling.

- Develop a marketing communication strategy and plan.
- Develop content.
- Configure media/communication channels.
- Share and promote the (new) story/stories of the place among residents and visitors/customers.

It cannot be stressed enough that the Seven Steps Roadmap pertains to an iterative process aimed at congruency and alignment of strategy and planning for innovation and communication.



Figure 2: The 7 steps roadmap.

3.1 REPORT – CUPIDO PARTNERS ACTIVITIES

This section provides more information about how and why the Seven Steps Roadmap was applied by the CUPIDO project partners.

Ad Step 1 - Describe the identity of the region

The Seven Steps Roadmap asked the CUPIDO project partners to first describe the identity and “cultural DNA” of their region, that is, the core values that characterise the region, the cultural (tangible and intangible) heritage offered in which these values are embedded and the cultural activities expressing the core values. In addition, they were to provide a sketch of the current tourism offer.

They were asked to explore how the identity could be developed into a more competitive identity; how the “cultural DNA” of the region could be leveraged to achieve this, commercialised and turned into culture-based employment opportunities. They were also asked to commence identifying stakeholders to involve in the next steps.

Step 1 meant that - keeping in mind the narrative approach chosen and the information gathered - the CUPIDO project partners commenced their work on the development of “the story of their place” and the co-creation of joint resident and visitor experiences. These experiences are generated by story and culture-based products and services that are innovative in matching old and new, what is and what needs to be created and delivered to meet trends in customer demands.

Ad Step 2 – Engage in perception analysis

Step 2 asked the project partners to engage in stakeholder consultation. The stakeholders included residents, visitors/customers, business, cultural providers and public and private (educational) organisations.

A survey outline was developed by knowledge partner Howest University of Applied Sciences in Belgium (28 November 2019). This survey outline was used to conduct in-depth interviews and to facilitate working further on Work Package 3 and its leading questions: “What is the characteristic cultural DNA of the region, what can be developed and how can this development contribute to job creation?”. The survey outline addressed two target groups: business owners/employees and stakeholders involved in the field of culture and heritage.

The research results were to include qualitative indicators for the attractiveness of the place - the current situation and the desired/future one. The questions aimed at gaining insight into:

- What the local communities indicate as cultural or heritage identifiers of the region they live or operate in,
- The needs and expectations of the local community as to improving the region's attractiveness for residents and visitors, which might indicate
- New business ideas and innovative formats and thus
- Possibilities for job creation within the cultural and heritage field, which in turn could improve the attractiveness of the area;
- What roles, tasks and responsibilities stakeholders would be able and willing to take on.

The survey was a multi-layered one. First, there was the general perspective: what do the regions and project partners have in common concerning the topics at hand? Second, there was the individual story of each region, where individual features can pop up and enrich the general results.

Apart from the common solutions, each region could mould a common solution according to insights that were relevant to a specific region and take it as a starting point for development and innovation. The project partners reported on and illustrated the results of their in-depth stakeholder interviews.

Ad Step 3 – Start strategising and planning

The CUPIDO project partners used the information gathered so far with regard to the identity of their region or city and its core values, the cultural DNA, the cultural activities and heritage and the stories people share, to think about branding, to see whether they could define a brand purpose and promise and already elaborate on other aspects of story-based resident and visitor experience development.

As mentioned above place branding is defined as “An identity-driven way of managing places. It is an inside-out approach that shape[s] the image that the place express[es] by on-brand behaviour and storytelling. The goal is to influence perception and reputation.” (Boisen 2022). A place brand can also be viewed as a promise that describes a compelling experience in realistic but competitively differentiated terms and that offers the visitor a distinct and desired benefit.

A brand purpose represents the reason for being and what one stands for above all else. To define a brand purpose, one could start with writing down everything that the brand believes in and what it stands for and how value is created for every stakeholder that touches the brand (for example, visitors, community members, public and private organisations, the planet) so that all thrive.

A brand purpose is also referred to as the “why” of an organisation, especially so since Simon Sinek (2009) presented his idea of a “golden circle” with “why” in the centre, “how” outside it and “what” at the very edge. “Why” is the ultimate purpose; “how” represents the tactics, goals and strategies; “what” refers to the day-to-day activities.

The CUPIDO project partners were invited to define the brand of their region or city and describe the promise this brand represents to visitors and all involved in realizing this promise, why and how. This Step 3 is the point of departure for the next steps in story-based resident and visitor experience development. Experiences aligned with the place brand and delivering the brand promise strengthen that place brand in the iterative process illustrated above in Figure 1.

Ad Step 4 – Identify relevant trends

The next step, Step 4 invited the CUPIDO project partners to engage in trend watching. Trends are developments in how we view society. They are reflected in people’s behaviour.

During a trend workshop including a trend game, an expert taught them how to identify relevant developments – relevant to locals and cross-border stakeholders - and link these to the values that characterise their region or city.

Subsequently, the project partners organized “Future Trends” inspiration workshops for the stakeholders in their own region to identify existing best practices and opportunities for business development and thus job creation by local and cross-border organisations and businesses.

They created “inspiration packages” addressing

- existing policy/strategy documents;
- the core values of the region;
- global trends (what is happening in the world?) and local trends (trends specific for and relevant to the region and themes).

In addition, they

- identified target audience and Product Market Combinations in those inspiration packages and
- offered positioning scenarios for their region (and the products and services delivered in the region) based on a combination (i.e. a match between) a region’s core values and relevant trends.

The project partners identified the target audiences/market segments they wanted to attract and serve based on existing sources. Market

segmentation creates subsets of a market based on demographics, needs, priorities, common interests, and other psychographic or behavioural criteria used to better understand the target audience. There is a wealth of research results and trend reports available to use for this exercise. Useful sources related to tourism, for example, include the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), the European Travel Commission (ETC), and national and regional bureaus for tourism.

Segmentation of customers/audiences is recommended if (Osterwalder and Pigneur 2010, p. 20 recommend) their needs require and justify a distinct offer, are reached through different distribution channels, require different types of relationships, have substantially different profitabilities and are willing to pay for different aspects of the offer.

Positioning is answering the questions “what does a product or service do?” and “who is it for?”. It aims to differentiate the product or service from those of competitors and “position” the product or service in the mind of a (potential) customer or visitor.

Ad Step 5 – Conceptualise value chains

Based on the information gathered during Steps 1 to 4 as well as the inspiration packages which include scenarios and ideas for new Product Market Combinations, the CUPIDO project partners elaborated on the value chains of stakeholders.

A value chain is a set of activities that a company or organisation performs to deliver a valuable product or service to the end customer. The concept of the value chain is based on the process view of organisations: the organisation is seen as a system, made up of subsystems which provide inputs, transformation processes and outputs and are involved in the acquisition and consumption of resources – money, labour, materials, equipment, buildings, land, administration and management.

The CUPIDO project partners conceptualised value chains and the value chain activities to be performed by stakeholders. How these activities are performed determines costs, affects profits and thus the overall success of the enterprise and the economic sustainability of the region. The value chains could be specific to the region but also involve stakeholders across borders.

As the narrative approach to Work Package 3 and the Seven Steps Roadmap constitute iterative processes, also now findings and ideas were linked to the region’s identity, values, brand, brand purpose and promise, relevant trends etc.

Ad Step 6 - Describe (future) experiences.

Step 6 invited project partners to work on the experience pyramid. They decided on themes (logical clusters) and scripted the signature, supporting and ancillary experiences their (new) products and services generated. Simultaneously, they worked on Step 7.

Ad Step 7 – Work on the story tree and share the (new) stories of the place.

Step 7 asked project partners to work on the storytree by co-creating a (new) master story of the place, signature, supporting and ancillary stories. Simultaneously, they were encouraged to prepare – in collaboration for actual product and service and thus experience development and delivery.

Step 7 asked the project partners to then focus on (marketing) communication: to develop content, and configure media/communication channels for the customer/audience segments they had earlier identified as relevant and possibly interested in the new products/services.

3.2 CONTRIBUTING TO STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING

The Seven Steps Roadmap facilitated the CUPIDO project partners to gather the basic information necessary to strategise and plan and work in a structured way on story-based resident and experience development, improved attractiveness of their regions, culture-based employment opportunities and economic sustainability.

The promotion of a (new) shared master story of the place and place brand; story-based resident and visitor experience development; the development and positioning of culture-based products and services and thus employment opportunities will result in improved attractiveness of the region for the target audiences and more economic sustainability. The purpose of strategy is to bring about a desired future with efficient use of available resources. In general, this requires answering the questions:

- Situation – where are we now?
- Objectives – where do we want to be?
- Strategy – how do we get there?
- Tactics – how exactly do we get there?
- Action – what is our implementation plan?
- Control & Monitoring – did we get there?

The narrative approach assisted in strategy development, stakeholder alignment and audience engagement. Strategy aims at bringing about a desired future, and at achieving goals with the most efficient use of resources. Stories assist in depicting that desired future and in elucidating goals. It is through narrative processes that we evaluate our own actions in relation to these goals. This way stories give meaning to change, inspire, energise and mobilise and encourage us to embark on a journey (Denning 2007, 2011; Boje 2001, 2012, Scheringa 2013).

The subsequent establishment of cultural incubators in each of the eight pilot regions was seen as essential to take strategy development and implementation and the iterative process described above to the next level. These incubators aim to support stakeholders in the cultural sectors, foster skills and competence development and organise creative cross-sectorial and cross-border meetings. They, in turn, can foster the development of new partnerships and business concepts, community-based and rooted in and using the unique cultural DNA of a city or a region.

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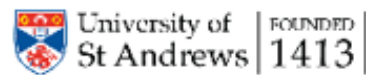
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