

# COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND CREATIVITY: REFLECTIONS AND LESSONS FOR TOURIST CITIES, BY GREG RICHARDS

PANDEMIA DA COVID-19 E CRIATIVIDADE: REFLEXÕES E LIÇÕES PARA CIDADES TURÍSTICAS, POR GREG RICHARDS

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## ABSTRACT

There is a growing debate about the use of creativity for sustainable development, particularly in terms of increasing the creative potential of cities. However, studies based on the experiences and perspectives of leading authors in this area are limited. Greg Richards is a long-standing researcher on the application of creativity in various socio-economic sectors, including creative tourism, creative cities, economy, and creative industries. This study, based on a semi-structured interview conducted with Greg Richards, seeks to present some reflections and ideas for ways forward, considering the scenario before, during, and after the Covid-19 pandemic and its possible effects on the new economy. Particular attention is paid to the emerge of 'glocal' creativity, especially related to the UNESCO Creative Cities.

**Keywords:** Creativity. Sustainability. Covid-19 pandemic. Creative Cities.

## RESUMO

Embora a literatura aponte que, no campo da gestão de crises, sobretudo tratando-se da pandemia da Covid-19, exista um crescente debate acerca dos preceitos de criatividade para o desenvolvimento sustentável a partir das cidades e seus potenciais criativos, entende-se que os estudos pautados na experiência e na perspectiva de autores que vivenciam tal temática são limitados. Greg Richards é um pesquisador de longa data sobre o contexto da criatividade, em diversos setores socioeconômicos, incluindo o turismo criativo, cidades criativas, economia e indústrias criativas, dentre outros. Este estudo, por meio de uma entrevista com roteiro semiestruturado, realizada com Greg Richards, busca apresentar algumas reflexões e ideias de caminhos a seguir, considerando o panorama pré, durante e pós pandemia da Covid-19 e os seus possíveis efeitos para a nova economia, dado o surgimento da criatividade 'glocal', especialmente relacionada às Cidades Criativas da UNESCO.

**Palavras-chave:** Criatividade. Sustentabilidade. Pandemia da Covid-19. Cidades Criativas.



## 1 INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of the 21st century, new directions in the global economy have pointed to the potential of creative regions and districts, co-creation, and the sharing of cultural elements within a creative network society. However, such strategies now have to be re-evaluated in the light of the Covid-19 pandemic, which has triggered the worst economic crisis since World War II (WORLD BANK, 2020).

In this context, studies of creativity can form part of the recovery vectors of the new global economy. Many researchers have analysed the integration of creativity in different fields, such as Management and Public Policies, Territorial Development, Innovation and Entrepreneurship in the Public Sector, Public Governance, Creative Tourism, Fair and Responsible Tourism, as well as offering multi-disciplinary perspectives (EMMENDOERFER *et al.*; 2021, 2022; MEDIOTTE *et al.*, 2021, 2022; MORAIS *et al.*, 2022).

Greg Richards is a particularly prolific researcher in this field. His studies approach creativity from many perspectives, as demonstrated by his most recent works, which led to the construction of this 'article-interview'. These studies are: Small Cities with Big Dreams (RICHARDS; DUIF, 2018); A Research Agenda for Creative Tourism (DUXBURY; RICHARDS, 2019); Rethinking Cultural Tourism (RICHARDS, 2021a).

It is worth mentioning that Richards is Professor of Placemaking and Events at the University of Breda and Professor of Leisure Studies at the University of Tilburg in the Netherlands. For decades, his studies and publications have focused on the creative development of cities and regions through tourism, leisure, and events. Increasingly, he has sought to involve countries from the Global South and emerging countries such as Brazil, and this has generated links with research groups from Brazilian universities such as the Research Group on Management and Development of Creative Territories (GDTeC) of the Nucleus of Administration and Public Policies (NAP2), which was the first group registered with the National Council for Technological Research and Development (CNPq) with this thematic focus and which completed ten years in 2021 (EMMENDOERFER; NIQUINI; RICHARDS, 2021). In addition, the GDTeC-NAP2-UFV in cooperation with a network of international researchers such as Professor Greg Richards and other foreign universities were proposers of the UNESCO Chair Creative Economy and Public Policy<sup>1</sup>, established in 2022, with headquarters at the Universidade Federal de Viçosa (UFV)<sup>2</sup>, Minas Gerais – Brazil.

This article-interview analyzes different perspectives on the challenges of creative development for the new global economy in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic (EMMENDOERFER; MEDIOTTE, 2022),

<sup>1</sup> <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4487085>

<sup>2</sup> <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.6624573>



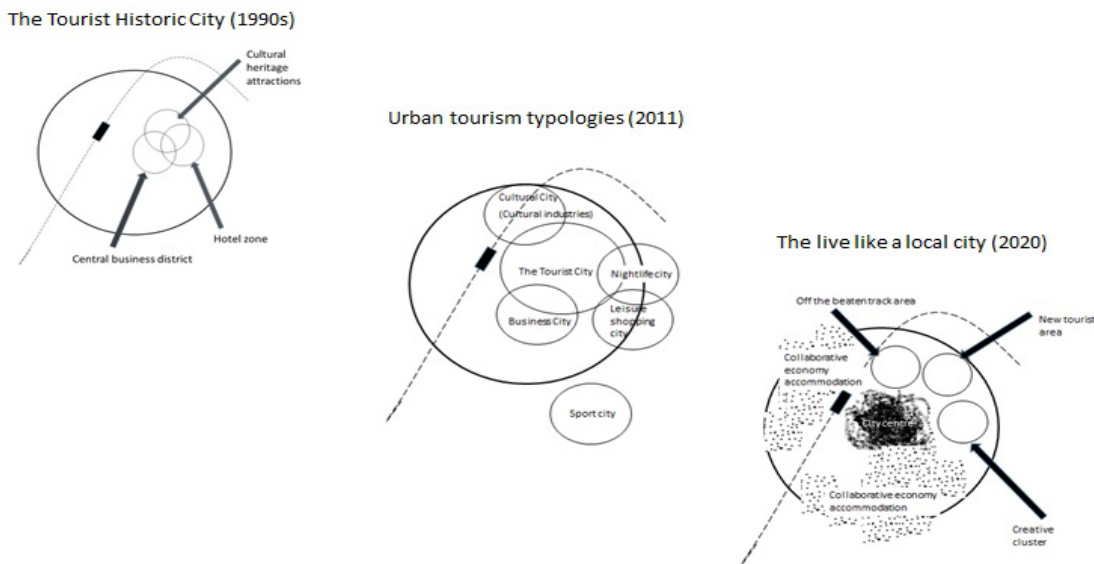
particularly focussing on creative districts, cities and regions, with emphasis on the UNESCO Creative Cities Network. In the following interview text Greg Richards provides this study with his experience and outlines relevant concepts on the proposed theme.

**Interviewer:** To start our dialogue, I would like to highlight some points from your book '*Small Cities with Big Dreams*', from 2018, which has become a reference in the international literature on Governance and Placemaking in the context of tourism, including in the scope of creativity. Thinking about that: What factors facilitate and limit the development of tourist cities, especially small cities, considering creativity as the driving force of the new global economy in the post-pandemic context?

**Greg Richards:** It is interesting that you start with the concept of the 'tourist city', which was first analysed in depth by Salvador Anton (1998) almost a quarter century ago. At that time, he saw 'tourist cities' as being specialized in the provision of leisure experiences for tourists, and therefore as having a distinctive spatial morphology. In fact, what we have seen in recent decades is a process of increasing de-differentiation between urban and tourism functions, so that the tourist city has become far less distinct, and tourist functions have become integrated into general urban processes. Whereas in the past tourism development was undertaken primarily by the tourism industry, with support from the state, today the development of platforms such as Airbnb and Live Like a Local means that anybody can be involved in tourism. The attractions sought by contemporary tourists are also increasingly integrated into the everyday life of the city, so we find tourism development everywhere, not just in specialized tourist enclaves. Arguably, therefore, we are moving from the specialized tourist city to the 'Live Like a Local City' (RICHARDS, 2022), see Figure 1.



**Figure 1 – The development of the tourist city**



**Source: Richards (2022)**

With the loss of specialized functions in cities, places are increasingly searching for ways to make themselves distinctive. In the past, distinctions were based on industrial or structural features, but now cities have to rely more on intangible features to distinguish themselves, and this requires the application of creativity. Some places are therefore limited by a lack of creative vision or skills – unable to identify the features that are distinctive, or which can be made distinctive through storytelling, curation or creative collaboration. If a city lacks a vision, or cannot effectively identify its role in the world, it is very difficult to launch a creative development programme. Some cities have tried to become creative by adopting ideas from elsewhere, but this is unlikely to succeed. Creativity is important because it can help to combine resources in new ways, developing new meanings that can help to link places to people. Particularly in smaller cities, people often think that a lack of resources hinders development. But with creative thinking, it is possible to overcome a limited resource base to compete effectively. This is illustrated by the Dutch city of Den Bosch, which is the focus of the book *Small Cities with Big Dreams*. Although Den Bosch is small in terms of population (150,000), it managed to create networks that drew in resources from other places, and therefore gave the city a much bigger resource base to work with. The city managed to built these networks by developing a vision that could be shared with other places, and thereby created ‘collaborative advantage’ rather than simply competing with their neighbours. For the programme of events developed around the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the painter Hieronymus Bosch, this small city managed to compete



effectively with global players such as London, Paris and Madrid through these types of collaborations. The size of places is not a limitation, because networking can be used to 'create size'.

**Interviewer:** How can these small towns and cities develop their creative potential (through creative tourism and creative economy, for example) without breaking with their autochthonous (endogenous) traditions, especially considering the impacts of mass tourism and gentrification?

**Greg Richards:** Maintaining distinctiveness is one of the major challenges that all places face today. With globalization, cultural symbols circulate increasingly rapidly, and 'clone cities' develop through the serial reproduction of experiences and consumption formats. Going against these trends means supporting local, endogenous forms of creativity. The problem is that these local activities are less attractive to global capital than residential or commercial property. Public sector intervention is therefore often required to ensure that local creative activities which are not yet articulated with mass markets can survive and develop. This is evident in many places where creative quarters and creative incubators have been established, often through triple helix partnerships between the public sector, private enterprises and educational and research institutions. It is important to ensure that creativity is built into the fabric of the city, not just bolted on. Creative development models that depend on the creative class, for example, often replace locals with hipsters, and café with cappuccino. This produces superficial change, often linked to gentrification and touristification. Creating real change requires more than a patina of authenticity, and needs to be based on an understanding of the dynamics and different layers and sectors of the creative city. Creativity is not the preserve of a single class, but a complex ecology that combines different social groups and structures. This is described clearly in the creative city model of Cohendet et al. (2009), who define distinctions between the 'upperground', or formal institutions, and the 'underground' of informal grass-roots creative movements. These two are crucially linked by a 'middleground' that consists of creative entrepreneurs or switchers, who link the Upperground and the underground through events, festivals and other creative activities. It is important to have each of the different layers of the creative city functioning well, as well as building links between them to ensure flows of ideas and capital to stimulate creative action at all levels. Building the creative city is more than polishing or repositioning; it relies on collaboration, creative combination and the originality stemming from the unique creative DNA of the city. We are also seeing some major cities in Europe supporting historic forms of creativity to ensure that this creative DNA doesn't disappear from the streetscape. For example, in Lisbon the *Lojas com Historia* programme supports traditional commerce, which would otherwise probably disappear in the face of globalization and gentrification (RICHARDS; MARQUES, 2018). Avoiding gentrification is a major challenge,



because if you improve the quality of life in a city, then people will also want to locate there. In the case of tourism, the challenges are greater, because touristic gentrification, as some have labelled it, not only replaces one social class with another, but also replaces rooted residents with footloose consumers.

**Interviewer:** What should we consider as fundamental indicators for cities included in the UNESCO Creative Cities Network, which carries some Creative brands, such as gastronomy, handicrafts, folk art, and literature?

**Greg Richards:** Very often cities use the easy and widely available indicators of tourism arrivals or spending as their main indicators. However, particularly in the case of the UNESCO Creative Cities, we should be more concerned with indicators related to production, rather than consumption. This tends to be rather challenging, because it implies switching from counting the number of consumers or items sold to a qualitative assessment of value. This is where an act of curation is important, replacing as an assessment of economic asset value with a judgement of future value. Cities should be concerned not just with increasing the current value per square metre of property, but also with identifying tomorrow's Gaudís, capable of turning empty spaces into pilgrimage sites. It is interesting to note how our view of tourism has changed over time. When Krippendorf was writing about tourism in the 1970s, international tourism was largely viewed as an export industry. Instead of sending goods abroad, you could earn foreign exchange by attracting tourists to spend their foreign currency in your city. This view seemed to disappear as the study of tourism shifted from the realm of economy to sociology and anthropology in the 1990s. But we can still be creative with the view of tourism as an export industry. Not in terms of creative consumption by tourists that occurs in the destination, but also the potential of creative tourism to generate exports and project attractive images in the global arena. This is a development strategy followed with great success by South Korea, which began pushing Hallyu (Korean Culture) and the 'Korean Wave' about 15 years ago. Korean culture and creativity are now viewed as being cool and attractive, and this supports exports of TV and film, fashion and gastronomy. It is estimated that Hallyu tourists account for about 10% of all international arrivals, and this market has considerable economic impact. The recent success of *Squid Game* and *Parasite* illustrate the way that Korea has used creativity to generate global attention and export revenues. Increased attention for the country also helps other creative sectors, such as design and gastronomy, and stimulates people to visit as creative tourists. In Korea the creative tourism spectrum is extremely broad, ranging from Hallyu media to contemporary design to the 'temple stay' programme that introduces international tourists to Korean Buddhism (OECD, 2014). Measuring the success of a creative city therefore requires the development of a wide range of indicators, that cover all aspects of creative



ecology. The UNESCO Creative Cities reflect a broad spectrum of creativity, but they are also limited by being linked to just one sector of creativity, such as music or literature. In most cases, while there might be one creative sector that is particularly prominent, most larger cities have several creative clusters that mutually support one another. This is clear in the case of Edinburgh, for example, which was designated as the first UNESCO City of Literature in 2004 (MARQUES, 2009; 2019). Although Edinburgh has a strong literary field, boasting authors including Arthur Conan Doyle (Sherlock Holmes), Walter Scott (Ivanhoe), and JK Rowling (Harry Potter), it also has many other facets to its creative industries. This is evident from the Edinburgh Festivals, which include events dedicated to books, music and drama (Edinburgh International Festival) film, Jazz and Blues, cultural diversity (Edinburgh Mela) and storytelling. One of the key areas that the UNESCO Creative Cities should look at is the implication of residents in the programme. If you read some of the reports produced by the cities, such as the recent report from Kansas City on their Music designation, they seem to forget local residents and highlight the collaboration with other cities. Inter-city collaboration is very important for building the networks that particularly benefit smaller places, but who are the cities collaborating for? Ultimately it should be for the people who live there.

**Interviewer:** What should we consider essential for cities that wish to be part of this Creative Cities Network, especially in line with tourism, creativity, and culture?

**Greg Richards:** I think these types of branding exercises are often driven by a desire for visibility. By linking themselves with a global brand, such as UNESCO, cities hope to become more well-known and more frequently visited. Some cities then lose sight of the fact that creative development is not just about branding, but also requires the whole creative ecosystem to function well. Keeping this in mind is an important function of the creative vision that should underpin a city's desire to become part of the network. Cities should understand how the creative system functions in order to provide support to the right parts of the system in the right ways. In building tourism that supports culture and creativity, rather than exploiting them, we should see the development of creative tourism as a means of attracting tourists who are engaged with culture and who will make a contribution to creative production as well as consumption. In this sense we should see creativity as a motor for development, not just as a hook.

**Interviewer:** In the book *'A Research Agenda for Creative Tourism'* from 2019, in the pre-pandemic context, there is a relevant approach to creative experiences, interactions, and dynamics in different parts of the world, bringing various international research perspectives and implications for public tourism policies. Considering the current post-pandemic scenario, how can we rethink the research gaps identified





in the book, for example - experience design, co-creation, authenticity, sense of place and belonging, sustainability, and creativity? What changed from 2019 to the present day?

**Greg Richards:** Most of these research gaps outlined in the book are still relevant. But new ones have emerged. In particular, the pandemic made addressing inequality an even more urgent part of the creativity agenda. For example, one of the clear impacts of the pandemic has been hastening the digital shift in culture, events, education and other fields. When we staged a webinar with the Directors of the Edinburgh Festivals about running festivals in the pandemic, they all spoke about how the digital pivot had increased access for distant audiences (RICHARDS; LEAL LONDOÑO, 2022). But while many people may now have easy access to digital technologies, many others do not. This includes many elderly people, who have traditionally been an important audience for cultural tourism, as well as those on low incomes, for example. In designing experiences for a hybrid future, we shouldn't forget that not everybody finds it easy to engage virtually with culture and creativity. The effects of digitalisation will be an interesting arena for creative tourism research in future. When the pandemic hit, most people assumed that creative tourism, which is built on contact between people, would totally disappear. We didn't reckon with the creativity of creative tourism suppliers, however. One of the pioneers of creative tourism in Latin America, 5Bogota<sup>3</sup> began to provide creative experiences online. They ran virtual cooking classes, where people could learn to cook empanadas or veggie tamales at home, using a pack of ingredients supplied by a local market. Similarly, Art Safari<sup>4</sup>, which runs painting holidays ran virtual classes with a tutor to learn techniques and skills related to painting or drawing landscapes in a particular place. Among these 'virtual holidays' were painting 'seabirds and clifftops' on a virtual tour to the coast. Some of our traditional notions of authenticity have also shifted with the pandemic as well. In the past most people associated authenticity with physical places, and being able to touch, feel and smell their surroundings (ANDRADE-MATOS; RICHARDS; BARBOSA, 2022). When people were unable to travel physically, they also started valuing other ways of establishing authenticity, which were more centred on themselves and their own experience of places they had visited previously. In the future it will be interesting to explore how our perceptions of authentic creativity change. During the pandemic people were also forced to become 'Tourists in their own city' (RICHARDS, 2017). This produced the interesting effect of people seeing their own environment in

<sup>3</sup> <https://5bogota.com/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://artsafari.co.uk/>



new ways. We have to wait and see if this also has the effect of making local creativity more known and appreciated among people who would normally travel a long way to have creative experiences.

**Interviewer:** Now, dealing with some of the discussions addressed in your book *'Rethinking Cultural Tourism'* (2021), which presents 30 years of research, experiences, and knowledge on topics such as cultural and creative tourism, social practices and development, behaviors and experiences of tourists eager for discoveries of new places and cultures, considering the time horizon from the 1900s to the present day, specifically to topic/section 2 (Actors in cultural tourism practices): What is the role of tourism governance, considering the new 'glocal'<sup>5</sup> economy model based on creativity through indigenous culture and traditions, considering the post-pandemic scenario?

**Greg Richards:** The changes we have seen in tourism in general, and cultural tourism more specifically, make it clear that we need to re-think tourism governance models as well. In some cases, this is already happening, as a consequence of the pandemic, but also because of trends already evident before Covid. The most notable has been the development of 'mass cultural tourism,' which has been particularly evident in major cities in Europe. So many people became involved in the practice of visiting museums and cultural sites in historic cities such as Venice and Barcelona that there was a clear need for action. In some cities this has already led to a change in governance models. In Amsterdam, for example, the previous marketing focus of the Destination Marketing Organisation Amsterdam & Partners was turned on its head. Now marketing is almost a dirty word, and the priority is to manage tourism better and where possible to shift tourists away from Amsterdam. Amsterdam & Partners' mission is now: to contribute to the **liveability, attractiveness, and prosperity** of a **sustainable and inclusive** Amsterdam Metropolitan Area by building a better **reputation** and **effectively guiding** residents, businesses, and visitors. The government of Amsterdam has realized that the residents of the city were essentially excluded from the tourism system that facilitated consumption of their daily lives. Now Amsterdam is trying to control Airbnb, which seems to be having initial success. The number of Airbnb listings in the city has fallen to about a quarter of the pre-pandemic levels. There is now more willingness on the part of the administration to intervene directly in tourism rather than seeing it simply as another industry operating in the free market. The tourism industry may therefore have to get used to a more interventionist stance from government, because the previous idea that tourism would keep voters happy by bringing in money

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<sup>5</sup> Global Actions are influencing and being influenced by local results.



has been undermined. The priorities these days revolve around 'quality of life' and 'balance' between different groups in the city. Ironically, our research on tourism and creativity has shown that a good quality of life is often what attracts the creative tourist (RICHARDS; WILSON, 2007). So managing this quality of life balance may increasingly involve measures to stem the flow of tourists. Venice is now finally getting around to imposing fees on tourists entering the old city after decades of debate. This shows that the willingness of the administration to intervene has increased.

**Interviewer:** Thinking about approaches to topics from that last book: '3. The changing contexts of cultural tourism', and '5. New rituals and the dynamics of cultural tourism practices', and making an analogy with the current scenario in tourist cities: What can we understand from these two topics about the new sociocultural practices of Tourism, considering two different scenarios, the pre-pandemic and the second, the post-pandemic?

**Greg Richards:** Rethinking Cultural Tourism proposes a new approach to the study of tourism that is not based on supply and demand, but rather the analysis of social practices undertaken by actors and constrained and facilitated by social structures. This analysis, originally developed theoretically by Bargeman and Richards (2020), is based on the work of Randall Collins on interaction ritual chains. If you see social life as containing many interaction rituals that bring people together in certain places at certain times to gain a feeling of collectivity, then it is clear that the pandemic had a dramatic influence. Suddenly the rituals that we take for granted, such as being able to travel and consume places as cultural tourists, were no longer possible. But this also highlighted the role of creativity in enabling people to adapt and create new possibilities. The spontaneous emergence of balcony concerts or the creation of open-air cinemas during the pandemic (VARNA; OSWELL, 2021) underlines this. We started to think about public space in new ways, and how we share the city with other residents, with tourists and other users (RICHARDS, 2021b). New social practices related to tourism will therefore continue to emerge in the post-pandemic era. We are already seeing people having to adapt their behaviour to the staff shortages that have plagued the tourism industry since the pandemic. It no longer makes as much sense to fly from large airports if you have to queue for up to six hours to get through security, as happened at Schiphol recently. There are already signs that the rural areas that were suddenly a lot more attractive during the pandemic will also keep a share of this market, and we see from data in Portugal that many more cultural tourists are heading for the countryside (FERNANDES; RICHARDS, 2022). Another ritual that seems to be getting a boost from the pandemic is gatherings of food trucks to create mini gastronomic events. This trend seems to have started in Helsinki, Finland, where food trucks and restaurants combined to stage



a 'restaurant day' that became very popular (RICHARDS; DUIF, 2018). Recent figures in the Netherlands show that the number of food trucks has doubled since 2017, and the rate of growth continued during the pandemic as chefs left their fixed restaurants to find customers. It is also interesting to see that creative tourism became more integrated into Carnival as a result of the pandemic. In Brazil, some Blocos were apparently very creative in staging workshops that would attract people and generate some income (KUKUL; GASTAL, 2022).

**Interviewer:** What was expected from creative tourism considering these two different scenarios? And what has been achieved and not achieved during the pre-pandemic period?

**Greg Richards:** As we have seen, creative tourism suppliers also adapted to the pandemic, particularly through the creation of virtual experiences. But it has proved very hard for most creatives to replace or even effectively supplement their experiences through virtual means. They did, however, become more creative in reaching a larger audience, which might supply some future growth. The main challenge remains the need for physical co-presence, as relationships are at the heart of creative tourism.

**Interviewer:** What are the main challenges for cultural tourism development based on creativity for tourist cities to reintegrate into the socioeconomic context, especially for the achievement of the UN SDGs?

**Greg Richards:** The main challenge currently is dealing effectively with a sudden surge of demand following the pandemic. Not surprisingly, many people are keen to travel again, and supply has not been geared up to cope. In some cases, cities will not want a full return to the levels of demand seen just before the pandemic, as this will also mean a return of management challenges as well. It is clear that there is a challenge in developing the social dimension of cultural and creative tourism, which relies on developing links between residents and tourists. There are many small-scale programmes that are now doing this, but there is still a problem of dealing with large numbers. In terms of the SDGs the focus is likely to be on Sustainable Cities and Communities (11) and Responsible Consumption and Production (12). A large part of cultural tourism is based on visits to cities, and it is important that these tourism flows are sustainable, and that they do not adversely affect the culture which sustains the community as well as attracting tourists. Tourism should certainly be about responsible consumption and production, although limiting the amount of travel itself seems to be a challenge that we don't yet know how to deal with.



**Interviewer:** To end, what can we expect from this new post-pandemic perspective considering creativity for the development and sustainability of tourist cities? What do we need to be more attention to in this new scenario?

**Greg Richards:** We should certainly try and develop initiatives that combine creative tourism and sustainability to ensure that future initiatives are sustainable. It is interesting to see, for example, that programmes involving tourists in environmental sustainability initiatives are gaining ground. In Amsterdam, you can go 'plastic fishing' in the canals to help keep them clean of litter, while learning about how the natural flushing system helps to keep the water clean. In Bali, young people have also launched initiatives to involve tourists in clearing plastic from the beaches. These kinds of creative programmes can help to do something positive for the environment, develop relationships between locals and visitors and give tourists the change to give something back to the destination, rather than just taking.

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