

APPENDIX - Audience questions following Anna Pollock's presentation on October 3rd

It's difficult compressing a life's work into a presentation of 40 + minutes, so to add to further discussion, here's a short article on LinkedIn that encapsulates the reasons behind the Conscious Travel approach.
[*Saving the Heart and Soul of Tourism Destinations*](#)

Over 20 questions were collated from participants regarding the presentation that I have endeavoured to answer below.

Chené Swart has also provided answers informed by the voices of the participants in the small groups on 3rd October.

How do you envision the future of tourism?

- **Anna:** Proponents of our current model have convinced the public that they have a right to travel whenever, wherever they want and, since competition is based on price, for as cheaply as they can find it. We have stripped the real value out of the encounter between host and guest. The price does not reflect the true cost of delivery. That has been pushed "downstream" to future generations to bear. If a "laissez faire" approach is applied to Venice, for example, it will turn into a privately owned theme park not a living community of people for whom this is still home, was home for their ancestors and could be a home for their descendants.

I envision a tourism that works (it won't be perfect) for all not just the few. It will also enable the local residents to decide how they wish to respond; who they are as a community; and how they will protect the resources -cultural and environmental - that they have inherited.

They will be working to ensure that employees, residents, investors and guests generate real, tangible net benefit from "the system." Mechanisms will have been found by the community for covering the costs of dealing with "externalities" such as pollution, waste disposal, wear and tear, etc. The current system holds virtually no one responsible but is all too ready to cast blame when problems arise.

- **Chené:** From the voices of the participants, the future of tourism talks about how tourism reconnects us to what matters as human beings and also reconnects us to our relationship to the world. It also talks about a tourism that values respect and connection with openness towards cultural diversity and inclusion. Participants also told how travel helps them to look differently at themselves and their own way of living.

How do you start the process? Where? What is first step?

- Anna: You take the time to understand why the current system is failing and then apply collective intelligence (no one has all the answers) to re-designing a system that works for your destination and has a chance of working better. That requires an inclusive approach that engages the voices of all citizens, fosters collaboration and involves a lot of listening and experimentation plus courage and willingness to try new things before they have been proven. Best practice in one place could be worst practice in another.
- Chené: You start the process by inviting communities to co-create the process with you, maybe in different regions. In this start the beauty, space and intense humanity is important to be present and to create a transforming tourism sector from that place. It is important to go about focusing on communities' real-life experiences and moments as the ground for both the exploration as well as the imagining of the preferred future. The more people you have in the room, the bigger the movement can be.

Do we construct a new paradigm or make it up as we go along?

- Anna: Any paradigm is always changing thanks to changes in context and understanding of the participants. But right now there is no need to make one completely from scratch but to find existing paradigms that are likely to work better. Seeing tourism as a living system (it is after all made up of living beings) holds more promise than a paradigm that sees tourism as machine. Start by adopting the ecological-living systems lens and see how it changes your thinking. Once you engage a way of thinking that focuses on connections and relationships rather than parts and separation, your capacity to see and frame challenges and new solutions (i.e., creativity) will strengthen. And yes, you make it up your interpretation as you go along. Each paradigm ends up being a personal construct.
- Chené: The mere fact that we are having this conversation gives us an indication that the new paradigm is already on its way. It is now our work to explore where the new paradigm has already found a home in Vlaanderen and to then learn from these communities about the practices and visions of the new paradigm. The continuation of the conversation and the way that it is done will be setting the tone for the new paradigm and what is possible to create together.

Who is responsible? The citizen? The policy maker? The guest, the host, the consumer, the business?

- Anna: We all are! The opportunity lies in tapping into the individual talents of all participants and the collective intelligence that emerges from their interaction as they explore aspirations and shared values.

What is (or is there) a role for the DMO in this at first then later on?

- Anna: The DMO's current role is to grow tourism by numbers, period. That is no longer sufficient or helpful. The future role should be to ensure that the majority of persons and life forms (a.k.a. the environment) can flourish and keep evolving. This is the role and function of all life and "nature" has had just under 4 billion years of practice doing it. We have much we can learn.

It will take a lifetime to learn how to do this and during that lifetime methods and technologies will keep changing. The DMO is currently accountable to the politicians. The communities need to hold their politicians to account and change the measures of success to better match the aspirations of citizens. The future role of the DMO is more enabler than director; more coach than general, more servant than hero.

For more see this link: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/destination-marketing-organizations-need-change-focus-anna-pollock/>

How can we support the shift from 'more' to 'better' and measure better, when partners are expected to produce more?

- Anna: We need to reach an agreement within our communities that simply attracting more tourists doesn't generate the results we seek (if it does, then carry on but be vigilant as there will be a time when it doesn't!).

So that begs the question – what results do we seek? Why do we have economies and societies if not to increase welfare and well-being of its participants (consumers and providers)?

If tourism's volume growth is undermining welfare and well-being for many, then stop and reconsider. Stop asking the DMOs to generate more but shift to generating more *net benefit* (i.e., welfare after costs have been paid for). Stop supporting companies that grow for the exclusive benefit of their shareholders and avoid paying the full costs of producing what they sell.

To what extent is "this" a bottom up story?

- Anna: It's a global story and "problem" that can only be solved or re-written locally. Tourism is a global phenomenon that takes place locally. We each have the capacity to contribute to change and adaptation of society (humanity) as a whole by acting within our own sphere of influence. Change starts from within each individual and radiates out from there into our families, workplaces, communities, and national and sector allegiances.

What is the role of government if you want to become a flourishing community?

- Anna: The original role of government was to enable its citizenry to flourish i.e., to enjoy welfare. Then welfare became tied to GDP that is a measure of all economic activity regardless of the collateral damage and negative byproducts associated with it. Now governments are expected to increase GDP regardless of who benefits. GDP has therefore ceased to be a good measure of increases in community and individual welfare. The current system does create wealth but distributes that wealth increasingly unevenly.

The future role of government should be to ensure it understands and its policies reflect the aspirations of its citizenry and, as far as tourism is concerned, put in place the mechanisms (public investment, regulations, policies etc.) for all stakeholders to flourish.

How can we stimulate organisations and people to ask more questions? Because that is what we need to do: start asking questions.

- Anna: By making it safe for people to do so.
- Chené: The invitation to ask more questions grows from various attitudes that people could be invited to consider:
 - If we assume that everything we need to know or learn is already happening, our questions can bring forth into words these movements and practices
 - If we could lay aside our own tendencies to give advice, to assume or think we know, to fix and help others but instead be carefully curious, a wealth of knowledge would open up to us.
 - Questions unfortunately have a bad reputation in our world because people have so often been pushed towards the “right” answers in school systems and endless surveys. We therefore have to acquire the art of asking questions that people don’t feel has a right answer, questions that capture their imagination and mostly questions for which they don’t have readymade answers.
 - More important than the questions even, is the context of dignity that we create through the dignifying practices we shared on the day of our gathering. If people experience that they have something to give because of the dignity of their humanity, the questions we will ask will be different as well as the quality of the answers we receive.

With the rise of tourism from countries like China or India, are these principles universally applicable? Is every market mature enough and ready to let go of the traditional model?

- Anna: It's important to distinguish between market (origin) and destination. From a destination perspective the principles are universally applicable. A resident of China has as much right to say no to busloads of tourists visiting their village as a resident of Flanders – they may not for various reasons associated with culture, money and power.

The challenge is that we have, as an industry, sold the right of all people to travel without thinking through the consequences. We're going to have to use technology far more creatively than we are doing now (which is to automate as a cost cutting, job stripping measure). May be we'll have to look at ways in which people can experience the benefits of travel without the full physical experience of it (ie effective use of virtual reality).

Collective values as to what is permissible behavior can and do change. We stopped the habit of cigarette smoking inside public buildings because of the effects of secondary smoke. We no longer allow gladiatorial combats to the death with living human participants but we do provide audiences with the same fate-based decision-making authority in computer games and televised talent shows. I don't have all the answers. What matters now is that we ask the right questions and seek answers from multiple perspectives.

There is still a difference between destinations. How can top destinations deal with this since they will always remain popular?

- Anna: The problem manifests itself by definition in popular destinations. If all such places do is disperse the problem they increase the number of overtourism incidences occurring in other spaces and later in time. We have to pool our resources and intelligence to find ways of “managing” a tsunami of demand: now and apply it to all destinations to avoid repeat occurrences.

How do we bring this theory of working with communities into practice / How do we collaborate with citizens in becoming a tourist destination?

- Anna: We start as Toerisme Vlaanderen is already doing by opening up conversations in communities; we educate – in the sense of explaining how current tourism models work and their impacts; we explore alternative models and most of all keep listening
- Chené: Human beings are story- and meaning-making beings. When they are invited into the crafting and the creation of the story of tourism the actions and practices that flow out of these moments are always more than one could ever imagine. The re-authoring theory of working with communities and citizens invite them as co-authors of the story of tourism. It assumes that every citizen/community are the experts of their local contexts and they have moments and experiences that would already tell us about the creation of the welcome in their local communities. These moments become the ground from where further hopes, dreams and practices of

citizens and communities can grow. These conversations with communities and citizens are held within spaces, places and practices of dignity and beauty and believe that the unique contexts of every community will be a guide in the kind of practices and experiences that will best suit the community.

Should we take actions to decrease the number of tourists in our art cities?

- Anna: It's quite possible that some places have both the existing capacity and need to attract more visitors – each place is unique. As each art gallery; each museum are finite buildings with a precise capacity to receive x number of visitors, then it may be necessary to cap the number entering at any one time or vary pricing to smooth out demand more evenly etc.

Would it, for Flanders, be wise to stop investing in foreign offices and marketing to the outside and investing more locally?

- Anna: This question cannot be answered without understanding the reasoning behind it. There are reasons for encouraging more domestic tourism and reasons for attracting foreign visitors. The question can only be answered in the context of the overall goal and objectives set for tourism as an activity.
Chené: After reading through 41 flipchart papers of 3 people per group, the transformational experiences of the participants lean towards intense humanity, hospitality in the meeting with local people. It is not an investment of one above the other, but an investment in local hospitality would be a participant in transforming tourism.

Where can we find proof of the advantages of searching for a new paradigm to convince our communities?

- Anna: The problems associated with over tourism nearly always reflect resident dissatisfaction with the way and scale tourism operates in their communities. The advantage of searching for a different model stems from a desire to avoid the negative consequences. Look at the destinations that are suffering the most and imagine how your fellow residents would react if similar conditions existed where you live and work.

How can we motivate people to become an ambassador?

- Anna: Places as different as Melbourne, Australia and Sorlandet in Norway have found that by developing a sense of pride of place and delivering practical support, many residents are naturally motivated to invite their friends, business associates and family members.

- Chené: There are various heart-moving stories amongst the 41 flipcharts of participants that through travel experiences in other places have now become ambassadors here in Vlaandere. I am reminded of one story where a man was helped by a stranger to find his way and because of that experience is now helping strangers at every station in Belgium. Again, I believe the ambassadors are already doing the work, if we capture their stories or bring them together, we can learn from them and make the invitation broader.

What should Bruges do before turning into Venice?

- Anna: Listen intently to the mood of residents. It comes down to feeling the pulse, the undercurrents, the mood well before opinions are expressed vociferously.

Where to start with this new approach while the context is still within the 'old' economy'?

- Anna: It's best to start from within the old economy as the transition does not happen overnight and if you wait until the old economy collapses you have reduced the amount of time and resources that can be applied to creating a better model. Start with small steps: a. identify and quantify what tourism is costing and b. look at the ways in which the net value can be increased.
- Chené: From the stories of the participants on the 3rd of October there are pockets of the new approach in people's individual lives and most probably also in local communities. It would be important to learn from local communities where this new approach is bravely practiced.

What is the sharing economy exactly? If we look to Uber or AirB&B or the 'Free Guides' – we see that the originally 'noble' initiatives can become very different, if a only a few smart people gain economically).

- Anna: There has been a tendency to hijack the term sharing economy inappropriately. Yes Airbnb enables ordinary citizens to make their homes available but, unlike Couchsurfing, a commercial transaction is involved. Companies like Uber and Airbnb are more like conventional intermediaries having simply applied current peer-to-peer technologies to enable transactions between individuals to occur at scale.

Are the technologies of big data and artificial intelligence more a threat than a help to achieve the goal (to rethink the system)

- Anna: They could well be a serious threat to the stability of society as we know it because both our capacity to evaluate and to make value judgments about the technology is not keeping pace with our capacity to create technical systems. Of particular concern is the robotisation trend that will eliminate many of the jobs

currently promised by tourism and other sectors. On the other hand, developments in Virtual Reality and the internet of things could be harnessed to better manage tourism demand.

The best person to listen to on this subject right now is Gerd Leonhard – read his book *Technology vs Humanity* or watch his videos. Here's one: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YXAmjgVoUQ8&t=9s&utm_content=buffer63482&utm_medium=social&utm_source=linkedin.com&utm_campaign=buffer. He asks the most important question – what is the purpose of all this technology? Simply to make more money or to develop human happiness?

The core issue to be considered is what does it mean to be human? How do we protect our humanity and fulfill our potential as human beings or do we become like the robots we have invented?

How do we bring this theory of working with communities into practice / How do we collaborate with citizens in becoming a tourist destination?

How as a tourism organization can you facilitate collaboration within and among communities

How can we bring the tourism sector and the local communities together? Which systems could we put in place to work towards the same goal, where everyone has a voice?

- Anna: These are the questions that Toerisme Vlaanderen is now considering. The best examples of collaboration among the citizenry of a place are to be found outside of tourism in the grass roots efforts of organizations like the Transition Town Network or the Business Alliance for Local Living Economies. The Pacific Northwest region of the USA is particularly active in this arena. It starts by asking questions such questions as Who are we? What do we care about? How to we help each other?
I am confident there are examples in Belgium already but my background has led me to North American examples such as <http://www.ThrivingCommunities.org>
- Chené: The role of the tourist organization is to come alongside the unique gifts and qualities of a community and facilitate the collaboration and learning of the different communities from one another.

Gatherings with local communities like we did on the 3rd of October creates the space where all the voices are heard and where the tourism sector is experienced as a partner and a co-journeyer with the dreams and hopes of local communities. These kinds of gatherings allow for deep human connection, a voice for everyone and also creates the ground for the participants to share possibilities and actions together. As these gatherings take place, the shared goal will arise from the moment created as well as the conversations.

How can the economical aspect harmonise with quality: less revenue and more quality? F.e. less visitors, but offering them a quality visit. How do you sell such a mindset in the business to your board? How can the economic interests have less of leading dominance?

- Anna: You ask them to take a closer look at the costs of volume? Who is paying for the infrastructure to support volume? Who benefits? Supposing you could increase the net expenditure of existing visitors by 5% why would you need to increase the number of visitors by 5%?

Note: the contents of the paper and the answers to the questions posed by participants are Anna Pollock's thoughts and opinions and do not necessarily express the position of Toerisme Vlaanderen. They are submitted to stimulate further thinking and contribute to the opening up of tourism-specific conversations that help generate a tourism economy that is better equipped to cope with a rapidly and fundamentally changing future.