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Arizona Project Broadens the Tourism Conversation

In 2003, Sharlot Hall Museum in Prescott, Arizona, set out to research a question: If heritage tourism, ecotourism, cultural tourism, and other approaches that position a community's "sense of place" as the tourism product are so wonderful, why don't they seem to be working? Why are many unique "places" in jeopardy, often *because* of tourism? With the support of a three-year federal grant, the museum conducted countless town halls to talk with citizens about tourism's role in their town. The result is Civic Tourism, the newest trend in hospitality development.

Borrowing from current literature on the Creative Economy, Civic Tourism extends this research to tourism – an area generally dismissed by creative clusters. Dan Shilling, the architect of Civic Tourism, says, "Regions can use the tourism industry to help preserve their distinctive cultural, natural, and built environments, as well as foster economic growth."

But in order to do so, communities need to "reframe" the conversation about tourism and community development. "Rather than see tourism as an economic end in itself," Shilling says, "citizens should use it as a tool for healthy place-making. It's part of the solution."

Communities also need to extend the dialog. Traditionally, the hospitality conversation has been a narrow one, convened by chambers of commerce or city departments. Civic Tourism maintains that the discussion should also include the general public – the people most affected by the industry's decisions. According to Shilling, "The goal is to design unique, vibrant, and prosperous places for the people who live in them. If this is done well, tourists *will* visit."

The project culminated in March 2006, with a conference that drew hundreds of people from 35 states, Canada, and Mexico. Since then, Shilling has given dozens of presentations across the country, and a second national conference will be held in October 2008, in Rhode Island.

Shilling has also authored a book, *Civic Tourism: The Poetry and Politics of Place*, which features many best practices. For more information about the goals, strategies, and practices of Civic Tourism visit www.civictourism.org.

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