

# A Study On Amsterdam's Neo-Bohemian Lifestyle And Their Travelling Habits

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## Abstract

This paper highlights the importance of bohemian cultures in the tourism and travel industry. The bohemian or gypsy culture, being present as an exotic element, is an attraction that cannot be ignored for many of the travelers to Europe who are attracted to this way of life that offers an experience of freedom and new travel habits. The Neo bohemian culture is not only present as a catalyst for the human experience in the different tours of Europe, but the knowledge of its habits is a source of dialogues with different cultural and human expressions.

## BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT ANALYSIS

### DEFINING CULTURE

Culture is a concept that seems to be very subjective and contextual. In the search to define what exactly it is, there are many different views on the matter. Overall, it is apparent, that in research, culture relates to patterns of behavior and interaction of human beings. When looking at this objectively, one can categorize according to; “symbolic, ideational and intangible aspects of human societies.” (James Banks, 1989).

For the purposes of this paper, which is largely sociological, it is possible to use culture in a categorical context. Here, one can use time constraints and geography to define a culture as something specific; classified according to origin, development, organization and function (Dictionary.com , 2016 ).

This concept of culture has mostly been closely associated with anthropology, where within this discipline it receives full analytical treatment, and recognition of its dimensions and complexities. However, it is now cutting across, and being borrowed by many other disciplines (Morey, 1985); for example travel and tourism or business organization. Because of this displacement one can reinforce the idea that culture is in fact very fluid and differs in accordance to subject, context and discourse.

In this paper, the focus will be more toward culture as a multi-linear concept which includes a process of a number of forward paths, of different styles and lengths (Pauls, 2014), with a focus on travel and dispersion.

A final consideration with regards to culture is to gain insight into the role of globalization and diversity within urban settings. This also includes the idea of community and self-actualization within these subcultures. It must be taken into consideration, that community and culture also suggests shared meaning, language and is also a medium that is exchanged (Å-tl, 2007 ). What may have been relevant in a previous generation of people may be completely meaningless today. Also, individuals sharing the same culture may also not share all the same ideals as the group that they are associated with.

Therefore, when one wants to define a new sub-culture or make a comparative analysis of an existing culture in accordance to place, it is necessary to realize that how it was defined may differ vastly from one place to the other.

## **BOHEMIAN CULTURE**

A Bohemian, according to the Oxford Dictionary (2016) definition, is someone “especially an artist, literary man, or actor, who leads a free, vagabond, or irregular life, not being particular as to the society he frequents, and despising conventionalities generally”. This sub culture is also associated with unorthodox or anti-establishment viewpoints and the expression of these views through free love and frugality. (Turque, 2013)

The term was first coined in France in the early 19th century when creators and artists began to populate the lower class Romani neighborhoods. “Bohemian” then became a common term for the Romani people of France who were thought to have originated from 15th century Bohemia or Czech Kingdom. (Harper, 2016)

The bohemian lifestyle was then romanticized and popularized by William Makepeace Thackeray’s novel, *Vanity Fair* in the 1800s and then even more so by George du Mauriers best-selling novel *Trilby* (1984). The lifestyle continued to gain recognition and popularity in both music and theatre as well as more recently in the 2001 film *Moulin Rouge!* Bohemian lifestyle also evolved in America and has now spread to various parts of the world (Mount HolyOke, 2015).

Today it could be possible to use Virginia Nicholson’s definition of a Bohemian: “The bohemian is an outsider, defines themselves as an outsider and is defined by the world as an outsider. (Nicholson, 2005). Neo Bohemia can be seen as a contemporary modern day evolution of the Bohemian lifestyle that was represented in the 1800s and 1900s. This term specifically, has been recognized, categorized and studied by only a handful of people.

It seems to stem from a commonly accepted description where “a bohemian” can be seen as a kind of “literary gypsy, no matter what language he speaks, or what city he inhabits. In simple terms a Bohemian artist or litterateur who, consciously or unconsciously, secedes from conventionality in life and in art.” (Harper, 2016)

The term used above is very vague when attempting to classify a person. This being said because conventions and norms differ from country to country and city to city. Also what may have been conventional in the early 2000s may not be anymore. Urban environments are also shaped by historical changes, dynamic entities, artistic innovation and economic enterprise (Lloyd, Department of Sociology , 2016 ). In the current context of globalization, this proves to be an even more interesting and complex phenomenon for the evolution of cultures and subcultures within urban environments. This is why it is necessary that this paper seeks to identify neo-bohemianism and their lifestyle, in the city of Amsterdam specifically.

To identify the growth and relevance of this subculture in Amsterdam I have drawn upon Richard Lloyds study of Wicker Park in Chicago. Here he distinguishes Wicker Park from past bohemian models because of the intersection of developments and restructured urban economy. Creative individuals had begun to gain benefits from urban association, global economic trends and despite gentrification of the neighborhood, those classified as bohemian did not get filtered

out but rather their lifestyle complimented and enhanced this change, and reaped benefits from the concentration of entertainment outlets and design media enterprises (Lloyd, 2002).

As a spatial phenomenon, we can identify these neighborhoods by the displacement of industrial and economic functions, which left large warehouses and buildings open. These have now become icons and symbolic spaces for the arts and bohemian lifestyle. Another aspect is that within these urban cities and spaces frequented by neo-bohemians there is an increasing importance of culture as a commodity. Finally, within the city itself, there is a changing occupational structure. This emphasizes the importance of the educated and culturally competent workers that generate or enhance cultural production. Thus, Neo-Bohemia suggests that the traditions of cultural innovation in older neighborhoods still persist while bohemian traditions intersect with economic development (Lloyd, 2002).

In terms of urban tourism the state of Neo-Bohemia challenges the idea of “the crisis-generated restructuring” (Soya, 2009) of urban cities as well as the importance of tourism and consumption strategies as a way of redeveloping older urban cores. Generally there has been a focus on capital investment developments such as the injection of cultural and convention centers. However, these urban theories fail to take into account the people living in these areas. They remain places where people live, not just visit. Therefore if Neo-Bohemianism is on the rise it also plays a big role in the process of cultural development within these spaces (Lloyd, 2002).

In 2002 the concept of bohemia was used to analyze regional conveniences by using a statistical measure called the Bohemian Index (Lloyd, 2002). In order to identify this sub-culture in Amsterdam, it may be possible to use this index as a reference point to distinguish Neo-Bohemia and its intricacies within the city of Amsterdam. This index draws on the theory that there is also a development of a blend between bohemians and bourgeois society. With this blend it seems that lifestyle and not work is the source of satisfaction which points to the rise of the “no brow culture” (Florida, 2001). However, one should not forget that there is also another side of the bohemian lifestyle, in a more traditional sense which promotes frugality, freedom and in some cases voluntary poverty. This suggests that there are multiple facets to the Neo-Bohemian.

## **NEO BOHEMIA IN AMSTERDAM**

Taking the above mentioned theories into account, it seems possible to relate the bohemian lifestyle to that of the “squatter” or “kraker” lifestyle in Amsterdam. This lifestyle in Amsterdam began in the 1960s, where many Europeans found refuge within the inner city of in abandoned houses and buildings. It is said to come about because of the tremendous housing shortage that the city still faces today (Ahmadi, 2012).

The squat scene is not what it was in its prime of the 1980s and has undergone many transformations. Most notably, it has experienced a shrinkage and loss of public support as well as a less anarchist outlook. As of October 1st 2010 the new government declared squatting to be officially banned across the country, and squatters who had enjoyed legal protection for over three decades were suddenly seen as criminals. (Lindner, 2006)

Since then, the squat culture changed dramatically, and those buildings that were once squatted have now become hosts to alternative cultural events and activities. Up to 160 buildings and apartments in Amsterdam are still illegally occupied (Stroobants, 2011) but nowadays many

of those who squat in Amsterdam are in fact students, scholars or artists with a job on the side. It seems to no longer be seen as a radical political statement but rather an acquired bohemian lifestyle. (With regards to the above research)

Squatting can be categorized into 5 different configurations (Pruijt, 2012):

1. Deprivation Squatting
2. Squatting as an alternative housing strategy
3. Entrepreneurial Squatting
4. Political squatting

When examining the squat culture that is linked to travel and cultural identification we can concentrate on numbers 2 and 3. Conservational squatting has contributed to the preservation of historic buildings and neighborhoods while Entrepreneurial squatting houses the underground art and music scene (Pruijt, 2012).

#### **GEOGRAPHY**

The area that will be covered in the research will be within the area of the original squat establishments in Amsterdam which can be found on the “black map” (*Figure 1*) which is mainly within the inner ring of Amsterdam. This will also be extended to some of the newer establishments such as “Cruikuisgilde” in the East and “De School” in the West which are relatively new cultural centers that will give a more accurate representation of the Neo-Bohemian Culture.

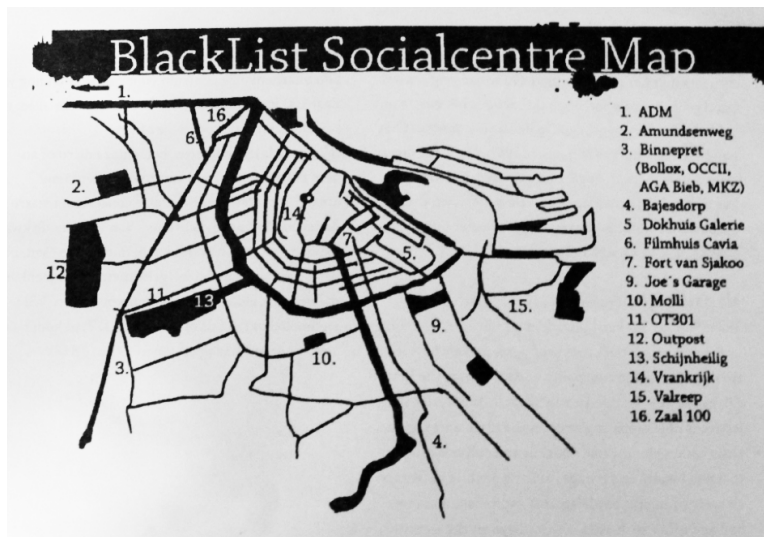


Figure 1. - THE BLACK MAP OF AMSTERDAM (AHMADI, 2012)

## SUMMARY/CONCLUSIONS

To conclude and from looking further into this sub-culture I think that the new squat culture that is on the rise in Amsterdam could be closely connected to the Neo-Bohemian culture that Lloyd (2002) has defined through his research of Wicker Park.

In Amsterdam it is possible to use a comparative analysis to see how closely related these cultures are. The bohemian index is also a good indicator and step forward on defining this subculture.

What I have noticed is missing from this research and what I think is also very relevant for Tourism studies is to look deeper into the travelling habits of this sub-culture as well.

If it does identify with the squat and bohemian cultures they are sure to have similar ideas on travel. (Where one travels for the events and causes that they are passionate about and maybe are connected to other people in other cities. I imagine that ideals of couch-surfing and house swap are apparent here.) However, to delve further into this and gain good insight, secondary research is very much needed, especially because this sub-culture is yet to be defined in Amsterdam.

The lifestyle of the sample adopts a qualitative active participatory research approach.

For example, in the old OT30 squat, many participate in language exchange. This activity encourages the exchange of ideas and cultural expressions. The NoMads Festival at the end of June is an excellent opportunity for travelers and tourists to have the opportunity to participate and observe the cultural and artistic expressions of Bohemian culture. Undoubtedly, it is an attractive and profitable way that makes travel experiences, as human experiences, have a huge impact on the relevant people and therefore on the economic impact of the area.

Also looking even further into the subject matter Neo-Bohemian seems to be a combination of Bourgeois lifestyle and bohemian lifestyle. (ie money + freedom) In this case I think I need to create a conceptual framework going forward, but this will reveal itself once all the secondary research is completed.

Also looking even more at the neo-bohemian theme seems to be a combination of Bourgeois lifestyle and bohemian lifestyle. (ie money + freedom). In conclusion, the bohemian lifestyle turns out to be very attractive for travelers seeking human experiences during their travel experience. The feeling of freedom that these experiences offer are as attractive as other recreation centers, with the difference that the human experience, by sharing art, culture, language and life, allows a catharsis in the traveler. Amsterdam is a city that is characterized by offering these experiences and evaluating and analyzing these means could be understood and applied to similar cases in the world.

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