

I cannot explain it, but you must visit Doloris

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This article is written by three second year students studying leisure and events management at Breda university of applied sciences. These students interviewed Joep van Gorp, the founder of Doloris. A project in which Brabant C has invested capital in the past. This interview took place on the 16th of February 2022.

What is Doloris?

“You can compare it to a climbing park for children with nets on the side, but then fully themed and for adults” (Joep van Gorp)

Doloris consists of a Meta Maze, a three-dimensional experience of which the visitor is a part of, says Joep. The maze is filled with many rooms, each designed by an artist. How the maze is experienced is different for each person. I have seen people being very energetic and contrarily, I have also seen people being emotional and a little scared even. The experience in the Meta Maze also depends on the choices the visitor makes in the maze. For example, the visitor could choose to go right instead of left, that will cause him/her to experience the maze differently from others. That also makes it a very personal experience compared to other free roaming art experiences Besides that, Doloris also consists of a rooftop bar.

How did Doloris come about?

I was inspired by a project in Berlin. In the beginning of the Doloris project, I was lobbying a lot, luckily it turned out that people liked my idea. Gradually, I started to have conversations with financiers, and I was able to start building Doloris. It was a big project and I had to spend a lot of time on it. Just do it and keep breathing I told myself. By earning funding, support, and a lot of hard work I was able to create it. Doloris is not comparable to anything else; it has its own experience. It is a kind of Alice in Wonderland experience, but not.

What is the target audience of Doloris?

At the start of our journey, we created ten target groups like, the Tilburg lover and the theme park lover. However, later we began to see many more people that did not fit any of our target groups. Then we realised that ‘anyone who can walk’ is our target group. Reaching all those different people is a challenge, so every time we try to design a different approach to reach different people. What we aim for is visualizing to the people what it is that they are going to do without telling them exactly what they are going to do, “show don’t tell”.

What was the vision of Doloris at the time, has this vision been fulfilled?

While I was working on my dream, the vision was: we are going to set up a cool installation and we hope that people will visit. Doloris has an incentive, “To raise the meaning of total experience even higher”. By continuously considering the experiences and trends, Doloris continues to develop. As a

result, the vision has certainly been realized and that also applies to the coming years. The question is, how long will it take the lead.

Did things pan out differently than was initially planned?

The rooftop was initially not part of the plan, the opportunity presented itself, so I took the challenge. Together with two companions we started to develop the rooftop bar. So, we went from a Meta Maze with a lounge where you can have a drink, to developing a big rooftop bar in combination with the meta maze and a lounge. Well... that set out to be a very challenging task. However, for every challenge we faced, we found solutions.

“Doloris turned out to be much more than I imagined. If you do not spar much with people, it stays small. But if you do keep sparring with more people, the bigger the vision becomes, and you will gain another perspective” (Joep van Gorp)

Why Tilburg?

In Amsterdam the market is moving too rapidly and that makes it unrealistic to earn enough funding. In Utrecht the concept does not fit that well. Tilburg and Rotterdam are the perfect cities for something like Doloris, there is more character to the cities and people really like to explore what their city has to offer. While in many other cities people mostly spend their time on less exciting leisure activities, like going to the restaurant or spending their afternoon on a terrace.

What was Doloris’s highlight in Tilburg?

I remember an article being published by Bas Vermeer in January 2019, Stadsgezicht. The article included the three greatest things of that year. Among which, Spoorpark, Lochal and Doloris. I remember reading this and thinking, huh, why Doloris. That whole year I did not realize the effect of this on the city. I knew that it was cool, but I did not notice how unique it was. It was until after a year that I realized that. I was just realising my dream, I thought. Even though there were many people who said that this was never going to happen, I just kept on going.

Do you think that the character of Tilburg contributes to the success of Doloris and vice versa? Is that a reason to choose not to expand?

There is a link, you can hear that Tilburg is getting increasingly more popular the past years with the Lochal, Spoorpark and us. The past years Doloris helped form Tilburg and contributes to the further creation of new concepts in the city. I feel that 2019 was the year in which Tilburg and the places in it, like Lochal for example, found out what the image of Tilburg is. It was also the year in which I realised what my role in the city is with Doloris. Prior to that year, that was unclear, a lot was happening but there were no new places introduced in the city. As Doloris we realize that we contribute to the culture of the city, we offer something new which gives the inhabitants of Tilburg something to discover.

A concept like McDonalds can be placed everywhere and when we want to expand, we must figure out how are we going to position ourselves in the city and how we are going to use the elements that are present. That, with the goal of knowing what you stand for in the city and who you are. Once you know that, you can go to another city. It is about, how do we make sure that we fit the area, not the other way around.

“ We want to keep our connection with the city by continuing to show involvement in cultural and creative projects in the city. We also see ourselves helping the city to continue to stay vibrant.” (Joep van Gorp)

What role does Brabant C play in your organization?

Brabant C was our first steppingstone regarding funding and their power was essential for our project. Our collaboration with Brabant C is minimal, they are mainly focused on financing cultural projects. Sometimes they do promote some of our material but that is not their focus. Their focus is to help cultural projects in with their road to success. We still have a relationship with them since they still provide us with capital. It took us several times to earn funding from Brabant C, it is the most difficult procedure in Brabant after all. Nevertheless, Brabant C helped us realize our dream.

What is the plan for Doloris in the future?

In a few years we must expand for Doloris to continue their mission. That means that for Doloris there will probably be a second location in another city. There, we will have to build something new, we cannot simply copy paste the Doloris concept that we have in Tilburg. What we also want to keep doing is to raise the significance of the total experience to a higher level.

What do you still want to achieve personally?

“I just want to do cool stuff” (Joep van Gorp)