Moving Beyond Product Innovation in Tourism: Benefits and Challenges

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Part 2

Product Innovation
A SPATIAL USAGE MODEL OF FOSSIL SITE VISITATION IN REMOTE AREAS

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ABSTRACT

Much of inland Australia and America is characterised by long distances separating small communities which offer limited infrastructure and few attractions for visitors. However tourism is often seen as one of the few possible ways to sustain existing communities in the face of declining primary industry based employment. Visitors appear to adopt a variety of strategies to tour the fossil fields and surrounding areas, and their spatial behaviour has different implications for the further development of the regions' tourist potential.

This preliminary study took the form of direct observation, participant observation and semi-structured discussions with visitors and tourism industry personnel in selected Australian and American outback areas rich in dinosaur fossils. The paper discusses the potential to develop palaeontological tourism and presents a conceptual model of the spatial structures of tourist visits to remote areas. The paper also summarises some of the issues to be faced in remote areas when using themes based on the existence of important dinosaur fossil fields to develop tourism.

Introduction

The purpose of developing remoter peripheral areas for tourism is two fold, to provide a sustainable economic activity for populations in those areas, and to reduce pressure of tourist visitation on established destinations. In contrast to the situation in Europe where the imperative is more often about tourist dispersal away from congested areas, it is the first objective, which applies most strongly to the American dinosaur fossil fields as discussed in this paper.

This preliminary study took the form of direct observation, participant observation and semi-structured discussions with visitors and tourism industry personnel in selected American outback areas rich in dinosaur fossils. The paper describes a major Dinosaur fossil site, discusses palaeontological tourism and presents a conceptual model of the spatial structure of tourist visits to remote areas. The paper also summarises some of the
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issues to be considered in remote areas when using themes based on the existence of important dinosaur fossil fields to develop tourism.

**Developing remote area tourism through commodification**

Much of America (and other continents such as Australia and Asia) is characterised by long distances separating small communities that provide limited infrastructure and offer few developed attractions for visitors. However tourism is often seen as one of the few possible ways to sustain existing communities in the face of declining primary industry based employment.

Peripheral areas are being developed for tourism in many countries. The purpose of developing remoter areas for tourism is two fold, to provide a sustainable economic activity for populations in those areas, and to reduce pressure of tourist visitation on established destinations (Middleton and Hawkins, 1998). It is the first objective which applies most strongly to the American dinosaur fossil fields discussed in this paper, in contrast to the situation in Europe where the imperative is also about tourist dispersal away from congested areas (Murray and Graham, 1997).

Despite the awareness of the fossil fields amongst the general public, remoteness, harsh climate and limited tourism infrastructure mitigate against casual visits to these sites, making it important to research and conceptualise the patterns of visitation.

The strategy to develop these areas is based on commodifying their resources in the sense discussed in Britton (1991). He shows that commodification of place occurs by controlling access to a site so that visitors can be charged a fee, and through the provision of other commercialised features of the visit, including tourist services such as hotels and restaurants, both in attracting visitors and providing them with satisfying experiences (Laws and Cooper, 1998 or souvenirs. However, commodification has to be related to the motivations of consumers if it is to be successful).

**Dinosaur National Monument**

The Dinosaur National Monument is located off a secondary road near the Colorado – Utah state border. The Park covers over 200,000 acres, mostly classified as wilderness and with only one surfaced road and one rough four-wheel drive track. Commercial white water rafting is available on the river in its 1,000-metre deep canyon during the summer season. Light refreshments are sold at the Park visitor centre. There is also a commercial cafe and small shop at the Park entrance and petrol and diesel is available within 20 kilometres on the main road from which a spur leads into the park. However, the nearest town offering a choice of motels and restaurants is over 100 Kilometres distant.

For tourists travelling the main roads near the US site, information about the Dinosaur National Monument becomes more readily available as one nears the area, via brochures distributed in Visitor Information Centres, accommodation and gas (petrol) stations, and in the form of roadside signage. There is some elementary branding too, as motels near dinosaur fossil fields tend to adopt names such as 'Dinosaur Motel', and restaurant menus feature 'Dinoburgers'.
The Dinosaur National Monument is administered by the US National Parks Service and provides a very sophisticated interpretative centre which has been featured in one of David Attenborough's 'Life On Earth' television sequences. The fossils here are the remains of dinosaurs apparently trapped on a sandbar over many millennia, first discovered by Earl Douglass working for the then new Carnegie Museum. The museum shipped out 350 tons of fossil from 17 species of dinosaurs before Woodrow Wilson declared the area a National Monument in 1915. It was then decided to present the continuing work of excavating the fossils as the core visitor attraction and a specially designed building was constructed for this purpose. Excavation has now been completed. But several fossil skeletons have been left partly exposed, and rangers provide commentaries for visitors explaining how the site was discovered and exploited against the spectacular and emotive backdrop of actual dinosaur remains emerging from but still embedded in the rock face.

Other remote American dinosaur sites
In contrast to the federally funded Dinosaur National Monument, most remote fossil field sites are characterised by limited development and present the appearance of having been virtually abandoned after excavation. Part of their attraction is the peace of the area and the freedom to wander at one's own pace along clearly marked self-guiding trails. Some fossil sites have been enhanced through a number of measures including better visitor centres, improved toilet facilities, shaded parking and picnicking facilities, refreshment vending, orientation talks by the guardians or rangers, signage around the site, walking-trail and driving tour leaflets (self guided tours) and upgraded retailing and catering outlets on the site or nearby.

Palaeontological tourism
Interest in dinosaurs appears to be widespread and some of the richest fossil fields are located in areas, which have few economic resources other than a potential for tourism. Detailed knowledge of the sites appears to be restricted to special interest groups such as palaeontological experts or enthusiasts such as fossickers. However, public awareness of them is stimulated by occasionally feature in travel media articles, off-road driver magazines and television science documentaries because of the compelling interest of spectacular fossilised skeletons and the tracks they made several hundred million years ago. For example, site guardians and rangers reported significantly increased visitor numbers following the screening of the film Jurassic Park.

As Leake and Lewin (1998) note, there is also a growing awareness of the interconnected nature of life on earth, of conservation issues and of the risk of further catastrophic cosmological events such as comets impacting planets. One such event was recorded in 1994 and received global media coverage. At a fundamental level, therefore, the human interest in dinosaurs alluded to in this paper is itself worthy of further study.

Remote site visitors observed in America during this study appear to be mainly middle aged and retired couples or family groups with children of about seven years old and upwards. In contrast, visitors to museums featuring major dinosaur exhibits were
predominantly family groups. However, this may be a consequence of the timing of the study, undertaken during the summer school holidays. A standard question posed by the remote site Rangers during orientation talks is whether people have previously visited the site. They report that they rarely receive a positive answer, and any repeat visitation is usually by older mature couples retracing a journey made a couple of decades ago.

Interviews with curators, guardians and hoteliers indicate that few tourists visiting remote dinosaur fossil regions are motivated specifically by palaeontological interests, the main exception being experts and university groups doing field work.

In America, the predominant mode of travel in remote areas is independent, either by car or recreation vehicle (RV) touring for extended periods and covering substantial distances (Masberg and Vasquez, 1998), with stops in the dinosaur region ranging from overnight to several days. Interviews with tourists driving vehicles registered in distant states indicate that most longer staying visitors are engaged mainly in outdoor pursuits such as fishing, mountain biking, or general sight seeing. These visitors are inclined to stop in areas along their general routes where there is an attraction or a variety of local activities.

Few seem to have planned their journeys in great detail. However, certain dinosaur sites are very remote. Their brochures advise the use of four-wheel drives, and some caution against visiting at all in bad weather. Here, visitors are rarer and seem to be motivated both by a strong interest in the characteristics of the area and the local evidence of dinosaurs. The relative lack of visitor facilities at such sites does not detract from their enjoyment and they generally carry camping provisions with them.

Segmentation of dinosaur fossil field visitors

From the foregoing it is apparent that people undertake visits to fossil areas with differing motivations, and in different ways. Three broad groupings are suggested for further study and refinement of understanding of how to develop and market remote area dinosaur resources:

- those with specialised interests in dinosaur fossil fields,
- the more numerous group of visitors who have general interests in visiting remote areas,
- and a third group transiting the area on a touring holiday.

Dinosaur specialists require little in the way of site interpretation, and some take seasonal employment as site staff and in fact provide interpretation to other visitors. They contribute to the local economy as temporary residents. Other specialists pay briefer visits to several sites and require the normal range of accommodation and other services expected by general tourists. Their visits are planned, either by themselves or by scientific groups, and may be influenced by articles placed in popular scientific magazines or through museum and university affinity groups. These visitors are also more likely to visit the most remote and least developed dinosaur sites.
People with general motivations to visit remote areas are likely to consider alternative destinations when making their holiday decisions. The promotion of dinosaur fossil sites may be persuasive to these travellers, and it may be easier to reach these segments through varied media (for example 4-wheel drive or adventure travel magazines). The general interest segments may be stimulated by more effective information dissemination and targeting, and also by efforts to brand the region in ways which appeal to visitors passing through the area, linked with relevant product development. The touring group are least likely to decide to stay on in the area, as their objective is to travel on to a distant destination. However, developments that would appeal to the general interest visitors might also attract some tours to spend more time and money in the area.

In the remainder of this paper, general and touring visitors are considered together and referred to as Area visitors. Area visitors may be less likely to visit remote and undeveloped sites compared to dinosaur enthusiasts.

**Dinosaur fossil area development**

Although surfaced roads pass through the areas, they are not heavily travelled, and do not link major tourist destinations to origin markets. The population within a day's drive is very small, necessitating an overnight stay or longer, but the available accommodation in these regions is restricted to relatively basic motels and camping sites. These are mainly located in small townships themselves some distance from the fossil fields, with few restaurants or other amenities.

The combination of remoteness and difficult access has evident effects in limiting visitor numbers, and also limits the degree of development of dinosaur sites for tourism. But it is not clear that enhanced visitor facilities would necessarily increase visitation significantly, at least in the short term. Similarly, these conditions limit the development of tours to and through the region by origin based operators.

Most dinosaur fossil sites are located in areas, which provide a widely dispersed range of additional potential tourist attractions and activities, some associated with palaeontology, others with no apparent link. These include the scenery itself, abandoned mine workings, desert flora and fauna and opportunities for off road driving, cross-country cycling, horse back trekking and other activities. At present, few of these have been developed as commercial tourism products, and many appear not to be well known to visitors. The challenge for destination area managers is therefore twofold, to develop and commercialise potential tourism resources and to provide information which would attract more visitors and encourage longer stays. The development and promotion of different tourist activities may encourage more area visitors to base themselves in a regional centre for a more extended period, making day trips to a variety of attractions and therefore spending more time and money in the area.

One strategy to develop the region's tourism potential is to establish collaborative networks, whereby each site or attractions carries information leaflets relating to adjacent facilities. Another approach (often used in tandem) is through the medium of a complimentary regional tourist newsheet which carries advertising for commercial
ventures ranging from puncture repair to hotels or campgrounds, as well as news stories about points of interest in the region, such as opening times and charges. These approaches can result in reciprocal benefits as visitors coming to an area for different purposes could be attracted to visit dinosaur sites, while the dinosaur visitor segment may be enticed to experience alternative features of the wider destination area. This paper now introduces a model conceptualising visitors’ spatial usage of remote areas.

Conceptualising tourist visits to remote areas
There is not yet an adequate theory of what factors are most germane in attracting tourists into remote regions, and of how they structure their activities in these areas. It is therefore rather difficult for operators or local authorities to make informed decisions on how to develop facilities in these areas, or to know how to promote what the areas offer. Yet given the extensive range of fossil fields and their remoteness, there is a growing tendency for regional tourist authorities to package them as part of a long distance tourist route. Murray and Graham (1997, p 514) have noted that tourist routes “function as a regional definition, a theme that transcends geographical diversity and distance to provide a spatially expansive but integrated marketable theme”.

In contrast to what might be expected from distance-decay studies, for example Greer and Wall (1979), visitors to the remote fossil sites came predominantly from distant origins. This factor suggests that an understanding of visitors’ journey planning and route related behaviour might be important. Campbell (1966) has distinguished travellers on the basis of the relative importance to them of their journey or their destination. Leiper (1979) employed two basic regional elements to explain tourism, the destination and the market. Mill and Morrison (1998) added a third, the journey. Flogenfeldt (1992) notes that tourists’ routes may be planned in advance, and often involve travel into or through an area which is defined administratively rather than in terms of the benefits it offers visitors. A consequence of the fragmentation of a tourist area into several administrative regions is that data on visitor flows, activities and experiences is itself fragmented, thereby limiting the ability of researchers to study the issues and restricting managers’ ability to maximise the potential of the area for tourism development.

Lundgren (1982) has examined tourist flows to wilderness and national park areas, noting that their remoteness and other factors tend to make them dependant for services on the tourist generating areas. Figure 1 conceptualises the problem of touring remote areas with limited ranges of attractions and facilities. For the tourist, the issues are about rationalising the time and effort needed for a journey to remote areas offering relatively few attractions or facilities, and about overcoming perceived travel barriers such as the remoteness of the area, the poor state of roads and the lack of amenities.
Figure 1: Travel routes of Dinosaur specialists and area visitors
Developing remote areas
The model presented here demonstrates that travellers with different motivations are likely to adopt different strategies to deal with the variety and dispersion of attractions in remote areas. The significance in terms of destination management is that it suggests the need to plan and promote tourism development both at the scale of the region, and at the micro level of particular sites and activities which could be developed, based on identification of market segments with growth potential.

This approach is different from that advocated by Murray and Graham (1997 p 514) who regard route based tourism as “alternative tourism characterised by a limited number of themes, exploited through spatially restricted itineraries.” Their concern is with linking dispersed areas offering related tourist attractions and is particularly relevant for tourist products such as vineyard or cathedral themed routes. The route becomes “a regional definition, a theme that transcends geographical diversity and distance to provide a spatially expansive but integrated marketable theme.” Thus, it acts as a focus for visitors with different motivations and needs, and gives a coherency to the area by bringing more visitors to the points of sale with in it and providing reasons for them to remain longer. However the idea of developing an otherwise little visited area which is located near a tourist route so that it offers diverse tourist activities, shares the assumption that experiences obtained along the way are at least as important as the destination itself, or may be not arriving there at all.

Discussion
For tourism suppliers in many remote areas, the problem is that there are insufficient visitor numbers or volume of spending to support investment in expansion or extension of business activities. As dinosaur tourism appears to be a commercially weak sector in itself, its potential for areas rich in fossil remains lies in identifying other local activities and features which can be presented as synergistic. Dinosaur tourism also appears to offer opportunities to enhance the experiences of visitors who come to the area motivated by other reasons, and may be a way to encourage them to extend their stay in the area. This can be linked to brand development based on the dinosaur connection as a special theme throughout the region and provides a means of differentiating the region from other locations, which provide wilderness activities but lack fossil sites.

Reciprocal benefits might be obtained by a range of operators in the area through targeting activities and excursions to each other’s main client groups. Thus, accommodation sector operators can be asked to distribute dinosaur site brochures on behalf of excursion operators. The brochures can be written to encourage longer stays in the area.

Further research
This scoping study has highlighted that a specialised asset such as dinosaur fossil fields may be utilised to develop tourism in remote areas through the regional development of further products, site networking, and through marketing strategies. Site enhancements are another important strategy, discussed elsewhere (Laws, 2002). However, it has been noted above that relatively few visitors are likely to travel to remote areas for the
sole purpose of visiting fossil fields, so the selective development of additional activities and tourist facilities is primary need in stimulating tourism to remote areas. More detailed studies are required, both of the motivations of potential visitors and of the supply side issues for areas which are geographically extensive, remote from major tourist source markets and often have seasonal visitation patterns due to climatic and other conditions.

The argument presented in this paper may be applicable to areas where the primary distinguishing appeal is based on features other than palaeontological remains, for example old mining works, or a unique form of flora or fauna. However, both Williams and Shaw (1991) and Meethan (1996) argue that tourists' expectations of what a particular site should look like can result in modification of the site. The development of activities and facilities for tourists is likely to have profound consequences for remote areas, opening a wide and important research agenda as new areas become accessible to tourists in other countries, including China and Australia both of which have important dinosaur fossil fields in remote areas.
Bibliography
ABSTRACT

The coastal area of East-Frisia, northwestern Lower Saxony, is a nation wide well known summer-seasonal tourism destination. Most of the coastal parts are marshlands and the chain of small islands is derived from wind erosion with sand shift and sand dune formations. The traditional economic factor is farming. However, two industrial complexes on the southern- and easternmost edges of the area in and around the cities of Emden (VW plant) and Wilhelmshaven (Oilindustry) played a mayor role during the economic restructuring in the 1960s and '70s. During the last 25 years coastal East-Frisia became a beach-related rural destination for the national summer tourism. Due to the natural favour as high wind area and to the search for sustainable energy sources the construction of single wind turbines and wind-farms became popular since the late 70s. Today East-Frisia has the highest density of windfarms in the World and hosts the largest windfarm in the EU, the Holtriem Windfarm near Aurich.

This leads us to some questions concerning the roles, functions, images and symbols of wind farms in this specific rural tourism. “Wind plants”, says Caroline Stanton, "should not be judged solely on their visual properties; indeed, they may be greatly valued for other qualities, such as what they symbolise”. Are windfarms only in a contrasting position to the traditional symbols and images of rural tourism? Do they destroy the image of an “intact rural landscape”? Do windfarms represent a specific spatial function; do they change the spatial factors of rural tourism? Are windfarms a tourist attraction apart? Due to their economic favours (e. g. the lease for the land) they might be Beauties for the local agricultural economy, but they might be the Beasts for others.

KEY WORDS

Imaginations of landscape, windfarm, East-Frisian-Landscape, tourism, regional identity
Geography of the ‘real’ landscape: The coastal area of East-Frisia, north-western Lower Saxony, is a nation-wide well-known summer-seasonal tourism destination located on the westernmost shores of the German part of the North Sea Coast. Most of the on-shore parts are marshlands and the preliminary chain of small islands is derived from wind erosion with sand shift and sand dune formations. Wind has always been a predominant factor.

Figure 3: The East-Frisan-Peninsula and the East-Frisan-Islands
Source: The Times Concise Atlas of the World

Between the East-Frisian-Coastline and the eastern shores of the Frisian-Islands stretches the western part of Germany's North Seas “Wattenmeer” (wadden sea). Besides the sandy islands and the wadden sea there are three different forms of on-shore lowland:

The near-the-sea silt or “Polder” areas with man-made dikes, where on the outlets of natural or man-made waterways small villages (‘Siele’) and estate-like huge solitary farmhouses (‘Gulfhaus’) represent the typical settlements. Here the traditional local economy was based on fishery and intensive agriculture.

The silt peat, fen and peat bog areas, where classical 18th century Dutch types of fen settlements (Dutch: Veen, German: Fehn) are the typical traditional settlement. In fact East-Frisia houses 6 out of the 10 largest ‘Veen’-Villages, with Papenburg being the second largest world-wide. The naturally wooded and forested parts are on the sandy post-glacial parts of the higher lowland, the so-called ‘Geest’. Due to the fact that the soils of this area were much poorer than in the marshlands, the farms, in particular the main buildings were much smaller too.
In East Frisia the traditional economic factors were farming, fishing and the maritime trade and this lead us to one of the most important historical social-economic dimensions of the geographical quartet. This is formed by the chain of the East-Frisian-Islands and the three forms off on shore lowland, the spatial increase of local wealth from the poor soils of the “Geest” to the rich clay- and silt-soils of the coastal marshes and to the wealthy seaport Emden.

Since the early days of the 20th century, two industrial complexes on the southern and easternmost edges of the area, in and around the cities of Emden (trade port, shipyard, Volkswagen plant) and Wilhelmshaven (trade port, oil industry, navy base and shipyard) have played a mayor role in the local industrialisation process, in particular during the economic restructuring in the 1960s and ‘70s. These two industrial cities attracted a lot of workers from the rural countryside and industrial residential centres became typical settlements in the suburbs of the industrial cores of the region.

The erection of windmills became popular in East Frisia during the middle of the 18th century - due to the natural favour as high wind area and the resulting economic advantages. In the 19th century more than 400 traditional windmills most of them galleried Dutch windmills, played an important role in the local economy. Today there still exist more than 80 renovated windmills. Many of them are reused as museums and provide information about local culture and heritage for the locals and the tourists.

Over the last 25 years, coastal East-Frisia became a beach-related rural destination in the national summer tourism. Many of the coastal villages (‘Siele’), e. g. Norddeich (City of Norden), Dornum (with Dornumer- and Accumersiel), Bensersiel (City of Esens), Neuharlingersiel, Carolinensiel, Horumersiel became nation-wide recognised seaside spas or seaside health spas.

The rise of the ‘Beauty-or-Beast’-Case: The construction of single wind turbines, windmills and windfarms became popular since the late 70s due to the search for sustainable energy sources and also as a source of extra income for local farmers. The construction of singly wind turbines, windmills and windfarms became popular since the late 70s. Today, East Frisia has the highest density of windfarms in the World and hosts the largest windfarm in the EU, the Holtrier Windfarm near Aurich. At the beginning the majority of the local population supported the construction of single windmills in the remoteness of the less populated ‘Polder’ as a good idea of a ‘clean-energy-recourse’. But the ‘new beauties’ in the landscape quickly left the ‘Polder’ and more windmills were constructed near villages and near densely quickly populated areas. They were more often constructed in windfarms with more than 50 or 60 windmills in each farm.
For a growing part of the local population, little by little the 'beauties' turned into 'beasts', as more and more people voiced the concerns about 'landscape damaging' or even 'destroying' effects. Others questioned the safety of the wind-turbines. This was a parallel process to what happened in other German regions and other countries like GB, Denmark or the USA.

What are the main arguments of the critics? Representative of much of the criticism on the uncontrolled spread of wind-turbines, windparks and windfarms is listed here in a selection of arguments from the well-known website of the Country Guardian, which was founded in 1992 (http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/windfarms/default.htm). This is described as a UK conservation group focused on the environmental damage caused by commercial windfarms in areas of national or local landscape value. It is not opposed to wind energy as such, but in practice almost all sites which are windy enough are environmentally sensitive.

'Countriy Guardian's Policy on Windfarms

The intermittency problem

'Wind is an intermittent source of power and the only form of energy generation, which we cannot control. If there is no wind, there is no generation; if there is too much wind the turbines must be shut down or they will be blown over'.
The safety problem
'Blades weigh up to 1.5 tonnes and their tips are travelling at more than 180 mph. When they have broken off they have planed up to 400 metres. On 9 Dec. 1993 parts of a blade were thrown 400 m at Cemmaes in Wales. At Tarifa, Spain, blades broke off on two occasions in Nov. 1995 - the first in gusty, high winds, the second in only light wind (report, Windpower Monthly, Dec. 1995).

In an article written in January 1996, Professor Otfried Wolfrum, professor of applied geodesy at Darmstadt University, wrote of a significant number of blade failures in Germany. He detailed four particularly severe ones where fragments of blade weighing up to half a tonne were thrown up to 280 m. "From the experience in Germany, where presently of all European countries the greatest number of turbines is installed, it appears that this technology is by no means safe...particularly with the large new models, with rated capacities of 500 kW and more, problems arise since the rotor blades are heavier and have to be manufactured manually."

The problem of 'Landscape Quality of Wind “Farm” Sites'
'The map of Designated Areas - National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Sites of Special Scientific Interest etc. - overlaps almost exactly the map of high wind speed sites. [...] The result is that wind developments have threatened much of our very finest landscape [...] If these landscapes, which are some of the finest in Europe, are threatened, how much more so are undesignated landscapes? for example, the beautiful Radnorshire hills, whose lack of designation is a puzzling anomaly, or those isolated hills in otherwise degraded landscapes which are treasured for their amenity value by those who live near them.

That no area can be considered so beautiful as to be sacrosanct is proved by a current proposal to build 50 turbines [...] in the Wear Valley, entirely within the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The turbines are each 300 feet high, almost as tall as St Paul's Cathedral, and will be visible from twenty miles' distance. [...] If between ten thousand and twenty-two thousand of these huge machines are to be built in such locations as those which have been proposed to date there will be hardly any part of our most valued landscape which is not blighted. Apart from the turbines themselves, many miles of transmission lines and hundreds of pylons would have to be constructed because the sites are remote from the grid.

It is no wonder that in 1996 the Countryside Commission, then the government's landscape watchdog, warned that England's scenic countryside is in danger of becoming a "windfarm wilderness." It noted that nearly 150 turbines were being sited in or adjacent to Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and that a further nine wind "farms" were targeted on Heritage Coasts, Areas of Great landscape Value and the immediate vicinity of National Parks. The Commission's brief was only to deal with England. The UK picture as a whole is even bleaker.'

The aesthetic judgement problem:
'Aesthetic judgements are subjective and there may be as many who find a wind turbine beautiful as there are who find it ugly. That is not the issue: a wind "farm" is an industrial site of vast proportions and a turbine is a huge and noisy machine - 300 feet
high or even more, the height of a 30 storey office block. A 30 storey building by a leading architect might be very beautiful, but on planning grounds would be unacceptable in a small village or on top of the fells in the Lake District.

[...]

Jonathan Porritt, another supporter, wrote in The Daily Telegraph: "The modern wind turbine is a mighty intrusive beast. It’s not into nestling, blending in or any of those clichés so beloved of rural romantics."

Wind Power Monthly, the magazine for the wind industry and wind enthusiasts, has recognised that the reason for the growing unpopularity of wind power is that a heavy industry has tricked its way into unspoiled countryside in "green" disguise. The editor wrote (September 1998): "Too often the public has felt duped into envisioning fairy tale wind "parks" in the countryside. The reality has been an abrupt awakening. Wind power stations are no parks." She went on to point out that in Denmark turbines are treated within the planning process in the same way as motorways, industrial buildings, railways and pig farms!

### The noise problem

‘The noise from a wind turbine comes from both the mechanical gearing and from the aerodynamic properties of the rotating blades. [...] The more intrusive noise comes from the effects of the blade moving through the air and the industry has had virtually no success in controlling this. [...] The larger the turbine, the greater the air mass moving the blades and the higher the noise level. The noise is a penetrating, low frequency “thump” each time a blade passes the turbine tower. This is reminiscent of the reverberating bass notes of a discotheque at a neighbour’s noisy party, which can be heard and felt even when the rest of the music cannot be distinguished, or of a helicopter in the distance.’

Those living close to wind "farms" find the noise levels completely unacceptable and are enraged that assurances about noise given in advance turn prove to be worthless. One unhappy neighbour wrote about his experiences to The Daily Telegraph (21.10.93). "The impact of wind farms on landscape may be significant, but noise is more relevant to those of us living next to this new industry. My home nestles on the northwestern slope of Mynach Bach, Ceredigion, below the 20-turbine windfarm owned by National Windpower. We live 350 metres from the nearest turbine and about 750 metres from six or seven others. The "thwump" of the blades and the grinding gears is driving us to distraction. [...] For my family and those in a similar plight ... there is a distressing human cost for this supposedly 'environmentally friendly' electricity. For us, this is no brave, new, clean energy but a rapacious industrial giant." (letter from C. Kerkham)

### The ‘effects on birds’ problem

‘Planning Policy Guidance 22 (PPG 22) which deals with planning considerations relating to the development of renewable states: "Evidence suggests that the risk of collision with moving turbine blades is minimal both for migrating birds and for local habitats." The simple fact is, however, that turbine blades have killed birds in large numbers, which is not surprising when it is remembered that turbine blades weigh up to 1.5 tonnes and their tips are travelling at 180 mph.
At Tarifa in Spain significant numbers of birds of 13 species protected under European Union law have been killed by turbines (Windpower monthly 2.2.94). The wind turbines in Altamont Pass in California have on average killed 200-300 Redtail Hawks and 40-60 Golden Eagles each year, while it is estimated that 7000 migrating birds a year are killed at other wind turbine sites in Southern California. (California Energy Commission).
The Times reported in May 1999 that Scottish Power was to invest two million pounds creating a new grouse moor away from a proposed wind "farm" to encourage a pair of Golden Eagles to hunt where they would not be at risk from turbine blades.

The problem of wider environmental consequences

"Wind "farms" are such a recent phenomenon that it is hard to be certain of their long-term ecological impact. However, the Flaight Hill Opposition Group at Hebden Bridge, Yorkshire, commissioned an hydrologist and a number of engineers to examine the neighbouring Ovenden Moor wind "farm". They found that the erection of turbines 200 feet high had cracked the bedrock of this upland moorland and diverted natural watercourses. Around the turbines and along the cable trenches the thin layers of peat were drying out rapidly and it is likely that these sections of peat bog will simply blow away. Moreover, tracks to and between turbines have acted as dams and formed deep pools of peat "soup" - fetid surface water, which cannot run or drain away. There is certain to be a knock-on effect on flora, insects and birds which depended on the ecological status quo before the turbines were built.

Dr John Hedger at the Institute of Biological Sciences at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, has written: "Wind energy is not as clean as its proponents would have us believe. It is an industrial development and as such causes degradation of the environments where turbines are sited. The result is a loss of habitat for wildlife. The proposed environmental benefits of windfarming...will only come from the very large-scale use of turbines. One environmental problem will simply be replaced by another."

Apart from the danger of blades becoming detached or disintegrating, there is a risk that lumps of ice can form on them in still cold weather and then be thrown significant distances when the wind gets up and the blades begin to move. This danger is specifically recognised in the government's planning guidance document PPG 22. "In those areas where icing of blades does occur, fragments of ice might be released from the blades when the machine is started." Professor Wolfrum wrote on this subject: "Some ice layers 150mm thick have been detected and their mass has been as high as 20 - 23 kg/m (proceedings BORKAS 11Helsinki 1994, p219)" He demonstrated that these fragments could travel up to 550 m and land with impact speeds of 170 mph. It is hardly surprising that during the winter, the management company erects "Falling Ice" warning notices at the Ovenden Moor wind "farm" in Yorkshire.

The problem of offshore windparks:

"In its scenarios for renewable energy by the year 2010 in New and Renewable Energy - Prospects for the 21st Century the Department of Trade and Industry suggests that between 60 and 70% of wind-generated electricity could come from turbines sited offshore. [...] We speculate that to meet the offshore wind target envisaged in New and
Renewable Energy will require between 3,800 and 4,500 turbines. [...] The Countryside Agency has recommended the DTI to ensure that our coastline is not damaged by the scale, location or cumulative impact of turbines, and that special care should be taken with the visual impact of the lighting of wind stations at sea since they will have to be illuminated at night. It would like to see mandatory controls of distance from shore: 3 - 5 km off industrial coasts; 10 - 20 km off National Parks, AONBs or Heritage coasts; out-of-bounds in largely undeveloped estuaries. [...] Unfortunately, developers are likely to be interested in sites within 5 km of coasts, where the water is shallowest, the wind speeds the most favourable and the cable connections the shortest. The Energy Technology Support Unit (a DTI agency) has estimated that nearly half of offshore turbines will be within 10 km (6.25 miles) of the coast, with fewer than 18% beyond the 20 km line. Three British off-shore projects are in preparation: Blyth Harbour, north of Newcastle, 1 km offshore; Scroby Sands, 3 km off Great Yarmouth; Gunfleet Sands, 5 km off Clacton-on-Sea.

How acceptable, from an environmental point of view, wind turbines at sea turn out to be will depend on how close to the coast they are sited, how scrupulously the developers avoid coasts of special beauty and how carefully cable landing sites and pylons to carry cable to grid connections are sited. Some people will be glad if pressure on our uplands is reduced, but others will be dismayed by the industrial intrusion into the majesty of the seascape.

The television interference problem
'That wind turbines can disrupt TV reception was noted in 1994 when the BBC and the Independent Television Commission recommended the Department of the Environment to compel wind farm developers to restore reception where wind "farms" caused interference. In the same year The New Scientist accused the government of ignoring the recommendation and leaving viewers at the mercy of developers.'

Besides the Country Guardian Group there are many other initiatives in the UK and Ireland, many of them are in opposition of planned windfarm projects; e. g. the 'Ymgyrch Cefn Croes Campaign', which is in opposition to the erection of 50 or more wind-turbines on a hilltop of Cefn Croes, Wales. In Germany, of course, there are many local and nation-wide published concerns too. The best known widely published criticism might be the 'Darmstadt Manifesto - A Paper on Wind energy by the German Professors Initiative Group' (Press Release dated 1 September 1998).

The German Professors Initiative Group' wrote (among other things):
'Our country is on the point of losing a precious asset. The expansion of the industrial exploitation of wind energy has developed such a driving force in just a few years that there is now great cause for concern. A type of technology is being promoted before its effectiveness and its consequences have been properly assessed. The industrial transformation of cultural landscapes, which have evolved over centuries and even of whole regions is being allowed. Ecologically and economically useless wind generators, some of which stand as high as 120 metres and can be seen from many kilometres away, are not only destroying the characteristic landscape of our most valuable countryside and holiday areas, but are also having an equally radical alienating
effect on the historical appearance of our towns and villages which until recently had churches, palaces and castles as their outstanding features to give them character in a densely populated landscape.

More and more people are subjected to living unbearably close to machines of oppressive dimensions. Young people are growing up into a world in which natural landscapes are breaking up into tragic remnants. […]

The animal world is also suffering at the hands of this technology. On the North Sea and Baltic coasts birds are being driven away from their breeding, roosting and feeding grounds. These displacement effects are being increasingly observed inland too. From the point of view of the national economy the development of wind energy is far from being the "success story" it is often claimed to be. On the contrary, it puts a strain on the economy as it is still unprofitable with a low energy yield on the one hand and high investment costs on the other. And yet, as a result of the legal framework conditions which have been set, private and public capital is being invested on a large scale – capital that is not least unavailable for important environmental protection measures, but also ties up purchasing power. This in turn leads to job losses in other areas. The only way in which the Investors can realise their exceptionally high returns is by means of the level of payment for electricity produced by wind which has been determined by law, and which represents several times its actual market value, and by taxation depreciation."
But could windfarms be a tourist attraction apart? In same cases the developers of windfarms see a potential of windfarms to operate additionally as a tourist attraction. Western Power, the developer of the Albany Wind Farm, the largest windfarm in Australia, in Albany, Western Australia, is promoting the windfarm as a tourist attraction viii: ‘Over the next month, the first stage of the tourist facilities development will commence. This involves the installation of pathways to a number of viewing platforms, the building of a wind farm display and the setting out of car parking spaces. The pathways are designed to avoid damage to the fragile dunes in the area. A wind farm walk is also being investigated.ix According to the ‘Albany and Great Southern Weekender’x local conservationists support the idea of the windfarm as tourist attraction: ‘Local conservationist Basil Schur said it was exciting to have a renewable energy source of this calibre in Albany. "It will be a major eco-tourism attraction," Mr Schur said.’

Even the Norderland Windfarm (also called Holtriem Windpark) near Aurich, East Frisia, one of Europe’s largest windfarms, with 35 Enercon-E66 wind-turbines, (1,5MW class) is hosting a (at the moment) unique attraction for tourists, a 360°-visitor-outlook-cabin underneath the nacelle of an E66 wind-turbine 62 m above groundxi.

Figure 5: The E66-Converter with Visitor-Cabin (Photo: Author)

Geographical imaginations and ‘constructed’ landscapes: (East-) Frisian-Landscapes exhibit many different individual and collective forms of understandings, imaginings and interpretations of space and place in so-called East Frisia. The actors in these social processes of imagination and construction are the locals and the tourists. Both base their imagination and construction of space and place on social constructed mythologies, which produce different spatial myths with different sets of, beliefs, values and understandings.xii This social construction of spatial myths could be either a very individual or collective process. But in both cases the constructed myths seems to be relational, in that the myths, often with the use of abstractions, tend to create
opposing sets of characteristics of and more general rather than specific stories about space or culture. Very common examples of such opposing sets are rural/urban, traditional/modern, old/new or, often with stereotype context of ‘self’ and ‘other’, ‘the safe house/the dangerous street’, ‘city/wilderness’. In general these myths tend to produce enduring stereotype phrases about space and culture and often these myths become a part of local heritage and identity.

And which spatial myths are related to East Frisia? It is clear that there in every little village will exist many different myths, but some of them might be very common and widespread in the countryside. One important spatial myth is derived from an abstraction of ‘typical’ visible aspects of the landscape: East Frisia is a flat country. As one can see in Figure 4, it is quiet easy to ‘create’ an abstraction that could operate as a symbol for the ‘typical’ East-Frisian-Landscape: It could be the green line in the middle of the photo.

This apparently endless green line is, of course, the dike-line and it visualises the separation of the land from the sea and sky. This Photo represents possible abstractions and interpretations that could create a myths of an ‘ideal’ of the ‘real’ East-Frisian-Landscape.

But in the ‘real’ world there are divergent aspects from this ideal. The natural or nature-like divergent aspects are sand dunes on the islands, dikes and terps on the mainland; All of them refer to ‘vertical aspects’ of the landscape. In pre-industrial times bell towers, lighthouses and, in particular, traditional windmills, formed the typical man-
made vertical or 'sky-scrapping' aspects -the anthropogenic silhouette - of the 'real' landscape.

Figure 7: Farmhouses and traditional windmill near Wittmund, East Frisia (Photo: Author)

The traditional Dutch windmills are much higher than the farmhouses. These 'traditional vertical aspects' belong to many spatial myths of the real East-Frisian-Landscape, not only for the local population, but also for the tourists who 'review' there spatial myths during their visits of the countryside. For the locals, the spatial myths are a mental aspect of 'self'. For the tourist it is a mental aspect of 'other'.

If the 'real' landscape is changing the spatial myths (or their creators) may adopt these changes or ignore them. A simple example: The landowner who gets an annual lease for his land that is used for a windfarm could view the new windmills as a progress of the traditional windmills in his homeland. While the traditional windmills are off the economic line, the new ones are able to bring up economic advantages. Under these circumstances it is easy to review the own spatial myths and to create one in which the new windmill is a positive part of the homeland. In this new myth, the new windmill will be a positive mental aspect of 'self'. The farmer's fellow neighbour, who did not had the chance to get some income out of the lease for the windfarm land, may also review his spatial myths. But for him the new windmills will not so easy become a positive part of mental aspects of 'self'. For him windmills remain a mental aspect of 'other', and may be a negative part of a reviewed myth.
Are wind-turbines or windfarms only in a contrasting position to the traditional symbols and images of rural tourism? The fellow tourist has his own spatial myth of the landscape and the old windmills as well. Would he change his spatial myths of the landscape under the visual impression of new windmills and then how would he change them? In general the tourist, used to the complex urban world and bringing with him his ‘urban myths’, would ‘create’ a spatial myth in which the ‘visited landscape’ would be imaged and represented in abstractions of ‘other’ rather than ‘self’ due to very different ‘stories’ behind the created myths.
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Figure 9: Windmills near and Tourists on the beach of the seaside spa Norddeich (Photo: Author)

‘Wind plants’, says Caroline Stanton, ‘should not be judged solely on their visual properties; indeed, they may be greatly valued for other qualities, such as what they symbolise’. But what they symbolise in the myths of the people still can be very different. But the individual or collective ‘stories’ behind old and reviewed spatial myths are also the basis for the differences in the public opinion.

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iii http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/windfarms/default.htm, introduction on homepage

iv All following quotations from http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/windfarms/case.htm

v Copies of the Darmstadt Manifesto can be downloaded in three different languages from the website http://www.windfarm.fsnet.co.uk/darmstadt.htm.

vi E. g. Göttinger Tageblatt (23.08.01), p 27: ‘Fischer protestieren’

vii http://www.alvent.net/conclusions.htm


xi http://home.t-online.de/home/begehbare-Windenergieanlage


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'THE ROLE OF PRODUCT INNOVATION IN RURAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT: THE CASE OF HOUSEBOATS OF KERALA'

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to examine how product innovation can contribute to the efficient and sustainable development of rural tourism. It suggests that innovative approaches to transform indigenous resources could be an effective strategy for rural tourism development that is sensitive to local communities' development needs. The paper adopts a case study approach to consider the houseboats of Kerala, India as an example of successful product innovation in rural tourism development. The paper will be exploratory in nature, and apart from an extensive survey of published literature, major research methods will include interview with key informants who have been involved in tourism development and management in Kerala. In addition, the study will also make use of author's own professional experience and understanding as a tourism professional in Kerala.

Product innovation and rural tourism

Innovation in its broadest sense is about introducing new ideas. According to Deakins (1996:161), 'innovation can be defined as all those activities that give rise to a new product or process of production'. Innovation can be a critical variable for the sustenance of a dynamic industry such as tourism, which is characterised by continuous changes in customer demands and increasing competition from similar destinations. Confronted with these challenges the global tourism industry has responded with new ideas, products, slogans and forms of tourism. As Hjalager (1996) argues innovation is also important as a response to environmental constraints and threats, shifts in competitive costs and opportunity structures and technological opportunities. The product innovation within the context of the environmental limitations in tourism, according to Hjalager (1996:202), involves 'the commodification of natural resources through marketing and provision of auxiliary services'. The authors argue that product innovation can be employed to transform some of the indigenous products and processes into unique tourism attractions and amenities with the rare ethnic touch. In an era of standardisation, innovative approaches to indigenous product development could also offer a competitive advantage to tourist destinations. Since the indigenous products will invariably involve local community members and use local resources, their development for tourism contributes to localised tourism benefits, which is one of the major features of sustainable tourism (Jithendran and Baum, 2000).

Rural areas are characterised by a farm-based economy, sparsely populated areas, geographically dispersed settlement patterns, and peripherally located (Getz and Page,
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1997; Sharpley, 1997; Buhalis, 1999), which contribute to their underdevelopment. However, these same characteristics seem to make rural areas attractive for tourism development. As a result tourism has increasingly been accepted as a strategy to offset the problems of developmental disparities in these peripheral regions. However, there have been apprehensions regarding the real benefits and negative impacts of tourism in the rural communities (Butler and Clarke, 1992; Sharpley, 1997; Bourke and Luloff, 1996). Among the concerns expressed include the inability of the local community members to participate in and benefit from tourism development. Local resident involvement has widely been recognised as a pre-requisite not only to localise tourism’s benefits and limit some of the socio-economic problems (D’Amore, 1983; Rodenburg, 1989; Loucks, 1988), but also to provide original and quality holiday experiences. As Bourke and Luloff (1996:277) argue, 'local participation, investments and input greatly enhance the chance for success of tourism projects because they reflect the local community's commitment to the industry'.

However, with their inherent development problems (Sharpley, 1997; Getz and Page, 1997; Buhalis, 1999, Todaro, 1989), rural community members are unlikely to have the necessary skills, knowledge, and resources to take part in the development or management of tourism. Moreover, the local ownership of tourism business also requires local entrepreneurial skills, which may be lacking in rural areas (Etchener, 1995).

The adoption of tourism as one of the means for the economic revival of rural areas, along with the growing emphasis on sustainability, requires introducing alternatives to the traditional mass tourism development patterns which gives rise to issues such as economic leakage and local resentment. Product innovation and packaging aimed at transforming some of the traditional indigenous resources into attractive tourist products could be one of the strategies for the sustainable development of rural tourism, especially those sensitive to the economic needs to the local communities. The tourism industry needs to take initiatives aimed at combining environmental protection, local development needs, and transformation of indigenous resources into tourist products.

Kerala - an introduction
Located on the Malabar Coast of the Arabian Sea, this south Indian state covers a geographical area of 38,864 square kilometres and has a population of about 31 million. Well known for its "Kerala Development Model", Kerala boasts a fully literate population and a physical quality of life index (PQLI) rating comparable to developed western societies. The Kerala model of development can be described as a paradoxical phenomenon of a) rapid social development unaccompanied by corresponding gains in economic growth; b) wealth and resource redistribution programmes, which helped create a high material quality of life; and c) high levels of political activism and participation among ordinary people (Chasin and Franke, 1996, Franke, 1995). With a low per capita income of $298 compared to the all-India average of $330 and a world poor country average of $350, the state has a higher overall standard of living, lowest level of infant mortality, lowest rate of population growth, highest per capita number of schools in the country. It also boasts a fairly developed and accessible public health service (Franke, 1995).
Often described as an 'extended village', Kerala's geographical and social landscape is essentially rural, with the city of Kochi being its only urban centre. Almost 50% of the state's population is dependent on agriculture, main crops being paddy, coconut, rubber, spices, coffee, tea and tropical fruits (George, 1997). However, in recent years the agriculture sector has been experiencing decline, with farming becoming increasingly unprofitable. Industrial activities in the state are limited, and with a militant trade union movement and the dominance of left-leaning political movements the state has not been very successful in attracting and maintaining industrial investment during recent decades. With a very high population density of over 749 per square kilometre, severe infrastructure limitations, and a fragile environment the prospects of industrial and agricultural development in the state seem to be very bleak.

Unemployment, which is 3 to 5 times greater than the all India average, has emerged as the most serious socio-economic problem in Kerala and it tends to nullify the positive aspects of 'Kerala Development Model' (Kannan, 1998, Rajeev, 1999). Large numbers of Keralites are forced to migrate outside the state in search of employment, especially to the oil rich West Asian countries. It has been observed by many experts that 'the Kerala model is unsustainable because of a three-fold economic crisis: a progressively worsening fiscal situation, prolonged economic stagnation and decelerating growth and the continuing inability of the economy to generate employment for Kerala's people (Tharamangalam, 1998).

There are unhealthy pressures on the state's environment from a number of sources such as illegal forest settlements, illegal sand mining in rivers, discharge of effluents from factories into rivers and waterways, conversion of forests into cash crop monoculture plantations, construction of dams and hydro-electric projects and a very high population density. Though there has been no research carried out on the environmental carrying capacity of the state, academics, policy makers and environmentalists in the state do concur that the critical stage has already been reached. Any future plans for the economic development of the state will thus be limited by these environmental realities. Therefore developing tourism, especially in the rural areas, seems to be one of the few economic alternatives for Kerala, a fact recognised by a series of tourism development and promotional activities in the late 1980s.

**Tourism in Kerala**

Acclaimed by the National Geographical Traveller (1999) as 'one of the must see destinations of a lifetime', tourism in Kerala is basically rural in nature. The product portfolio of Kerala tourism includes beaches, countryside, backwaters, hill stations, festivals, ayurveda (the ethnic Indian medical practice), wildlife, and classical art and dance forms. With most of its tourism destinations located in rural areas, Kerala has been successful in transforming some of its rural resources (e.g. festivals, backwaters, and the traditional cargo boats - now converted into houseboats) into major tourist attractions.

The state government accorded the status of an industry to tourism in 1986, making the sector eligible for all incentives and concessions extended to other industries. This was
followed by the announcement of a number of investment and performance incentives to the tourism industry by the state government. Some of the innovations embarked upon by Kerala tourism include the formation of district tourism promotion councils (DTCPs) aimed at making tourism development more decentralised and broad based (Paul, 1991). They also organised a series of familiarisation tours for the overseas travel trade and media; developing an international airport at Kochi as a cooperative venture; and deploying tourist police in the major tourist destinations. The tourism statistics of Kerala from the mid-80 onwards saw a quadrupling of arrivals (Table-1), which is indicative of the impressive effect that the concerted development and marketing activities carried out by both the public and private sector, making Kerala tourism one of the success stories of India.

Table-1
Foreign and Domestic Tourist Arrivals to the State during 1986-99

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Foreign Tourists</th>
<th>Percentage variation</th>
<th>Domestic Tourists</th>
<th>Percentage Variation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>50841</td>
<td></td>
<td>423756</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1988</td>
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<tr>
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</table>

(Source: Government of Kerala, Department of Tourism, Government of Kerala, Mathews, 2000)

Though Kerala has seen an impressive growth in tourism over the last decade, tourism development in the state has not been free from some of the environmental and socio-cultural problems (Jithendran, 1993, Menon, 1999), which call for a sustainability-oriented approach to its tourism development.

The Houseboats of Kerala
The development of houseboats as a tourism product in Kerala represents an illustration of a sustainability-oriented approach to tourism development. The houseboats are small cottages erected on large traditional wooden cargo boats using ethnic materials and building design and are now a major component of tourism in the State. The concept originated from one of Kerala’s key assets of an attractive backwater waterway system, which is one of the most beautiful and expansive in the world, consisting of lakes,
Innovation in Tourism Planning

rivers, lagoons and connecting canals. Cringle (1996:28) describes them 'as a cross between a giant Norfolk Broads and an as yet undeveloped Venice: a sprawling system of saltwater creeks, estuarine lagoons, lakes bigger than the Isle of Man and 44 rivers providing around 1,000 kilometre of inland waterway system'.

The region around the backwaters is known as the 'rice bowl' of Kerala and cruising the backwaters is an ideal way to explore the nature and experience the culture of the surrounding villages.

As a natural and cultural attraction, backwaters have been described as the unique selling proposition of Kerala tourism (Kerala Tourism, 2000). They have traditionally formed the major transportation infrastructure of Kerala, and the large non-mechanised wooden boats, locally known as 'Kettuvallams', used to be the sole means of cargo transportation. However, with the advent of railways and roads, the waterways and Kettuvallams declined in importance within the transportation infrastructure. As a consequence, the artisans who made the Kettuvallams have been moving to other professions and the indigenous boat making skills were on the verge of extinction. Those Kettuvallams that still existed were difficult and expensive to maintain, which resulted in many being in ruins or being dismantled. It was observed that: 'their demise not only marked the end of an era, but also the end of a way of life for the craftsmen whose families have been constructing these amazing vessels for centuries' (Inspirations, undated tourist brochure: 2).

However, the early 1990s saw the start of the revival and rebirth of the Kettuvallams, when a Kerala-based tour operator originated the idea of organising backwater cruises of longer duration than the then prevalent 8-hour trips. He bought a Kettuvallam and with his own design and the help of one of the few remaining artisans, successfully transformed it into a houseboat with bedrooms, bathroom, kitchen and a small sun deck. This heralded the dawn of houseboat tourism in Kerala as a new product providing a very unique holiday experience, and the houseboats became popular with the tourists.

Soon the owners of unwanted Kettuvallams began converting their vessels into houseboats. Gradually almost all the Kettuvallams of the area were converted into houseboats, making their owners small-scale tourism entrepreneurs. Initially, this entrepreneurial development process took place without any assistance or support from the tourism development organisations in the state. They were marketed mainly through the local travel agencies, tour operators, hotels and visitor information centres. The houseboat owners would leave their flyers in the tourist information counters and hotel receptions in the major towns and pay commission either to information centre staff or the hotel owners on the number of customer generated. In the absence of any organised marketing activities in the main tourist markets, most of the visitors to the state would know about the houseboats only after arriving in the state, either from other visitors or through the visitor information centres and hotels. The earlier stages of houseboat tourism development in Kerala can be described as a form of "indigenous product innovation", in that an indigenous resource was developed into an attractive tourism product, without any governmental support and planning.
With the houseboats becoming increasingly popular, other tour operators and hoteliers soon started acquiring their own houseboats, thus expanding the ownership patterns of the houseboat tourism. The State Tourism Department then launched a massive promotional campaign, comparing them with the well-known stationary houseboats of Kashmir, but with the unique advantage of being mobile. In addition, the newly formed DTPCs in the backwater districts of Kollam and Alappuzha were also active in promoting houseboat tourism by opening visitor information centres in central locations and helping the houseboat operators market holidays. At present, the houseboats seem to be one of the most extensively marketed tourism products of Kerala and most of the tour packages involving the state invariably have houseboats as a major component. However, the most effective distribution channels for the houseboats seem to be the visitor information centres and hotels, especially for the individual houseboat owners.

In 2000, the Indian Prime Minister endorsed a project to connect the entire waterways of the State, with central government funding worth 5 billion rupees (US$ 107.2 million). In addition to enabling the realisation of the potential of backwater and houseboat tourism, this project could further transform the economic and infrastructure characteristics of the State, offering a much-needed effective alternative to road and rail transport networks. In combination, this entrepreneurial and public sector activity resulted in an upsurge in the development of backwater tourism in Kerala. Currently, it is not only confined to the backwater regions, but operates in waterways throughout the State, and accounts for more than 100 vessels (Kerala Tourism, 2000). An average houseboat cruise takes between 1 to 7 days and costs between US$ 50 to US$ 325.

Houseboats and sustainable tourism
The innovative dimension of the houseboats is reflected further in its packaging as an eco-friendly and indigenous tourist product. Only locally available materials are used to build and furnish the Kettuvallams and they do not have any modern day amenities such as television, refrigerator, etc. The tourists are served regional cuisine cooked in the boat using locally available produce, and they can also visit villages ashore to see and experience the rustic rural life. While in the early days the houseboats were not ecologically friendly, leading to complaints about water pollution from sewage and fuels, the newer vessels use solar panels for basic heating and lighting, have biodegradable waste disposal systems, while some came equipped with battery operated engines. As a result of the utilisation of indigenous resources and eco-friendly technologies, the houseboats as a tourism product is now considered to be aligned to the sustainable category.

The rejuvenation of the Kettuvallams as a tourism product increased their commercial value and stimulated demand for the traditional artisan skills needed for their building, refurbishment and conversion. The entire village community of 'Alumkadavu' is now actively involved in this enterprise, and 'an ancient craft that would have been banished to the history books is now thriving' (Inspirations, undated tourist brochure: 2). No accurate statistic exists relative to total employment in the State in this endeavour However, the following is indicative of the employment generation potential.
Innovation in Tourism Planning

of houseboat making (Sharma, 1999:112): 'It (one houseboat) needs 8 to 10 people working for 60 days to put together the hull. Then another 15 people work for 60 more days to get the roofing done and another two months are taken for interiors and fittings'. In addition, average crews of 3 to 4 local people, who are required to have a good knowledge of the local waterways, and local culinary practice, man each boat and are skilled in sailing the traditional Kettuvallams. Jobs have also been created by the need to service and maintain the houseboats every year. Furthermore, the houseboats use locally made furnishing materials, which generates employment to large number of artisans in other sectors.

Unfortunately, the rapid development has resulted in a lack of quality control systems relating to: materials used for construction; design of facilities; service; safety and security measures; and general maintenance (Kerala Tourism, 2000). Consequently, the tourism department has introduced an approval and grading scheme to ensure certain minimum quality standards and certification to encourage a higher degree of eco-friendliness. A positive feature is that as the product is ecologically sensitive, and houseboat tourist spend most of their time on the waterways, the negative economic and socio-cultural problems at community level associated with tourism seem to be minimal. Furthermore, since the houseboat tourists are separated spatially from the local community, it could be regarded as segregated and controlled and thus a possible sustainability strategy (Guthunz and Krosigk, 1996).

The emergence and recognition of the commercial potential of houseboat tourism has generated a population of small locally owned enterprises. Owners of previously unwanted and unvalued Kettuvallams entered into entrepreneurship, with the generation of a number of backwater resorts, many of which are small, owned and operated by local persons. The government intervened, offering financial, management and marketing assistance, and developing necessary infrastructure for backwater tourism such as approach roads and boat jetties, which encouraged more local entrepreneurs to participate. Tangible benefits are difficult to quantify. Clearly, the indigenous skills, knowledge, materials and the operational requirements of the houseboats suggest an employment and economic multiplier effect, with potential benefits to percolate down to the grass root community level. It would appear that houseboat tourism has: made significant contributions to the economy of the region; generated employment for local communities; contributed to the preservation of traditional cargo vessels along with the artisan craft of making them; increased demand for the local supplies from the farming and handicrafts-making sector; and augmented the backwater infrastructure in the region. It is predicted that other regions in the state will experience similar benefits as houseboat tourism expands nationally.

Conclusion

It is argued that product innovation has a major role to play in rural tourism development, creating wealth and adding value to local communities. This is particularly relevant in the context of developing countries and their incumbent social, economic and environmental problems. The tourism sector has been recognised as a
vehicle through which some of these problems potentially can be addressed. However, the importance of local involvement, the sensitive employment of indigenous resources, and sustainability has been recognised. In this way innovation of local resources into tourist products may generate benefits for the host communities of a material and non-material nature, with a reduction in economic leakage and employment opportunities optimised.

The case study based in the Indian State of Kerala clearly illustrated the issues confronting the development of tourism in a developing country. Early lessons of negative impact have informed both the indigenous population and government towards considering products and policies that are designed to support sustainability-oriented tourism. The example given was that of the Kettuvallam houseboat, which has been effective in engaging local individuals in tourism with a 'new age', ecologically friendly tourism product. Their endeavour has resulted in a cascade and multiplier effect, impacting on the demand for local natural and produced resources, and traditional knowledge and skills. This has consequences for direct and indirect employment in the provision and servicing of the tourism product, drawing from the local community and hopefully giving back more than the sum of the parts. The example of houseboat tourism in Kerala may well provide a model to other rural societies on how product innovation can be a strategy for sustainability-oriented tourism development.
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DEVELOPING TOURISM IN THE PERIPHERAL SUB-REGIONS OF CUMBRIA, UK - A CRITIQUE OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTOR INITIATIVES

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the role of two different types of public/private sector partnerships in supporting and developing tourism in West Cumbria, UK. An introduction is provided to the economy of West Cumbria before considering the role and nature of Local Area Tourism Initiatives. The success of the West Cumbria Tourism Initiative is evaluated, before the case of the 'Whitehaven Renaissance Project' is discussed. This project is an innovative tourism and leisure product development scheme to regenerate the economy of Whitehaven through an initial investment of £55 million. The lessons that have been learned from developing tourism by these two partnerships are outlined. This paper is based on the author's knowledge and understanding of tourism in West Cumbria, supported by findings from semi-structured interviews conducted with key public and private sector executives involved with the development of tourism in this sub-region.

KEYWORDS

Public/Private Sector Partnerships
Local Area Tourism Initiatives
Development Companies
Product Innovation
Tourism and Local Economic Development

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to explore the development of tourism in one sub-region of Cumbria, England, the area known as West Cumbria and to consider the role of public/private sector initiatives in supporting these tourist developments. In particular, there will be a strong focus on the work of the West Cumbria Tourism Initiative (WCTI) and the Renaissance of Whitehaven project. The WCTI was a local area tourism initiative that operated from 1994 – 2000. The Renaissance of Whitehaven project was an innovative product development scheme to develop tourism resources in a town that previously relied upon traditional industries for its economic base.
At the end of the paper a critique will be made of the role of public / private sector initiatives in developing tourism in peripheral locations, and a number of generic points will be drawn out that might have relevance for tourism development in a wider context.

Cumbria is situated in the north west of England, and stretches from the Scottish Border in the north, to Morecambe Bay in the south, and from the Pennine Hills in the east, to the Irish Sea in the west. West Cumbria is geographically isolated, bounded by the sea to the west and the mountains of the Lake District to the east and is distanced from major centres of population. The main populated areas are the towns of Workington, Whitehaven and Maryport, along the West Coast.

A great variety of landscapes can be found in Cumbria, but the region is best known for the Lake District, which is an area of outstanding natural beauty right at the geographic heart of the county. The Lake District has been attracting tourists for over 200 years, but at the start of the 21st Century strategies are in place to disperse, and attract tourists to some of the lesser-known sub-regions of Cumbria.

This paper is primarily based upon the author’s knowledge and understanding of tourism in Cumbria and West Cumbria, but also incorporates research findings from 19 semi-structured interviews conducted with key executives who have a role in developing tourism in the area. The interviews were conducted over a two-year period, 1999 – 2000, see Hind (2000) and Cunningham (2001). A qualitative approach is adopted in presenting the research findings, and although it is not possible to draw statistically valid interpretations from the research, the points discussed in this paper are based on the expert opinion of senior executives who have a clear understanding of the issues involved in developing tourism in West Cumbria.

Cumbria’s Economy

In the 1980s, employment patterns within Cumbria were relatively stable. The Thorp reprocessing plant at British Nuclear Fuels (BNFL), Sellafield in West Cumbria employed 7,500 construction workers, while Sellafield itself employed 9,000 workers; employment in the shipbuilding industry in Barrow-in-Furness increased from 8,000 employees in the mid-1980s to 14,000 by the end of the decade; the food processing industries in Carlisle fared well, and a number of companies producing craft products for sale through factory shops, or by export tended to prosper, Peck et al (1997, p49). In the 1980s, therefore, Cumbria had a relatively successful economy, with rates of unemployment below the national average.

The successful 1980s, though, were followed by the turbulence of the early 1990s. The Trident nuclear submarine project at VSEL in Barrow-in-Furness came to an end, and by 1992 the shipyard’s workforce was cut from at 9,500 which reduced to 5,000 by 1993. Construction at Thorp had been completed and only 1,500 construction workers were employed at Sellafield in 1993, Peck et al (1997, p52). Other employers experienced a period of re-structuring as the recession of the early 1990s bit hard. For example: the Lillyhall Leyland Bus factory in West Cumbria closed in 1992 with the
loss of some 300 jobs; K-shoes rationalised production facilities across Cumbria; Scotts (owned by Kimberley Clark) in Barrow announced job losses; the Hartleys Brewery in Ulverston was closed.

When all these job losses are put into context, the employment picture of Cumbria in the late 1980s and early 1990s in the industrial areas of employment was one of decline: employment in the manufacturing sector fell by 11.6% and construction employment fell by 17.1%. However, service sector employment, particularly jobs in 'distribution, hotels, and catering' increased by 20.8% between 1987-'91, Peck et al (1997, p54). The decline in industrial employment continued into the mid-1990s.

It could be argued that the decline of industrial employment in Cumbria from the late 1980s onwards encouraged local authorities to diversify the economic structure of their districts. Attracting industrial inward investment to a region in the early 1990s was very difficult, especially for a region such as Cumbria that had missed out on the inward investment boom of the 1980s. Tourism, however, was seen as one possible sector for further development, not only because of its recent track record of being an area of employment growth, but also because of the changing structure and patterns of domestic tourism. More people were taking short break holidays, and a wider range of destinations were becoming popular for tourism, perhaps as a result of the post-modernist tourist movement. As mentioned previously, the Lake District has had a 200-year history of tourism, and some of the peripheral areas of the County felt they could capitalise on this.

And so it was in the late 1980s and early 1990s that all districts in Cumbria embraced tourism as a significant sector for development, spurred on not only by the reasons outlined above, but also by a national drive to encourage tourism development in some of the more disadvantaged regions of the UK to assist with regional development.

The Role of Tourism Development Agencies In Cumbria

It is recognised both at a national and regional level, that the private sector by itself cannot develop a substantial tourism industry in areas of economic decline. Indeed, it could be argued that the private sector might not even see tourism as a possible area for investment. Thus, to encourage the development of the tourism industry in areas where there was not an established tourism base, Tourism Priority Areas were designated. Public sector / private sector partnerships were established to develop tourism strategies in these Tourism Priority Areas. These tourism partnerships sponsored by the English Tourist Board were initially known as Tourism Development Action Programmes (TDAPs), but were succeeded by Local Area Tourism Initiatives (LATIs).

In Cumbria LATIs were initially established in Carlisle, the North Pennines, Furness and Cartmel, and West Cumbria, followed by a Hadrian's Wall LATI and the establishment of the Settle-Carlisle Development Company. These areas were recognised as priority areas for tourism development, helping to develop tourism in Cumbria outside the Lake District National Park. The strategies implemented by these
local initiatives, however, varied according to local tourism development needs, and the resources for tourism within each of the localities. The strategy for Eden and the North Pennines was based on the high quality of the landscape and the need for sensitive tourism development that would lead to sustainable tourism. Carlisle’s strategy emphasised the historic city, with its Roman and Border’s heritage. The seafaring traditions of West Cumbria lay at the heart of West Cumbria’s strategy emphasising also the distinctive, historical towns of West Cumbria and their local traditions. Furness and Cartmel’s strategy was partly based on the sub-region’s proximity to the southern lakes as well as the history and heritage of the area. The Hadrian’s Wall and Settle-Carlisle initiatives clearly had very focused aims.

The common elements of the role of these LATIs, though, was their emphasis on marketing, the encouragement of the training of staff employed in tourism, improvements to the quality and supply of tourism facilities, improving accessibility to the locality, and developing the environment, attractions, and infrastructure for tourism. A key to the success of the LATIs was that they involved the pooling of resources for marketing purposes in what is recognised as a very fragmented industry, Long (1995, p482). The pooling of resources was also essential when tackling infrastructure problems that required community wide collaboration in order to address them. A project manager managed each LATI, and each scheme lasted initially for three years.

Thus, a strategy that was pursued in the 1990s was that of diversifying the tourism product of Cumbria to areas with the Lake District National Park. The work of the LATI’s was instrumental in this strategy. Clearly, each LATI would have very specific local objectives, and would pursue a very specific local strategy, but the cumulative effect of all LATI’s would be to develop new tourism products for Cumbria, and to promote these to appropriate market segments. A review of what has been achieved in West Cumbria is presented below.

**West Cumbria Tourism Initiative (WCTI)**

The WCTI was set up in 1994 to assist with the development of tourism in an area that had experienced severe industrial decline - West Cumbria was renowned for its heavy industries - iron ore and coal mining. These industries have now disappeared and unemployment is above the national average, Copeland Borough Council (2001a). The geographic coverage of the WCTI stretched from Silloth in the north to Millom in the south, and as far inland as Keswick.
The initial work of the WCTI centred on:

- Co-ordinating and expanding the marketing of tourism in West Cumbria;
- Improving business performance through the provision of business advice;
- Improving the quality of the tourism product and customer service through training;
- Securing greater involvement in, and raising the awareness of the economic importance of the tourism industry with the local community and the private sector;
- Encouraging inward investment in major tourism projects and to support development projects which were already underway.

An important part of the WCTI strategy was to encourage new tourist attractions to be developed, such as heritage centres in Whitehaven (The Beacon) and Maryport (the Maritime Museum), a gateway attraction in Cockermouth (the Lakeland Sheep & Wool Centre), and industry tourism attractions such as the Sellafield Visitors Centre. A wide range of publicity and promotional leaflets were published to help raise awareness of the tourism facilities and attractions of West Cumbria, as well as a Travel Trade Information Pack aimed at tour and coach operators. The promotional leaflets included:

- Maryport - A Proud Maritime Tradition
- St Bees - A Thousand Years of History
- Silloth-on-Solway - A Town of Victorian Charm
- West Cumbria - Coastal Heritage Trail
- Whitehaven - Georgian Town & Harbour

To assist with the promotional strategy the WCTI area was branded ‘Cumbria Western Lakes and Coast’, in order to overcome some of the negative images that were held about West Cumbria. Travel and Tourism exhibitions were attended to promote the area, and local television and local commercial radio stations have been used for advertising, Bousfield (1998, p45).

With regard to employment, the total number of people estimated to be working in tourism in 2000 was 12,619 employees (6,333 FTEs), an increase of 24% on 1992, Copeland Borough Council (2001a). From 1994 - 2000, staff from the WCTI estimated that they contributed to the creation of over 200 jobs in the tourism sector. In terms of the volume of visitors, it is estimated that there was an increase of 40% in the number of visitors to West Cumbria, from 1997 – 2000, (ibid). Research findings from economic impact studies commissioned by WCTI suggest that total revenue generated by the tourism sector in West Cumbria in 2000 was £238 million, an increase of 39% on 1992, (ibid).

An Evaluation of the Success of the WCTI

The West Cumbria Tourism Initiative LATI came to an end in December 2000, and as indicated above some successes were achieved as a result of its activities. Quantitatively, the number of tourist attractions, the number of tourist visits,
employment within tourism, and tourism revenue in West Cumbria increased during the time period when the LATI was operational (although it is not possible to say what proportion of such growth could be directly attributable to the WCTI). New tourist attractions were developed, and the sub-region did have for the first time a co-ordinated marketing strategy. Business support and guidance were also provided to new and existing tourism businesses. Perhaps, most importantly, though, the WCTI raised the profile of tourism as a sector of economic activity that did offer hope for the future. This profile raising occurred not just with potential private sector investors, but with public sector organisations and members of the general public, including schoolchildren, who were introduced to the notion of the tourism industry as a potential employer.

But what were the limitations of the WCTI as a means of encouraging tourism development in West Cumbria? Firstly, it had a relatively short time span – three years in the first instance, and then extended for another three years.

It could be argued that such short term tourism restricts the scope and scale of strategies that the LATI could become involved with and the refinement of those strategies once they were being implemented. One area of criticism that could be levelled against the WCTI is that its promotional campaign and branding strategy did not reflect the priorities that some private sector organisations felt it should. Some private sector tourism organisations located in West Cumbria felt that the sub-region’s promotional strategy should be more reflective of the area’s proximity to the Lake District (an internationally recognised tourist brand) rather than the associations with the Cumbrian coast (relatively unknown). The short life span of the WCTI probably did not help in devising and testing the most appropriate promotional campaign to be implemented. The short life span of the LATI also resulted in human resource problems. The temporary nature of the WCTI - it had just two project managers during its lifespan - inevitably affect just the continuity of strategies and related work programmes.

Limited funding is also a problem for LATIs. They operate with a low staff complement and have few financial resources that can be devoted to very significant media promotion campaigns. Instead, they have to rely heavily on publicity and public relations as a means of communicating with target audiences. This obviously reduces the reach of the message that is to be communicated. A small number of staff employed by the LATI means that only a small number of projects and activities can be managed at any one time. The WCTI was really operated by three staff – the project manager and two administrative assistants.

LATIs also are restricted in the sense that they have no direct influence over infrastructure or capital projects in their areas. They can identify investment needs, but as with the WCTI, are reliant on other organisations and agencies to actually take the risk and raise the funds for such investment.

Thus, the WCTI, which was a result of government policy in the early 1990s, probably did meet all the objectives that were set for it when it was first established. It also
probably could not have achieved any more given its limited life span and low level of funding. Its tangible results, in the sense of its contribution to local economic development, are really just marginal. In Copeland Borough Council, for example, nearly 40% of the workforce is still employed at the Sellafield nuclear site, with another 20% of jobs dependent on the nuclear industry (ibid). Such a heavy dependence on one sector of the economy indicates an underdeveloped service sector. In addition, the unemployment rate in Copeland in October 2000 was 5.5%, the highest in Cumbria and well above the national and regional rates (ibid).

While the WCTI was operational, another public/private sector partnership was established in West Cumbria – the Whitehaven Development Company. Whilst the WCTI had a sub-regional remit, the Whitehaven Development Company was able to concentrate its resources solely on one town.

The Whitehaven Renaissance project

Whitehaven, an example of a Georgian planned town, was once England’s third largest port renowned for its trade in rum, tobacco, and slaves. Whitehaven comes under Copeland Borough Council authority, and has developed dramatically in the last few years. “There is generally a lack of industry in the town, and a strong dependence on the main employer in the area, BNFL. Whitehaven’s success today is partly through a lack of funding in the past for redevelopment and as a result, it has retained its Georgian heritage, whose intrinsic qualities create the attraction for tourists”, Cunningham (2001, p42).

The Whitehaven Development Company Ltd was established in 1992, and vested a year later as a Company limited by share to promote the economic regeneration of the town and harbour of Whitehaven. The Company was a partnership between the public and private sectors, with the shareholders being British Nuclear Fuels, English Partnerships, Copeland Borough Council, Cumbria County Council and Whitehaven Harbour Commissioners. The responsibility of the Development Company was to bring about the ‘Renaissance of Whitehaven’ and to re-focus its economic base into tourism and service sector employment. West Cumbria was recognised by the European Union and the UK Government as an economically disadvantaged region and was awarded Assisted Area Status and Objective 2 Area Status, making it eligible to apply for European Regional Development Funding.

A 10 year development plan was agreed (in contrast to WCTI’s three year life cycle). Central to this was impounding the inner harbour by building lock gates to create 10 hectares of permanent water, improving port access times and improving flood control of the town. Part of the new harbour was designated for a marina, initially housing 100 berths. Derelict buildings were removed from two of the harbour quays and contemporary artworks and sculptures integrated into the refurbishment of the quays. The land adjacent to the harbour saw a general upgrading, with the development of new tourist facilities such as the Beacon, and formal recognition of the start of the C2C Cycleway (coast – to – coast) which begins its journey across the country and into mainland Europe from Whitehaven Harbour.
In tandem with the infrastructure developments, new tourist attractions were also established. The Hub provides a performance area for street theatre and bands, as well as an exhibition area. The Crow’s Nest is a 40 metre ‘tall ship’s mast’ situated at the end of one of the quays. More history is told in Jeffersons - The Rum Story. The Jeffersons were C19th rum traders and the exhibition is housed in one of their former warehouses. The exhibition tells the story of rum, from the sugar cane fields, through the early slave trade to US Prohibition. Finally, The Quest is an interactive heritage trail to study the history of Whitehaven and the harbour.

Since its inception, the Whitehaven 'Renaissance Project' has successfully completed a £55 million development programme to transform the harbour and surrounding area of Whitehaven. Funding has come from the Millennium Commission, English Partnerships, Copeland Borough Council, European Regional Development Fund Monies and the Whitehaven Development Company Partnership. The Whitehaven Development Company has now been ‘wound up’, and responsibility for managing the project’s assets rests with a charitable foundation W3M, whose Chief Executive is Terry Ponting, formerly Chief Executive of the Whitehaven Development Company.

It is evident that much has been achieved over the last 10 years in Whitehaven. The town, once heavily reliant on the traditional industries of chemical manufacture, iron ore and coal mining, and the nuclear fuels industry, utilised its harbour primarily for the importation and exportation of raw materials and finished goods. The strategy of the Whitehaven Development Company has been to transform the role of the harbour from being an industrial facility to a role more linked to leisure and tourism. But the strategy didn’t just include the harbour. As subsequent funding bids have been successful, the transformation and regeneration of the town has moved inland, refurbishing derelict buildings and converting them into new tourist attractions.

The strategy to regenerate Whitehaven, using tourism as one vehicle is bold and visionary. The public / private partnership involved in this regeneration scheme realised that to be successful, the scheme and its related projects had to be innovative in order to not only change the image of the town with residents and non-residents, but to attract private sector investment as well.

**How Successful has the Whitehaven Renaissance Project Been?**

There can be no doubt that the aesthetics and infrastructure of Whitehaven have improved as a result of the redevelopment that has occurred, and that the town has less of an industrial feel and more of a leisure / tourist feel to it. The marina that has been developed has achieved high occupancy rates since its inception, and attracts yachts that are cruising up (or down) the West coast of England. Events that are organised in Whitehaven to promote the town have been successful – a maritime festival in July 2001 attracted an estimated 110,000 people (Copeland Borough Council, 2001b). A new hotel has opened on the outskirts of Whitehaven (a Whitbread owned Travel Inn) that achieves average bedroom occupancy rates of 80% throughout the week (data
supplied by the hotel manager, 2001). Further service sector inward investment has been attracted to Whitehaven since the start of the Whitehaven Renaissance Project, notably a new call centre expecting to provide employment for 700 people. The local tourist information centre now deals with enquiries from overseas tourists as well as domestic ones. And the first year of operation of the Rum Story has seen this new innovative development meet its target visitor numbers (data supplied verbally by W3M, 2001).

It is evident that the Renaissance of Whitehaven project has so far been successful – but what might account for this success?

Six important reasons can account for such success. Firstly, the project was set up using a Limited Company as its legal and administrative entity. This enabled the Company to raise and administer funds in a similar way to any other Company, potentially reducing some of the bureaucracy which might otherwise hinder the development of an organisation solely administered under public sector policy. Secondly, the project had an initial 10-year life span, time enough for a clear and ambitious vision and strategy to be developed and implemented. Such a time span enabled one senior executive to manage the project from inception to realisation, providing continuity of strategic intent and reducing the possibility of strategic drift. As Chief Executive, Terry Pointing played a highly significant part in enthusing all stakeholders about the potential that the project had for the regeneration of Whitehaven, and epitomised optimism in the future. Fourthly, the project was adequately funded, harnessing public sector grants with matching funding, enabling innovative infrastructure and capital development projects to be established. Fifthly, planning bureaucracy was reduced by transferring ownership of key, harbourside parcels of land to the Whitehaven Development Company, which enabled the Company to determine appropriate use of the land and to market such land to potential developers. Finally, as the ten year period progressed, the successes achieved to-date were communicated to the local population as well as to potential inward investors, so that the momentum and confidence in future investments and success gathered pace throughout the project.

But stepping back from the case study of Whitehaven, and putting what is occurring in this town into a wider context, a number of cautionary pointers emerge.

Whilst publicly funded infrastructure projects can be instigated, and publicly funded flagship tourism attractions can be developed, there can be no guarantee that private sector investment will follow, or that visitors will be attracted to the area in increasing numbers year-on-year. These problems are generic to all new tourism developments, no matter where they are located, but the author feels that they are even more acute when considering tourism developments in peripheral locations with low resident populations. The initial success of the rejuvenation of Whitehaven will be primarily due to local residents, and residents from neighbouring Districts of Cumbria, visiting the town to see its new attractions. There will be a limit to the number of repeat visits that these local residents will be prepared to make. Whilst genuine tourists are being attracted to the town, they will still be small in number, and staying for a relatively short period of time. In order to attract a larger number of overnight staying tourists,
concerted and continuing marketing efforts will have to be made to put Whitehaven on an already very congested tourist map, not only in Cumbria, but also in the rest of the UK. This is because all towns in the UK are now promoting their tourism facilities and the marketplace is very competitive.

A second cautionary note is that what may appear to be innovative in Whitehaven, may not be innovative when compared to tourist developments elsewhere. Hartlepool in the north east of England, has sought to rejuvenate itself in a similar way to Whitehaven, but is probably a more established tourist and leisure destination. Hartlepool in the 1990s received over £200 million of UK public sector and European grants to improve its infrastructure and to diversify its economic base into tourism and service sector related areas. A marina was established, and a new maritime interpretation centre was built to reflect Hartlepool’s shipbuilding past. Similar examples can be found from other coastal regions of the UK, where declining port and harbour towns have turned to tourism as a means of developing the local economy. Thus, establishing a tourism economy in Whitehaven on tourist attractions that are innovations to the town, may not lead to long term sustainable economic prosperity as similar harbour towns are also developing in a similar way. The ‘innovative products’ of Whitehaven, may not be sufficiently distinctive to draw the much-needed overnight tourists through the outstandingly beautiful Lake District National Park.

Finally, at some stage opportunities for further public sector funding for infrastructure and capital projects will be exhausted and the onus will be on the private sector to maintain the investment. Has enough been achieved so far to really entice private sector investors to take a risk on Whitehaven as a new and up-coming tourist destination? Probably not.

So what generic lessons can be drawn out from the points raised in this paper?

Lessons Learned

Public / private sector partnerships to develop tourism can result in significant achievements in terms of developing and enhancing the tourism product, and also in marketing the product. Clearly, the outcomes from each partnership will be influenced by the type and form of partnership that is established. It could be argued that for ambitious development projects where significant infrastructure and capital investment is required, a partnership based upon the concept of a Development Company is the most appropriate where a long term perspective can be taken in terms of funding and strategy development and implementation.

The management and leadership of the partnership will be crucial to its success (as it is with any successful organisation). The Chief Executive will be combining many roles: visionary; strategist; entrepreneur; diplomat; politician; accountant; decision-maker; communicator; problem-solver; motivator; fundraiser; etc... The person appointed to the role will need to be competent in most of these areas, and as such, needs to receive a rewards package that is commensurate with the challenge and tasks of the job. The
Chief Executive is likely to be working with a small team of internal staff and a wide range of external stakeholders, and hence will require a depth and breadth of experience that spans both public as well as private sector organisations.

The strategy for developing tourism needs to be realistic and achievable, but one which includes distinguished and distinctive elements. A ‘me-too’ strategy for tourism development will not be successful in the highly congested and competitive tourism market of the 21st. But identifying what is distinctive and distinguished is challenging. Many tourism destinations rely upon their heritage for their tourism appeal and product, but as suggested in this paper, this is likely to lead to a repetition of what has been developed elsewhere. Identifying and developing a truly innovative tourism product is challenging, and developing a sustainable competitive advantage with such an innovation is likely to require continual investment – something which a time-limited, financially restrained, public / private sector partnership is unable to achieve.

It is evident that in marginal tourism locations, which are probably peripheral locations as well, the lead in tourism development has to be taken by public / private sector partnerships. It is highly unlikely that private sector entrepreneurs or organisations will be the first to invest capital in localities that are at an early stage of their tourist area lifecycle. But there is no guarantee, that private sector investors will commit themselves to a locality even though it has received public sector pump priming. Once again, will be a limiting factor in developing tourism in peripheral locations. Major investors will not be attracted to the locality until a critical mass of tourism facilities has been established, and are attracting tourists. A major uncertainty is how long will it take for this critical mass of facilities and tourists to be established. And in the highly competitive world of tourism, will major investors concentrate their investments in established honeypots with a proven tourism track record at the expense of newly developing areas?

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper has been firstly to review the contribution that public / private sector partnerships have made to the development of tourism in West Cumbria, England. Secondly, to draw out generic lessons that can be applied to similar situations where tourism is being used as one means of rejuvenating the local economy.

A number of conclusions can be reached from the previous discussion. Firstly, public / private sector partnerships do work, and are popular and successful when it comes to instigating and supporting tourism developments. This paper has briefly reflected on two different types of partnership, and it has been indicated that each has its merits, and there are situations in which each should be the preferred partnership to be used. An important conclusion to be drawn from this paper, though, is that the ‘temporary’ nature of some types of partnership will result in more modest outcomes.
If a locality is seeking to really harness tourism as a significant contributor to the local economy, then the framework and administration that is used for the partnership should be robust enough to withstand changes in political governance, both at a local and national level. This will enable long term objectives and strategies to be set, which should encourage continuity of management of the project.

The second main conclusion that has to be drawn is that a certain degree of caution has to be maintained by the partnership, and its stakeholders, when setting objectives and devising the tourism strategy. Recent evidence indicates that there is an oversupply of tourist attractions in the UK for the size of the current market. Many recently developed tourist attractions have failed to reach their initial volume and value targets – the Millennium Dome in London being the most publicised example. A number of these new attractions could be regarded as being innovative – the Dome, the Earthcentre (Doncaster), and Rheged (Cumbria). It is evident that product innovation by itself is no longer a guarantee of commercial success. The total product offering – location of the tourist attraction, proximity to markets, distinctiveness of the attraction, service quality plus a host of other business factors – the marketing and financial strategies, for example, need to be taken into account when initially considering the development of a new tourism facility. Clearly, the recent availability of grant aid from the UK’s Millennium Commission has contributed to the increase in number of tourist attractions and developments. This might have led to some tourist attractions being supported, where the business case was unrealistic and/or too ambitious.

The final conclusion to be reached is that a clear understanding of the nature of tourism has to be firmly grasped in all situations where tourism is being used as a means of economic regeneration. Developing and marketing new and innovative tourism destinations and attractions takes time. The tourism industry is highly competitive, with a wide range of alternative choices available for the tourist. Uncontrollable external factors, such as the foot and mouth crisis; inclement weather; economic recession; and terrorist activity can affect the industry very seriously. Public/private sector tourism development partnerships need to be fully aware of these factors (plus others that can adversely influence the success of tourism strategies), and ensure that their ambitions for the development of a local tourism industry are realistic and inkeeping with market conditions. No matter how successful the partnership might perform as a 'partnership', and no matter how innovative its strategies, the overall success of the project might rest with factors outside its control.

As always, time will tell if Whitehaven and West Cumbria are successful in diversifying their economies through tourism. The process and administration of tourism development have been based on accepted models for developing tourism in regions that are experiencing a period of economic re-structuring. Considerable investment has been made in the tourist infrastructure, but the question remains whether such investments will be sufficiently distinctive to entice tourists through one of the UK’s most attractive landscapes, to a landscape that still reflects its industrial past?
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CREATIVE TOURISM AS A FACTOR IN DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

The ATLAS Cultural Tourism Research Programme has identified a shift in the tourism market away from passive towards active cultural experiences, and from unskilled towards skilled consumption. This development in demand, labelled 'creative tourism' by Richards and Raymond (2000), is paralleled by a need on the supply side for destinations to distinguish themselves in an increasingly competitive global market. Above all, this calls for an increasing use of creativity by the destinations themselves in order to develop innovative products.

One of the areas in which this innovation has occurred in recent years has been the transition from the provision of tourism services to the development of total tourism experiences. The current emergence of creative tourism, which concentrates on giving tourists the opportunity to develop their own capabilities through active experiences, is perhaps an example of what Pine and Gilmore (1999) have termed 'transformations'. This 'final stage' of their progression of economic value is focussed far more on the needs of the individual than is the case in the current 'experience economy'.

This paper considers the implications of the development of creative tourism for different destinations. In particular, peripheral locations are analysed as a potential leading edge of creative tourism development. The relative lack of created resources in these locations means that creative resources must be used to develop cultural tourism instead. This innovative pressure is illustrated with a case study of language and arts tourism in the Celtic fringe of Europe.

Introduction

Cultural tourism has been one of the main elements of European tourism for a very long time. The thirst for knowledge and new experiences has been a driving force for tourists since the Grand Tour. The current popularity of cultural tourism as a major market segment in Europe has stimulated considerable development of new cultural tourism products in recent years. Cities and rural areas alike have seen culture as some
kind of holy grail that will deliver their dream of upmarket, highly cultured, high spending visitors.

In particular, cultural tourism has been identified as one of the leading elements of the ‘new tourism’ – a flexible, culturally sensitive and environmentally friendly style of tourism that Poon (1993) asserts is replacing the ‘old’ mass tourism. There is no doubt that cultural tourism is everywhere these days. There is hardly a region in Europe that is not active in the cultural tourism business. Ireland is no exception in this regard. Cultural tourism has long been a central element in tourism policy (O Donnchadha and O Connor, 1996; McGettigan and Burns, 2001).

However, as Richards and Ramond (2000) have argued, cultural tourism is beginning to change from a largely passive into an increasingly active form of tourism. Many cultural tourists are no longer content to just look at static monuments and museum displays – they increasingly want to be actively involved in their own learning process.

According to Pine and Gilmore (1999), this desire for an optimal mix of active and passive is a feature of the emergence of the ‘experience economy’. And the tourism industry seems well equipped to provide experiences of all shapes and forms. A quick glance at the growing number of sites promoting tourism destinations and products on the Internet underlines this.

We no longer visit tourism destinations we experience them. So a growing number of cities, regions and countries are re-packaging themselves as experiences. Take New Zealand, for example. The entire country has been divided into five experience themes: wilderness, thrill zone, heartland, Kiwi spirit and chill out. It seems these days that nature alone nature is not enough – it has to be improved on. The same can be observed in the UK, where a website for the ‘Cotswold experience’ promises that there will soon be a yorkexperience and an oxfordexperience (sic). So prevalent is the idea of tourism as an experience industry that the English Tourism Council no longer talks about improving the quality of tourism products but is ‘working to improve the quality of England’s tourism experience’.

The rush to develop or re-package ‘experiences’ echoes the headlong rush to build new cultural attractions that characterised the last 20 years in Europe. Just like the ‘cultural arms race’ of recent years, the experience fever is likely to lead to serial monotony rather than growing diversity (Richards, 2000). Now that the Guggenheim has developed outposts in Berlin and Bilbao, cities are standing in line for a ‘McGuggenheim’ franchise. Over 60 cities have indicated an interest in becoming franchisees, and it is likely that the existing outlets will soon be joined by new museums in Las Vegas, Rio de Janeiro, Venice and St. Petersburg as well as a third Guggenheim in New York (Honigsbaum, 2001).

If everybody can experience a Guggenheim without leaving home, where does that leave the tourism industry? Struggling to find new sources of innovation in tourism development.
Culture and Creativity

One of the problems of surviving in the global cultural tourism marketplace at present is the fact that major investments are usually thought necessary to compete. You either need to be a city that has a vast stock of cultural resources built up over centuries, or you need to be able to buy a custom-made cultural icon, such as Bilbao has done. This can be expensive, however, as the recent report into the Bilbao Guggenheuim indicated that it cost $160 million just to buy the rights to the Guggenheim name and stock the building with art (Plaza, 2000).

Cities that are unable buy their way in or to compete in the cultural tourism market on the basis of their store of culture and heritage are looking to develop their creative resources instead. Creative resources go beyond cultural resources because they imply adding something to existing resources. The Oxford English Dictionary defines creativity as being ‘inventive, imaginative; showing imagination as well as routine skill’. According to Chartrand (1990) ‘creativity occurs when an individual steps beyond traditional ways of doing, knowing and making’. This is vital because a simple return to the past or appeal to tradition rarely creates innovative products. One only has to look at the plethora of cultural routes, heritage centres and museums in Europe to underline this point.

For many cities, creativity is not just a source of competitive advantage – it is the only option. As the Huddersfield Creative Town project points out, deindustrialising cities have only one resource: their people (www.creativetown.com). Developing creativity allows the human capital of cities to be utilised to develop new solutions to the problems of economic restructuring. The cities, which do not have vast reserves of ‘real cultural capital’, can also develop their creative capabilities to regenerate themselves.

Creativity is also beginning to take over from heritage as the major means of preserving the past. Whereas in recent decades countless factories and other symbols of past productive activities have been developed as heritage attractions to display the past, these spaces are increasingly being turned into creative enterprises. We can see this in the development of new creative quarters such as the Westergasfabriek in Amsterdam, or the CCM in Catalonia.

At the same time, however, creative activities are subject to a growing time squeeze. There are fewer gaps in our busy everyday schedules for creative activities, because these usually require a heavy time investment. The effects of this are becoming evident in patterns of cultural consumption. There is a growing group of ‘cultural omnivores’ who undertake a wide range of cultural activities, but who spend relatively little time on each one. In the Netherlands, for example, the proportion of people undertaking creative activities has hardly changed over the past 25 years, and the time spent on those activities has fallen, but the number of different activities undertaken during the year has grown (de Haan, 2000). So people are participating in a greater range of activities in a more superficial way during their leisure time.
There is no evidence that our desire to be involved in creative activities has diminished. The result of increasingly pressured leisure time is that creative activities are being squeezed out of our normal leisure time in two different directions: into our work and into our holidays. There is growing evidence that people who are not able to exercise their creativity through leisure are taking jobs in the creative sector to enable their self-development and self-expression.

Creativity is also taking a greater role in our tourism activities. People who don’t have time to engage in creative pastimes in the everyday environment are using their holiday time instead. This is particularly evident in countries in northwestern Europe, where holiday entitlements are high. In the Netherlands, for example, advertisements for ‘creative holidays’ began to appear in national newspapers about two years ago, and now it is one of the biggest categories of holidays advertised.

The link between tourism and creativity is also increasingly beginning to be made by policy-makers. Heritage tourism is now seen by the British Council, for example, as one of the major export activities within the ‘creative industries’, alongside areas such as the performing arts, design, fashion and advertising.

These trends have arguably resulted in a growing demand for what Richards and Raymond (2000) have termed ‘creative tourism’. They define creative tourism as:

Tourism which offers visitors the opportunity to develop their creative potential through active participation in courses and learning experiences which are characteristic of the holiday destination where they are undertaken.

Creative tourism includes a wide range of activities, such as:

- Arts and crafts
- Design
- Gastronomy
- Health and healing
- Languages
- Spirituality
- Nature
- Sports

In the Netherlands, for example, advertisements for creative holidays in de Volkskrant in 2000 included the following activities:

- Painting, drawing, mosaics, etching, icon painting
- Sculpture
- Pottery
- Photography
- Weaving, creative textiles
- Music making, singing, dance
- Theatre, storytelling
Filmmaking
Cookery

This demonstrates the diversity of activities that can fall under the category ‘creative
tourism’. What links these activities, however, is the desire to learn on the part of the
tourist. Unlike cultural tourism, the demand is for active participation, rather than
passive or contemplatory modes of learning.

Research by ATLAS on arts and crafts tourism in Europe has shown the potential of
this market. Interviews with over 1100 tourists in rural areas of Portugal, Finland and
Greece indicated that cultural attractions were for most people less important in their
choice of destination than factors such as the weather and the landscape. However,
there was a significant minority of tourists who had a particular interest in arts and
crafts. Some 10% of visitors indicated that they were interested in seeing how
traditional products were made. An even higher proportion said they were interested in
learning to make these products themselves (Richards, 1999).

One can also see the effects of the link between creativity and tourism very clearly in
the field of gastronomy. European regions are increasingly seeking to differentiate
themselves on the basis of regional gastronomy and this is being packaged for tourists
in a range of different ways, including wine tasting tours, gastronomic holidays and
cooking academies. Cuisine provides an ideal resource for creative tourism, as there is
the potential for people to learn about food, its link to local cultural and local
agriculture, while learning to cook dishes for themselves. The gastronomic tourists also
return home to display their new-found prowess to their friends (Hjalager and Richards,
forthcoming).

There is also a strong relationship between creativity and interest in local cuisine. Almost 40% of Dutch tourists with a creative background indicated that they were
‘very interested’ in local cuisine, compared with only 27% of those without a creative
background.

**Implications for Tourism Destinations**

The emergence of creative tourism has a number of implications for tourism
development and marketing.

First, there is a need for an even stronger customer orientation than in the past. Tourism
development has tended to revolve around the attractions available in the destination
and these have been offered as the basic reason for the tourist to come to the
destination. The argument tends to be that every region has culture, and the assumption
is that visitors will be interested in seeing that culture. However, there is no natural
market for local culture, since tourists are unlikely to have prior knowledge of what the
local culture has to offer and local people are unlikely to have much knowledge of the
cultural needs of tourists. This product-orientated approach has to change if experiences
are to be offered to creative tourists.
Second, creativity is also required from the destination. The growing number of cultural products on the tourism market has tended to lead to serial reproduction of ‘unique’ experiences rather than distinctive cultural tourism products (Richards, 2001). Although imitation may be the sincerest form of flattery, it does little to develop a healthy cultural tourism market. Destinations increasingly need to use their creative resources rather than just their cultural resources to innovate new and exciting products.

Third, new alliances are needed to support the creative resources of the destination. Much has been made of the development of networks in tourism (for example through ‘diagonal integration’ or strategic alliances). However a lack of understanding of the dynamics of regional economies has tended to diminish the spatial aspects of these analyses. As Caalders (2000) has shown, the development of local networks in tourism is an essential prerequisite to innovation.

Examples of creative tourism development

The foregoing analysis of the development of creative tourism indicates a major shift in the basis of tourism development in many regions. The shift from natural to created assets that was marked in tourism by the relative decline of traditional beach tourism and the emergence of ‘new’ tourism (Poon, 1993) has in turn been superseded by a further shift from created assets to creative assets. The effects of this ‘creative turn’ have been surprising.

Although major urban areas have been at the forefront of creative industry development, creative tourism has also become a major factor in tourism development in peripheral areas. Whereas the periphery arguably suffered in the shift from natural to created assets (and the resulting dependency on ‘real cultural capital’), it could be argued that peripheral regions have an advantage as far as creative assets are concerned, precisely because of their lack of real cultural capital. This effect can be amply demonstrated in the case of the Celtic regions of Europe.

In the Celtic fringe of Europe, the lack of ‘real cultural capital’ has also forced people into being more innovative in the development of new cultural tourism products than in many other regions of Europe that are better endowed. In Ireland, the twin goals of supporting traditional culture and developing the economy have been achieved in many areas through the creation of summer schools focussing on Celtic culture. Stocks (2000) illustrates how the Gaeltacht area of Donegal has been involved in community-led development of cultural tourism since the 1960s. The initial developments in Gleann Cholm Cille revolved around the presentation of the material aspects of Gaelic culture through construction of a museum and a ‘village’ of traditional houses. In 1983 the Oideas Gael organisation was founded in the village to promote of Gaelic language and culture, initially by offering language courses and special bilingual courses in archaeology, painting and dancing. This early development of creative tourism enabled tourists to learn while participation in everyday life in the Gaeltacht area. It was so successful that a special centre was built and run by local people. By 1994 some 700 summer course participants were generating almost 5000 bednights in the area.
The Irish summer school has become an inspiration for creative tourism development elsewhere. In Scotland, for example, the Gaelic Arts Agency became interested in the Irish model, launching the Ceolas programme in South Uist in the Western Isles as a pilot project.

The Ceolas project revolves around a weeklong programme of masterclasses, house­ceilidhs, concerts and lectures that was launched in 1996. Since then the event has grown in popularity and scale, attracting 100 course participants, mainly from outside the Highlands and Islands region. Student evaluations underline the importance of the creative element of the event: 73% of the students agreed that Ceolas had made a difference to their life, 70% said they become interested in something new and over 80% said they had learned new skills (Kay and Watt, 2000). The level of satisfaction and also of repeat visitation is high, indicating that this form of creative tourism can be very successful in generating interest in traditional culture and in supporting the local community. Increased direct visitor spending over the period 1996-98 was over £50,000, with more than 4000 bednights being generated every year.

Ireland and Wales have also been linked through an Interreg project focussing on their shared Celtic heritage. The Intercelt project in Ireland has developed a series of courses on traditional culture, such as Irish language, music and dance. Other aspects of traditional culture are also presented for tourists, including storytelling, poetry, cultural festivals and arts and crafts. Tourists can gather information about traditional cultural events throughout Ireland through via the Intercelt, as well as information on travel and accommodation. Experience has shown that traditional Irish culture has a wide appeal to tourists, even if they have no family ties to Ireland. Tourists have attended Irish language courses from Japan, France, Germany and Israel, for example. A similar form of cultural tourism has been established in Wales through the Croeso Cymru (Welsh Welcome) network. This offers visitors the chance to attend a wide range of traditional cultural events, stay in traditional accommodation and buy traditional and contemporary Welsh crafts products.

These examples underline the fact that creative tourism has great potential for development in peripheral areas that otherwise may find it difficult to match the vast supply of cultural monuments and museums in more developed regions. In fact, one might argue that because of their relative disadvantage in terms of material culture, they have been forced to be more innovative and resourceful with living culture. In this sense, they may in fact be ahead of the game.
Prospects for the future

If the demand for creative activities continues to grow, we may see a new type of 'Grand Tour' emerging in Europe. Whereas the Grand Tourists of the 18th century went to Italy and Greece to learn about classical culture, the modern creative tourist travels to learn about all types of culture and can be attracted to almost any destination given the right product. The desire to learn is not seasonal and does not depend on the existence of important monuments or expensive infrastructure.

In the future it is likely that creative tourism will be further stimulated by the growth of sabbaticals. Many people are now feeling the need to take time out from work to develop themselves or to assess their career perspectives. Very often the people taking long breaks from work will need to show some result at the end of their trip, either in terms of personal fulfilment or through acquiring new skills. For them, travel is no longer an end in itself, but the means to a new future. This is an interesting new market that should provide opportunities for a range of different destinations.
References


Huddersfield Creative Town: www.creativetown.com


A TRAIN OF EVENTS – THE EAST LANCASHIRE RAILWAY AND TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

The 'de-industrialisation' of large tracts of the north of England gave rise to a growing interest in tourism as a short-term measure by local authorities. The Greater Manchester Council followed the lead set by Bradford, capitalising on its industrial heritage and surrounding landscape to develop a viable tourism product. In particular, it adopted a policy of reclaiming its river valleys from dereliction, imaginatively using a variety of funding to turn them into ‘country parks’.

By a happy coincidence a group of railway enthusiasts, were also promoting a steam railway. It ran along the northern limb of the Croal-Irwell valley, a designated 'park'.

The two entered into a partnership, and produced a project intended to be the catalyst for tourism development in the area.

The G.M.C. involvement created an organisational structure, a funding conduit, and a secretariat. The volunteers added the creative entity, operational labour force, and contacts with the private sector.

The paper looks at this curious relationship, the variety of complex synergies it engendered, its advantages and disadvantages and its ultimate impact upon the local communities.

Finally, it suggests ways in which this process may be developed.

KEY WORDS

Tourism, Development, Railway, Preservation, Heritage, Public Sector, Partnership

This is, perhaps, an unusual paper. In the first place, it is not concerned with an 'academic' or theoretical context. Instead, it is rooted in the practical world of tourism development and is concerned with a particular case study of public and private sector collaboration in developing tourism within a particular area. Secondly, it employs a narrative device to a great extent in order to describe the collaborative process as it evolved – the 'train of events' of the title. The development of the crucial public-private sector relationship and the resulting synergies can be best understood by this
Innovation in Tourism Planning

The ‘de-industrialisation’ of large tracts of the north of England in the 1980s gave rise to a growing interest in tourism by the local authorities. Obviously, tourism could not be the solution to the prospect of increasing unemployment and urban decline. However, the development of tourism offered the prospect of perhaps mitigating the impact of decline in the immediate short term. The Greater Manchester Council, together with a number of metropolitan boroughs in the area followed the lead set by Bradford. Here was a local authority capitalising upon its industrial heritage and surrounding landscape. In developing a viable tourism product. The ‘Bradford Weekend’ was still an object of wonder. The G.M.C. were consequently receptive to any idea that would assist in developing a coherent tourism development strategy in their area.

In a separate, but ultimately related development, it had adopted a policy of reclaiming its river valleys from dereliction. Although Greater Manchester might appear to be one great urban sprawl, the regional topography had resulted in sparse development along the course of the river valleys. These ‘green fingers’ penetrated to the heart of the conurbation (in some cases to points within walking distance from Manchester city centre) and presented the opportunity of creating a network of extended ‘linear country parks’. A ‘planning authority’, composed of representatives of the G.M.C. and the metropolitan boroughs through which the river ran, managed each of the ‘parks’. Interestingly, this policy was adopted without any particular development budgets. Within the overall planning guidelines for each designated ‘park’, both the G.M.C. and its constituent authorities undertook projects in a piecemeal fashion, as and when funding was available. They imaginatively used a variety of sources, from derelict land reclamation grants to European environmental initiatives.

The Croal-Irwell Valley was one such ‘country park’ development. Commencing in Salford, it followed the course of the river Irwell before dividing into two. One branch ran along the Croal to Bolton, but the main part continued along the Irwell to Bury, thence extending as far as Ramsbottom and the Lancashire county boundary at Stubbins. A great deal of work had been undertaken in this area, often in conjunction with other agencies and including water purification measures, reclamation of industrial waste, construction or improvement of foot paths, landscaping and tree planting.

But this is only one side of our equation. Before introducing the group of railway enthusiasts, some mention of the important role that railway preservation has played (and continues to play) in tourism development will not be out of place. There are currently 108 operating steam railways, and 60 steam centres, throughout the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. The total route mileage is calculated at 427 miles (687km), upon which are 570 stations. This is greater in extent than the London underground system and would exceed the distance between London and Glasgow. Approximately 7,800,000 visitors produce a turnover of £42,950,000. Although the preservation movement relies upon the work of an estimated 23,000 volunteers, it is
thought that it employs over 1000 full time staff, not counting seasonal employment (mainly in catering and retail). Bizarrely, the movement hardly ever appears as a tourism research topic.

The East Lancashire Railway Preservation Society has a long and complex history. It originated in an abortive attempt to preserve a section of closed railway between Stubbins and Haslingden in the Rossendale area, and moved its small collection of locomotives and rolling stock to Bury in 1970. Why Bury? The local authority had acquired the former Castlecroft goods yard, as part of the land was needed for the construction of a bypass. The remainder became a road construction depot, and the contractors requested that the 1849 good shed remain standing as offices and store. This site was now redundant and the authority offered it to the preservation group on a short-term lease. Owners of historic buses and commercial vehicles rented space in the paved area of the shed and the combined rail and road collection opened to the public as ‘Bury Transport Museum’.

Nevertheless, Society members still hoped to operate their own railway. The Society had formed a limited liability company to act as its legal entity. (The majority of the shares were thus owned by the Society and vested in two trustees.) Passenger operations between Bury and Rawtenstall had ceased in 1972, but the line remained open for an infrequent service of coal trains. The Society (in its Company guise) thus approached British Railways, requesting an arrangement concerning the Bury Rawtenstall line, which passed Castlecroft Yard. It was proposed that the preservation group operate a limited service of diesel-hauled trains at peak periods during the week and a steam-hauled service of tourist trains at weekends when no coal trains ran.

The fact that a small society of railway enthusiasts with hardly any money and no suitable locomotives or rolling stock to operate such a service could even contemplate such a move strikes one as audacious to say the least. Yet, placed in the context of the time, it was a well-calculated gamble. An experienced railway manager (with excellent connections) led the group, and many of the members had helped to set up the recently opened Keighley and Worth Valley Railway. The anger of local residents who had lost a cherished service was still a potent political factor. Indeed, local councillors had managed to persuade SELNEC (then the Greater Manchester public transport body) to offer the possibility of an operating subsidy.

And, if the right to operate were obtained, there would be little difficulty in attracting private locomotive owners to the line. However, this is uncharted territory and the railway did not know how to respond. Their legal people were horrified at all the possible problems and the project ultimately failed.

After licking their wounds and weathering an immense fall in membership, the enthusiasts consoled themselves with the fact that the Rawtenstall line would close one day when the coal traffic ceased. In the meantime they would prove themselves to all and sundry by developing the Bury Transport Museum site. Above all, they had to be taken seriously once more. A quarter mile of track bed, alongside the operating line, was leased and track laid with the intention of giving steam-hauled brake van rides.
However, some degree of mistrust, or even prejudice, still existed on the part of B.R. and permission to carry passengers was constantly refused. The railway project did not seem to be going anywhere.

However, the real turning point had already occurred, though few realised it at the time. In response to a consultation exercise by the Croal-Irwell Authority, the group had made a detailed submission. It noted that the original Authority proposals had addressed the problem of vehicle congestion in the developing country park and had canvassed the possibility of a restored rail passenger service north of Bury as one of the solutions. The original idea no doubt envisaged a subsidised B.R. service, but the group suggested that this might be accomplished by the operation of a steam railway as a tourist attraction. The enthusiasts were well placed to do this, having an existing lineside depot, locomotives, railway equipment, and the necessary expertise.

The rest of the submission was an exercise in persuasion. When the Rawtenstall line eventually closed, the redundant trackbed would cost next to nothing to purchase, since no one would want to take on the liabilities of the bridges and other works. Thus, the local authority might do this as part of the Croal-Irwell development plan, if only to turn it into a cycle path. (It was pointed out that any delay would result in the costly reclamation of derelict land at some future date.)

The track itself was another matter. It had a market value, and it was thought that the B.R. would probably want at least £250,000 for it. But there was a precedent. It was pointed out that Peterborough Development Corporation had recently purchased five miles of track on behalf of a local railway society in order to provide a leisure facility for the new town. The investment might compare favourably with other projects - the purchase price of the track, for instance, was the equivalent of the annual expenditure by the Croal-Irwell Authority on landscaping and tree planting.

The submission argued that both track and trackbed might be purchased and leased to the group’s operating company. This would produce a viable tourist attraction of first rank. The appeal was now directed at the G.M.C.’s tourist development preoccupations. Here was one of the factors that would act as a catalyst in implementing their strategy. Within this context, the proposal was linked with existing and potential tourist attractions in the area. Above all, the position of the railway (within twenty two minutes of the Manchester city centre by electric train) was emphasised.

The submission inevitably found its way to opinion formers in the G.M.C. and at Bury Metropolitan Borough - preparing the ground for what was to follow. In 1980 the group was able to obtain custody of the Bolton Street Station in Bury. This was a great stroke of luck – the local authority had acquired the site (mainly to obtain the large car park) when the station was replaced by a new Bus-Rail Interchange. The society had the use of the station in the short term in return for agreeing to police it. The station, being located in the town centre, had immense strategic significance for the future of the project and gave some credibility to the group’s ambitions. In the meantime, the owners of some large main line diesel hydraulic locomotives were persuaded (through the erection of a shed) to bring their charges to the Museum.
When the coal traffic finally ceased in December 1980, the Society was able to follow up its initial effort by submitting a report to a joint meeting of the G.M.C. Arts and Recreation and Planning Committees. It must also be considered that this occurred in the aftermath of the successful 'Rocket 150' celebrations. They certainly felt that the proposal was worthy of an 'in house' feasibility study. At the same time, Bury Metropolitan Borough obtained the agreement of B.R. to postpone track lifting.

To test the degree of public support for such a venture, G.M.C. funded the charter of a B.R. train to operate three excursions along the line on 27 March 1982. The 'East Lancashire Phoenix' was a resounding success – the trains were packed and people had to be turned away.

The Council had already seen that any project to develop the line would involve Rossendale Council, and quickly recruited them as a 'junior partner'. In 1982, both local authorities agreed to back the plan. Two factors were uppermost in this decision. The Department of the Environment was willing to agree to a 'derelict land grant' for the purchase of the railway as a 'going concern' to avoid higher reclamation costs at a later date. This would constitute 70% of the purchase price.

But the most important factor was a gradual realisation of what might be accomplished with sufficient imagination. The G.M.C. might act as a 'facilitator'. It could easily negotiate with a variety of bodies and organisations. It already had departments full of expertise. Civil engineers could advise on the state of the bridges and draw up specifications as to what needed to be done. The legal department could undertake the work in association with the necessary Light Railway Order and the Council's existing parliamentary agents might apply for it. Above all, the G.M.C. could access a variety of grants and funding. If aspects of the country parks could be developed without a clear budget, then why not a railway? All that was needed was an outline strategy.

There remained one problem – the relationship with the enthusiasts. Although very little, if any, local rates would be spent on the project, the relationship of a local authority with a private company was then regarded as a delicate thing. And what would happen if the enthusiasts failed? An organisational structure would have to be devised which would safeguard everyone's interests.

In the first place, the track and trackbed had to become the property of the local authorities in which it lay. But the local authorities would not wish to be encumbered with the management of the asset. For this purpose, the railway would be vested in a charitable Trust, ownership reverting to the authorities if the Trust was wound up for any reason. A Trust seemed the appropriate organisation – non-commercial, with both tax and VAT privileges, and the ideal vehicle for the receipt of grant aided funding. The Trust members would consist of representatives of the local authorities concerned and the Society's Operating Company. The Trust needed no paid executive since G.M.C. staff at no additional cost could provide all the necessary administrative functions. In addition to managing and funding the railway asset, the Trust would also
be responsible for a works programme to restore the line, in conjunction with the Company, employing contractors for works beyond the ability of the enthusiast group.

In turn, the Trust leased the line for operational purposes to the Operating Company that were contracted to provide the railway services. This resulted in far reaching change. At the request of the G.M.C., a new Guarantee Company was formed. The new company structure made it impossible for a profit to be distributed – any operating or trading surplus would have to be ploughed back into the undertaking. Although this was a logical step, given the complex arrangements, it severed the formal link between the Company and the Society. The latter now became a cross between supporters’ organisation and a body representing the interests of the volunteer working members.

Terms were agreed with B.R. for the purchase of the line in 1984. The G.M.C. drove a pretty hard bargain – they even managed to offset some of the purchase price with an ‘endowment’ from B.R., representing a commuted sum for all the maintenance money that they would theoretically save! Restoration work began the following year on the Bury-Ramsbottom section. Again, the G.M.C could use its considerable expertise in the area of reclamation by employing a number of teams through the Manpower Services Commission Community Programme. Finally, in February 1986, a Light Railway Order was obtained, transferring the legal operating powers to the Trust.

All this was achieved in the dying days of the G.M.C., which had been scheduled for abolition by the Thatcher government. Their local authority functions were transferred to Bury Metropolitan Borough. The decision was also taken to liquidate all outstanding budgetary balances and funding from the Arts and Recreation Committee budget was earmarked for the renovation of platforms and station buildings. The G.M.C. was finally wound up in March 1986.

Tribute should be paid to this body. Without its vision, imagination, and initiative, it is doubtful that the project could have got off the ground. Of course, it was a strategic organisation, transcending traditional local authority boundaries in a world where they are not recognised by tourists. Perhaps that is the lesson that ought to be learnt from the episode.

And what of the other half of the partnership, the enthusiasts themselves? The success of the reopening strategy, and the security and opportunity that it offered, released an incredible dynamic of growth. The numbers of working members rapidly increased, some transferring their support from more distant preserved lines. Groups and individuals contacted the railway with a view to bringing their locomotives to Bury for restoration purposes, or running under operating agreements. Offers of sponsorship from industry increased. The start of crew training along the line resulted in photographs and wide-ranging publicity.

The first section of line, from Bury to Ramsbottom, opened on 25 July 1987. Around 35,000 people travelled on the East Lancashire Railway in its first short operating season. This increased to 60,000 the following year, growing to 75,000 by 1990. The second phase, extending the line to Rawtenstall, opened on 27 April 1991, increasing
the total for that year to over 100,000. Passenger figures have since stabilised at around 130,000 per annum, placing the E.L.R. within the top ranking of preserved railways.

This rapid growth resulted in the creation of a dynamic. The project began to grow. Stations were reconstructed at Ramsbottom and Rawtenstall, the former Buckley Wells locomotive works, and surrounding land, was acquired. To finance this expansion, new sources of capital funding were explored. The local authority connection, for example, enabled the railway project to be included in the Mersey Basin bid for European Regional Development Fund funding.

However, the railway lost its link to the (then) B.R. network through the advent of the Metrolink tramway system (the two forms of operation are not compatible). This led to the current phase of development – the Heywood extension. This section of line would result in an ultimate main line connection, and would require the support of Rochdale Metropolitan Borough. Fortunately, Rochdale were impressed with the success of the E.L.R., particularly, its role in the regeneration of Ramsbottom. Conscious that the 'neglect' of Heywood was a live issue, it realised that it could play the same kind of role on the trust as the other local authorities, without any open-ended financial commitment. Funding came from yet more sources – a £500,000 grant from English Partnerships plus the employment of cash from landfill tax credits derived from a local company.

Thus, a small transport museum, founded by enthusiasts, has been transformed into an operational steam railway, over eight miles long. A small sideshow has become a major tourist attraction, with plans to expand even further.

The internal dynamic spread into other areas. Both Bury and Rossendale followed the logic of treating the Irwell Valley along which the line ran as a common marketing area - creating and financing a nascent - 'Croal-Irwell Initiative', and appointing a marketing officer. Unfortunately, this was in addition to, and not instead of, their existing municipal organisations. Not only was there unnecessary duplication of effort, but the joint organisation was the first to succumb with the onset of financial stringency. But it at least indicates what might have been.

What of the impacts of this case study on the local communities? The results are impressive. Over 120 hectares of derelict land have been reclaimed to date. More than 100 specific capital projects have been completed on behalf of the Trust, totalling £12 million, and creating an estimated 300 jobs in the building trade (local firms being mainly employed). The railway has resulted in perhaps an additional injection of £1 million in the form of visitor spending into the local economy, creating an estimated 250 full and part-time jobs. Surveys have suggested that up to 72% of passengers on the railway patronise local shops and facilities. Moreover, the local authorities believe that the success of the line, with its associated publicity, has played a part in the change in peoples' perceptions of the Irwell Valley as a place to live and work. Indeed, the degree of change is evident in Ramsbottom.
Once a quiet place with closed shops and derelict property, it is now bustling with tea shops, craft shops, antique shops and the like. The line connects with a number of local attractions, such as the Weaver’s Cottage at Rawtenstall, Nuttall Park at Ramsbottom, and a variety of local events. The line is much used for country walks in the summer months.

The relationship between the operating company and the local authorities was (and continues to be) successful. But it has not been without its problems. In the first place, the volunteers have lost control of the railway operating company, and are reduced to the status of a supporter’s organisation. This has resulted in some distance, at times, between the two. However, it is a symbiotic relationship – the operating company could not, in the long run, function without the assistance of the volunteer organisation and society members can only realise their ambitions through the company. The rapid growth of the enterprise produced stresses and strains of a different order, and some problems were created by the fact that the project was growing too fast and outstripping the organisational structures.

Secondly, the involvement of agencies and organisations with different priorities can affect the development strategy. A station at Irwell Vale was not considered a priority, but Lancashire County Council wanted (for internal reasons) to spend the remainder of their countryside access budget on this project. This might have been more usefully spent on reopening the station at Stubbins (crossed by the Irwell Valley Way), but financial assistance can never be refused.

In conclusion, the experience of the development of the East Lancashire Railway project surely sheds some light upon the process of tourism development. The latter, if it is anything at all, is a proactive process, a partnership between the public and the private sector. Yet this might still be news to a great many local authorities in Britain.

Local authorities are uniquely placed to co-ordinate and bring tourism development projects such as this to fruition. In the first place, they provide the ultimate ‘free lunch’ – a variety of services from planning to engineering, from legal advice to access to a variety of public funding and grants, all from existing departments at no further cost. Secondly, they can act as the medium for accessing funding and assistance only available to corporate bodies, such as derelict land reclamation grants.

However, this can only be accomplished in partnership with the private sector. The volunteer area of this sector is a very neglected topic. However, it has proved a major vehicle for tourist development. One can readily bring to mind the number of museums, visitor centres, and a variety of other tourist attractions, that volunteer groups have brought into being. It is often forgotten that the great tourist complex of Ironbridge Gorge owes its origin to such a development. However, there are limitations to the private volunteer or charitable sector – usually limitations of both logistics and funding.

The East Lancashire Railway project demonstrates what can be achieved by the partnership of a group of enthusiasts and local authorities. In effect, the partnership is but a framework to obtain and manage funding from external sources. A proactive
framework, to be sure, but a framework whose day to day costs is already subsumed in existing local authority budgets.

But why, one may ask, should we stop at local authorities? There has been no mention in this paper of the North West Tourist Board. This is because the August body had little or no part in the process outlined. What then, are the functions of a regional tourist board at the moment? Publicity, benchmarking and report writing appear to be the answer. Greater Manchester Council was able to achieve what it did in this case because it was a strategic authority, transcending existing local government boundaries within its area. An Area Tourist Board is a similar regional strategic authority. The Board recently had powers and funding devolved to them from the centre. Would it be too much to ask if they adopted a more pro-active stance and acted as a facilitator, in partnership with a variety of volunteer and commercial groups, in setting up the necessary structures to channel a variety of funding to nascent tourism projects?

Perhaps the lesson is this. Tourism development is a proactive process, requiring engagement by a partnership of public and private bodies. It is, above all, the function of acting as a strategic facilitator, forging new relationships and developing new public-private structures independent of day to day local and regional institutions and budgets. There is a tremendous amount of creative energy out there waiting to be unlocked.

The great majority of this paper is based on the author’s personal experience of the project in question.

However, the following sources have also been used, viz.: -


Helen Bainbridge (Strategic Planning Manager, Rochdale): Presentation at ‘Heritage Railways: Maximising the Community Benefits’, held at Celtic Royal Hotel, Caernarfon, 22-23 April 1999.


East Lancashire Railway – The Heywood Link (Bury MBC, 1989)
MOVING BEYOND PRODUCT INNOVATION IN TOURISM: BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

Many difficulties still exist in translating innovation theories into action in the tourism industry. A substantial literature base is now in place addressing innovation typologies and methodologies and assessing organisational structures, cultures and sizes. Despite this, transferring leading-edge research on organisational innovation and creativity into pragmatic strategies for tourism enterprises has not been fully successful.

The most cited and obvious form of innovation is Product innovation. It is on this basis that the success of organisations is often judged. In tourism, this criterion for measuring innovativeness is flawed. It encourages companies to spend heavily on visible product changes, often at the expense of innovations in processes, structures, marketing or operational procedures. This leads to piecemeal attempts at innovation, which often lack sustainability. This paper will examine both the conceptual and practical underpinnings of product and process innovations and investigate how to widen the scope of understanding. The benefits of both forms of innovation will be examined and the challenges posed will be assessed in the context of the current tourism infrastructure and marketplace.

The author will use a case study of Dublin’s Smithfield Village to discuss how innovation must exist in a multitude of forms, from location to product design, and from branding to community involvement. The benefits and challenges of the innovations employed will be assessed for a wide number of stakeholders, including local and national tourism interests and local community groups.

The paper will conclude that for innovation to be successful in tourism, the general understanding of the term must be widened. Strategies for innovation must be bedded in a programmed combination of product and process innovations that add value to customer and community alike, and have sustainability at their core.

KEY WORDS

Product innovation; process innovation; services; tourism; sustained advantage; cooperation; alliances.
INTRODUCTION

As competitive pressures intensify in the hospitality and tourism industry, the need to adapt, develop and innovate should have become a basic building block for organisational excellence. However, many businesses have failed to recognise that weaknesses in innovating will lead to stagnation. Key factors that lead to innovation excellence are not easily understood in tourism, and highly innovative role models can be hard to come by. In Irish tourism, much still has to be learned in driving an innovative organisation forward, finding the correct balance between hard and soft innovation (Ahmed 1998), and ultimately, understanding that a changing consumer and environment must mean an ever-changing organisation.

This paper will address a preliminary examination of some of the key issues in tourism innovation through a combination of conceptual and practical discussion.

Understanding innovation

A main contention of this paper is that the tourism manager would benefit from a wider understanding of the term innovation in all its contexts, and thus a focus on enlarging the scope of product innovation may offer a useful starting point. There are several main approaches to organising product innovation, which have evolved over the past two decades. The author will expand on these shortly. But, first, a much more fundamental look must be taken at both innovations in general and product innovation to explain how tourism managers may appreciate their benefits further.

At its most basic, innovation is often misunderstood. Early definitions, and indeed many newer definitions, associated it directly with invention or discovery; being the first to come up with an idea and put it into action. Innovation may be described as the taking of an invention into its first marketable form. Since most successful contemporary innovations are not born of original ideas, but copied from elsewhere, this perspective is no longer the only valid thinking. For example, Jurys Doyle Group (then Jurys) was the first to introduce the concept of the limited-service or budget hotel to Ireland, yet this concept had been extremely well developed in the U.S. and elsewhere. Moss Kanter’s perspectives are much broader. To her, innovation refers to the process of “bringing any new problem-solving idea into use”, including ideas for reorganising, improving communication, or assembling products in teams (Moss Kanter 1994). She further describes innovation as “the generation, acceptance and implementation of new ideas, processes, products or services.....occur(ing) in any part of a corporation and...involve(ing) creative use as well as original invention”. Whilst recognising that the proposal of single definitions is highly selective, the author feels that a perspective is presented here that may aid tourism managers to perceive innovation as a broader, more easily embraced concept. This places it in line with recent recognition that innovation is a loose, haphazard activity, creative activity which can occur through a series of small, scattered changes.
Also of importance to the tourism manager is a preliminary understanding of the role of technology in innovation. In listing some of the major innovations of the last few years, computer-related devices and the Internet would be top on many lists, yet some of the more successful innovations in tourism and hospitality are subtler. This distinction is important, because although technology undoubtedly plays a key role, not all innovations have to be technology-biased. Innovation in the very concept of the hotel may be witnessed in the emergence of the boutique hotel, such as the Morrison hotel in Dublin. The role of renowned designers in building a hotel brand also gives an interesting perspective in how to add innovation. To cite the Morrison again, the strong association with John Rocha has resulted in many innovations in image and design, as is also the case in the Versace hotel in Australia.

Attention to innovation has also manifested itself in Kelly’s Hotel, Rosslare, Co. Wexford, Ireland, where a mentoring programme is in place for all staff, in O’Brien’s Sandwich Bars where an international franchise has been created based on Irish sandwiches, in Lynch Family Hotels where many marketing innovations are in evident, and Kylemore Abbey, Co. Galway, where nuns developed a convent into a major tourism attraction.

Product innovation

At the heart of product innovation is the attempt to create market advantage through offering something which, at least for a time, no one else is offering. It is important to acknowledge that the term “new products” covers a variety of options, from small incremental improvements of a cosmetic nature through to radical product innovations. This continuum will be expanded on later in the article in the context of tourism product innovation and will form one of the base underpinnings of this article. At this point, Booz’s framework can offer a simple way to understand that only a minority of product innovation is “new to the world”, and that more often, “new products” are developments of ideas which already exist elsewhere. They may indeed be simple repositioning of the same product in a different market.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of product innovation</th>
<th>Frequency of occurrence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New to the world products</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New product lines</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvements to existing products</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additions to existing product lines</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost reductions</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repositionings</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Booz 1982)

Immediately one can see the variety of ways in which product innovation may be deployed and that being the first to invent or use a product only forms part of the picture. In tourism, such an understanding may be beneficial where innovation could be embraced in smaller, more incremental, forms. One drawback, however, of Booz’s
Innovation in Tourism Planning

categorisation is that the lines between product and process innovation are undoubtedly blurred. Such a drawback only exists in our conceptualisation of product and process innovation, rather than in their practical applications where such merging is inevitable.

Benefits of product innovation

Undoubtedly, there is a strong relationship between a consistent focus on product innovation and success in the marketplace. Souder (1994) and Thomas (1993) both suggest a strong correlation between market performance and attention to product innovation. Booz (1982) highlights that product innovation, and in particular new products, helps capture and retain market shares and increase profitability in those markets.

Brand new product concepts offer the opportunity to open up new markets and maintain significant market shares in those segments. As the life cycle matures, product innovations unrelated to price, such as design, customisation and quality are linked to competitive sales growth (Walsh 1992).

Understanding the need for product innovation to the extent of a commitment to replacing products frequently with newer versions also sustains growth. Taken to its utmost, an approach of “cannibalisation” (Chandy & Tellis 1998) suggests often quite radical innovation before a product even reaches maturity.

Approaches to Product Innovation

Current debates on directions in product innovation have reached a level not entertained by the tourism industry. Calgagno’s discussion (Calgagno 2001) of the three main approaches to product innovation is an in-depth and fascinating one. The most basic approach discussed is the craft design organisation, characterised by informality of process, lack of scientific validation of projects, tacit knowledge, and informal, on the job, mechanisms of learning. Often the artisan work in product development may be seen as learning by doing process in which the project is continuously and incrementally modified step by step. The unpredictability and lack of rational organisation of the product innovation process here bears some resemblance to the ad hoc nature of product innovation in tourism. In an industry where most sectors do not follow a formal New Product Development or New Service Development process, the nature of innovation tends to be unsystematic.

Calgagno’s second step in the evolution of the innovation process demonstrates a more scientific approach to organising development activity where the main issue centres on translating the embedded knowledge into explicit forms. In order for it to be communicated and extended to all parties involved in the development process. Product innovation must be accomplished in a sequence of strictly controlled stages where the emphasis is on high quality and standardised products. Applications of this model lie outside the tourism industry, where larger companies may have the competence and resources to develop radical innovations.
The third step in the evolutionary trajectory is that of the variety design. Here the main emphasis is on improving the development process as a knowledge experience, and thus product innovation is seen as a complete knowledge and learning process.

Understanding Process Innovation

Whilst new products are often seen as the cutting edge of innovation in the marketplace, process innovation plays just as important a role. The strategic importance of process innovation can be seen in both manufacturing and services sectors and applies equally well in tourism. Essentially, the output of process innovations is improved competence in producing the (same) product or service, through innovations in the way the company is run and the operational and management systems. This may be translated into faster production, producing the same products but at higher quality or less cost, or perhaps providing enhanced choice for customers.

Like product innovation, the term “process innovation” covers a broad band, incorporating minor incremental improvements and at the same time radical innovations whose effects are much more widely felt. In tourism, process innovations would more commonly fall into the incremental category, where existing technological knowledge is deployed (competence-enhancing innovations). Considerable strides have already been made in cleaning processes for hotels, airline meal production and interactive marketing methods, to name a few. In all these cases, some changes have been required within the organisation, either in the equipment employed to produce the product or service or in the way the process is organised and structured. However few would go as far as to change the rules of the game. One notable exception may prove to be the impact of the Internet on the traditional travel agent. At the extreme, the issue of “disintermediation” and particularly the shift to on-line reservations and information may offer a possible competence-destroying challenge to the industry.

Also reinforcing the nature of process innovations in tourism as being incremental is the fact that they tend to be stand-alone rather than components in broader systems or architectures. This lack of integration in tourism innovation is a point that shall be developed further.

Innovation and Services

It is well recognised that services are becoming more important within the innovation process. In terms of the economic and technological landscape, services are now “coming of age” (Alic 1994; Amable and Palombarini 1998). Much discussion now centres on a number of key services, perhaps most notably Knowledge Intensive Business Services (KIBS) and their role in new knowledge-based economies. Rarely, still, is mention made of the hospitality and tourism sector and its impact on driving innovation. With the exception of work such as that by Hjalager (1997), little research is available to aid our understanding of the dynamics of innovation in the tourism industry.
Why has tourism been ignored?

It is only recently that in both academic and policy terms services have registered in terms of their due recognition within the innovation process. This is reflected in the rapid growth in R&D activity in services throughout Europe and further afield, with the services share of total Business Expenditure on R&D (BERD) between 1980 and 1997 rising sharply for most countries (Howells 2001). Ireland’s % share of services R&D to BERD is now at 13%, still below the OECD average of 15% (Howells 2001). Attention to the tourism and the hospitality industry lags behind even further in this respect. From research in progress (O’Rawe 2001) the author has found a lack of awareness of the nature of innovation, how it may be fostered and what differentiates innovation from day-to-day product management. This is in line with two earlier Irish studies. A report by the Tourism Task Force (1992) painted a damming picture of the lack of innovation in Irish tourism, documenting a critical lack of market orientation, passive attitude to research, lack of competitive awareness and an inability to generate ideas. A further study by Shannon Development (Russell 1996) found that fundamental tenets of business practice were not being applied and discussed a range of barriers to innovation in Irish tourism.

The Report highlighted a lack of structures to help cultivate innovation, a claiming of innovation where it did not exist, a poor culture for innovation, and a general lack of understanding of, and support for, innovation. Barriers were further discussed in terms of educational aspects, business strategy barriers, market information barriers, foreign visit barriers (unfamiliarity with product activity abroad), organisational barriers and market planning barriers.

Such problems have also been documented elsewhere. Research conducted by the Centre for Hospitality Research at Cornell University (Dubé et al 2000) focussed on trying to stimulate innovation and creativity in the U.S. lodging (hospitality/accommodation) industry.

Whilst this study deals only with the hotel and related accommodation mix as a subsection of the tourism product, some interesting findings were drawn. Using a methodology which identifies “best practices”, the study uncovers product innovations or new practices employed in hotels and documents these new ideas, or creatively applied existing ideas, with the goal of helping the industry learn from itself by stimulating knowledge and creativity. It is felt that the lodging industry has distinctive characteristics that require a particular approach to the study of its innovative best practices (Keehley 1997; Young 1996). These include, for example, the “experiential” nature of the product (Brown 1997) and the pervasive presence of the customer at the core of service operations. These factors will apply equally in other parts of the tourism product mix and thus, adopting principles of innovation from other industries will not be sufficient to sustain creative development.
Innovation in Tourism Planning

The size and structure of hospitality and tourism units have been cited as barriers to innovation. A barrier or an excuse not to bother?

The question of how organisational size relates to the ability and propensity to innovation is one of the oldest in political economy. Inspired by Schumpeter's (1934, 1942) contrasting hypotheses, this question has been widely but inconclusively examined. There is certainly sufficient evidence to suggest that small, medium and large firms can all be innovators (Chandy and Tellis 1998), but that it is more the nature of the innovation that may differ. Preliminary research carried out by O’Rawe et al (1998) found some significant difference between a large and small hotel group in terms of the style and formality of the innovation process. Key distinctions were found in idea generation methods and both service and product innovations. However, both were innovative to some extent.

Services have traditionally been treated as peripheral to innovation and have suffered from many historical and institutional legacies that still impede their development. Most paradigms for the conceptualisation of innovation remain rooted in manufacturing. For example, indicators employed to measure innovation are normally centred on formal research and development (R&D) activity/spend, or numbers of patents acquired. Since R&D is not a central part of the tourism manager’s vocabulary, and patents and prototypes are rarely acquired, viewing innovation as a tangible and measurable activity is more difficult. As tourism organisations do not have this research and technically intensive profile, a characteristic which is likely to remain the case, innovation needs to be interpreted differently.

Services innovation is regarded as being more “ad hoc”, and disembodied in nature, making it more difficult to narrate and capture within innovation metrics. This has gone some way to contributing to the notion that services are passive, the reactors to innovation occurring in the manufacturing sector (at best), or indeed the “no hopers” in innovation terms. Miles (1993) discusses services in the context of inactive or non-receptive innovation components and as innovation “laggards”. However, it is becoming apparent that our conceptual preconceptions about service activity and the innovation process are now being challenged, whereby service firms and their output have an increasingly central role to play in driving innovation. Howells (2001) points out that “service-centred perspectives.....” will become more central to the competitive advantage of firms and nations”.

Innovation and Sustained Advantage in Tourism

The year 2000 marked the end of an extremely buoyant decade for Irish tourism. The cold statistics from this period show that ambitious targets of two Operational programmes for Tourism were met and exceeded, visitor numbers and their attendant revenue also reached an all-time high. The Northern Ireland Peace Process and the Belfast Agreement have also brought unprecedented tourism opportunities. Innovative initiatives such as the Tourism Brand Ireland campaign have also sought to inject new life into the nature and marketing of the Irish tourism product. The cumulative result of
these issues, coupled with a fashionability never before attributed to Ireland, mean that
the Irish tourism product of 2001 bears little resemblance to that of a decade ago.

"We have swapped the 'jaded product' of the past for something
that is the envy of our competitors"

(Redmond O'Donoghue, Chairman Bord Failte 2001)

Sustained attention to investment in product development has indeed ensured that a
critical mass of products has been built up. Bord Failte’s Tourism Development
Strategy 2000-2006 sets out a framework of further investment under the aegis of the
national Development Plan NDP 2000-2006. Under this programme, £100 millionIR of
funding for a specific set of tourism supports has been allocated.

Recently, product development has also benefited under the Interreg II initiative of the
European Union. Completed in 2000, the Business Expansion Scheme approved and
certified 19 new projects in 2000 involving an investment of £7.9 million IR, and 40
new projects in 2000 involving an investment of £15 million IR. Additional funding
schemes such as the Agri-Tourism Scheme 1994-1999 have also aided in driving
product development. The overall grant fund under the Scheme was £8 million IR and
bore a total investment of £21,759,824IR.

Since 1991, the LEADER initiative has been operating to support the rural areas of the
European Union by means of a development method which gives local players a say in
the future of their area. Innovation has had a high profile in its strategies where the
focus has been on supporting transferable innovation between rural regions. Tourism
and tourism projects in Ireland have formed a critical part of LEADER’S activities,
benefiting from the acquisition of skills, new product development programmes,
product marketing and transnational co-operation.

The re-organisation of Bord Failte in 1992 also turned the focus on speciality product
development and product marketing. Bord Failte now actively works with separate
specialist activity niches, each with specifically assigned funds and personnel. Three-
year strategies are in place for golf, angling, heritage, walking and cycling, equestrian,
English language learning and conference and incentive tourism. Two additional
strategies were formulated in 2000 for the horseracing and inland cruising sectors. Golf
and angling have proved to be the two leading products in attracting overseas visitors to
Ireland and this pace is set to continue, with angling tourism currently benefitting from
the largest investment in tourism angling in Western Europe (£17 million IR). A
specialist marketing initiative, funded under the Tourism Angling Measure (TAM), is
also in place which aims to increase revenue from angling from £67 million IR (1997)
to £79 million IR (Bord Failte 2000).
**Sharing Innovation in Tourism**

Co-operating in innovation is a much-discussed theme. Moving product innovation beyond the individual organisation, building alliances and creating shared benefits are all now central to successful innovation.

Outside the services sector there is considerable research on the use of networks in the innovation process (Freeman 1981) and a focus which highlights that innovation is rarely undertaken in isolation by a single (manufacturing) firm. Innovation more frequently now involves bi-lateral or multi-lateral networks of (manufacturing and services) firms working together. While the mechanisms may be different, the underlying message should be embraced in tourism.

Partnerships within the tourism industry have improved greatly. However, it is not sufficient to build partnerships solely between tourism players; a wider view of alliances is necessary. The “reach” of the tourism sector can be increased by creating stronger linkages between tourism and retail, tourism and food etc. Such mechanisms could help build innovative products and practices and still embrace sustainability as a core concept.

One such example is the *Luxury Alliance*, which claimed the Innovation Award of the Federal Association of the German Tourism Industry in March 2001. The Innovation Award of the German Tourism Industry was started in 1999 to honour people, companies or federations, who do innovative, pioneering work in the tourism industry. The *Luxury Alliance*, created by Mr. Paul McManus, President and CEO of the Leading Hotels of the World Ltd., is the first industry-wide international marketing co-operation in the luxury sector.

In August 2000, Mr. McManus founded the Luxury Alliance together with Mr. Regis Bulot, President of Relais & Chateaux in order to combine the marketing activities for hotels, tourism activities, and high-quality consumer goods. Among the current partners are cruise lines such as Crystal Cruises, online-shops like eLuxury.com and the lifestyle-supplier Vivre.com. Among potential partners are exclusive car manufacturers, financial companies, and on-line portals. They all have one thing in common: the sophisticated client.

"At first glance, the Luxury Alliance is a spectacular yet classic co-operation agreement -- as if Mercedes and BMW presented a joint marketing concept. However, it proves to be a real innovation. The partners offer all companies from the luxury sector exclusive access to their hotels and restaurants, and thus to their clientele." (Business Wire April 12th 2001)

**Dublin’s Smithfield’s Village: an example in forming alliances to aid innovation and sustainability**

Dublin’s Smithfield Village is an innovation. Buildings on core concepts of arts, culture and heritage, developers have attempted to embrace the local community and encourage working relationships with both local authorities and other entertainment based projects. This is an interesting example of where product innovation is only one
part of the innovative mix and where overall synergy is created which may prove to build long-term innovation and sustainability.

Smithfield, is one of the oldest and most historic areas of Dublin City, and has been associated with outdoor market space as far back as the 17th century. The heart of the area comprised a vast cobbled space spanning 335 metres. In 1664, the City Assembly ordered that the area be set out in lots with a large market place and the Square soon became a focus for uses associated with the cattle trade. Smithfield was also home to Jameson Distillers. Thirty years ago, Jameson moved its operations to Middletown, Co. Cork and the cattle market and associated abattoir closed down. Many of the buildings fell into disrepair, unemployment rose, a scrap-yard began operating on the west side of the square and the cobbled plaza degenerated into a surface car park.

In more recent years, the area has attracted a great deal of attention with the rejuvenation of this area spearheaded by the development of Smithfield Village. The development in Smithfield, which occupies a two and a half acre site, was the vision of the Devey Group, the holding company for both Heritage Properties and Devey Leisure, the builders and operators of the Village. The development incorporates a blend of residential, commercial, entertainment, retail, cultural and tourism elements.

In terms of product innovation, there is much on offer. The 73 bedroom Chief O’Neill’s Hotel and Chief O’Neill’s contemporary Irish traditional music café bar draw inspiration from the legendary Irish born Francis O’Neill, Chief of Police of Chicago in 1901, and the most prominent individual collector and publisher of traditional Irish music in history.

“Ceol” is an interactive visitor centre celebrating the living story of Irish traditional music, story, song and dance. Duck Lane retail store is a showcase of the best of Irish and international gifts, crafts, jewellery and clothing. The Chimney and viewing tower are fast becoming an icon for the area. Rising 175 feet, the tower offers visitors 360-degree views of the Dublin skyline. Kelly and Ping is an Asian fusion restaurant, a cultural meeting point of west and east.

The Jameson Distillery has been restored into a replica of the original working distillery. It, too, houses its own restaurant and gift shop. The development also incorporates 224 apartments. What can be seen here is an innovative product portfolio mix, where innovation exists in design, product development and a strategy of blending tourism, music, entertainment and retail, and attempting to combine local community interests with tourism development.

However, this exists elsewhere. What singles out this project and what may make or break it, is the extent to which community involvement is maintained, and partnerships are enhanced. As the Smithfield village scheme is based on rejuvenation, building alliances outside tourism are essential to sustainability. Town planners and Dublin Corporation also share in the responsibility of building the Smithfield brand and must view themselves as having a supporting role in the innovation system.
Conclusion

Product saturation is a very real risk in the Irish tourism marketplace. The experience of 2001, to date, again reminds us that success in the hospitality and tourism industry is fickle. The industry, like all other national tourism industries, remains susceptible to the whims of external environmental changes. On year-end review, the “Foot and Mouth” crisis will have taken its toll. Rural areas, whose products include walking holidays, will have experienced losses, as will city centre tourism products where tour operators have cancelled rooms and conferences have relocated.

While many managers adopt a “siege mentality” in these circumstances, cutting budgets and trimming costs, the more enlightened see innovation as a key strategy. This realigns the organisation with the external environment and lengthens the organisation’s product life cycle. The product itself is, of course, central to this. Providing a more ambitious and knowledgeable customer with an updated, innovative, quality product is one key to customer retention. However, enlarging innovation to include process innovation, organisational innovation and transactions innovation, is the real driver of loyalty. Such a broader, more sustainable innovation strategy needs to be implemented in large and small ways, through a strategic plan and in everyday performance, occasionally radically, but more likely incrementally. Innovation is documented as a fragile and vulnerable activity. Nowhere is this more the case than in the many tourism organisations who suffer from an inability to sustain innovation over the long term. A more outward view is needed so that the vulnerability of the industry may be part protected and that success may be better ensured.
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The author also acknowledges the work of Jennifer Coffey in compiling background for the Smithfield Case study
THE USE OF NEW TECHNOLOGY BY SMALL TOURIST ATTRACTIONS IN LONDON

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ABSTRACT

The rise in the use of new technology is rapidly changing the way we work. Computers are increasingly being used to deliver innovative approaches to business. They are being used as 'multifunctional information resources' to gather information and as a means of immediate communication, rather than as the 'number crunchers' for which they were originally intended.

"There is a new culture where everything is always open and every competitor is only one click away."
(D.Medows – Klue speaking at The Innovations Show London July 2000)

ICT is helping to give fluid boundaries to traditional concepts of business hours and location, blurring the distinction between service industries and manufacturing sectors as economies are transformed. The tourism economy which includes such categories as 'tourism and related hospitality, transport, cultural services and visitor attractions' accounts, for an estimated 5.5% of GDP and 6% of all employment across the EU member states. (CEC 1996a). London as the capital of one of those member states is a popular tourist city destination. It attracts over 25 million domestic and overseas tourists (45:55) and many more leisure day visitors each year. It is a cultural as well as a business and administrative capital and its tourism profile is both diverse and evenly spread throughout the year, with less than 10% variation in hotel occupancy levels between the highest and lowest months. Over 50% of tourists have visited the city before mostly in the previous 5 years. (Evans, Bohrer and Richards 2000) It is in the context of this market that small tourist businesses are beginning to exploit the potential offered by the use of new technology.

Using case study evidence collected from in-depth interviews during 1999 and 2000 with staff/owners of small tourist attractions in London this paper considers the implications about the use of new technology. By evaluating the major impacts brought about by ICT and the World Wide Web, in particular in terms of the changing relationships of time, space, and the means of communication and the effect on power & control. The paper concludes by considering the place of technology in terms opportunities or barriers to Tourist SMEs in an urban tourist location such as London.
Introduction:

Recent years have seen many changes in the use of computers. The original machines, unlike today’s laptops, palm held computers and WAP phones were large pieces of equipment that were sensitive to both movement and climate change. Computers were primarily used by mathematicians and scientists to ‘compute’ numbers.

Drucker noted in 1988 ‘for the most part computers are still being used to facilitate traditional computational efforts; that is to “crunch conventional numbers”, but that as a company, especially a large one, moves from “data to information, its decision processes, management structure, and even the way its work gets done begin to be transformed.”’ (cited by Rosenberg 1997)

This has been borne out over the past few years, as computers have become more versatile. More usable interfaces and advances in both software and technology means that computers are becoming less of the “number cruncher” they where designed for and more of a system to access and manage knowledge. These changes have contributed to the rise in the use of new technology, both at home and work, and have in turn changed the way we work.

Computers are increasingly being used to deliver innovative approaches to business. They are being used as ‘multifunctional information resources’ to gather information and as a means of immediate communication. According to research published by Gartner Dataquest August 2001 there are an estimated 22 million PCs in Britain. Eight million homes (about 40 percentage) now own a computer. (Uhlig 2001) Figures produced by “Which?” Magazine (19th June 2001) have quoted that 36% of the British public or more than 16 million people are now ‘surfing’ the Internet. This is nine percent higher than the 2000 figure. Perceptions and expectations are therefore changing both with regards to the high quality of documentation that can be produced, and the speed by which information can be found.

‘There is a new culture where everything is always open and every competitor is only one click away.’

(D.Medows – Klue speaking at The Innovations Show London July 2000)

ICT is helping to give fluid boundaries to traditional concepts of business hours and location, blurring the distinction between service industries and manufacturing sectors as economies are transformed. New technology can make businesses more efficient. Long supply chains are likely to be shortened and it is predicted that the impact of this on small business as well as increased internal efficiency will be the most important effects of new technology rather than between business and customer. (The Innovations Show London July 2000)

‘Companies need to be e-enabled or they are likely to lose their place in the supply chain. The challenge for SMEs are the suppliers because human factors will not sustain this revolution.’
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(D. Furness Director of BT B2B and e-business speaking at The Innovations Show London July 2000)

The tourism economy which includes such categories as ‘tourism and related hospitality, transport, cultural services and visitor attractions’ accounts, it has been claimed, for an estimated 5.5% of GDP and 6% of all employment across the EU member states. (CEC 1996a). London as the capital of one of those member states is a popular tourist city destination. It attracts over 25 million domestic and overseas tourists (45:55) and many more leisure day visitors each year. It is a cultural as well as business and administrative capital and its tourism profile is both diverse and evenly spread throughout the year with less than 10% variation in hotel occupancy levels between the highest and lowest months. Over 50% of tourists have visited the city before mostly in the previous 5 years. (Evans, Bohrer and Richards 2000)

The tourism ‘industry’ is in practice, however, fragmented. It is represented by both a large number of small enterprises and a smaller but powerful number of ‘global and national operators’ (Evans and Peacock 1999). BT has reported that between 30% and 50% of SMEs only have Internet access from home (The Innovations Show London July 2000). Therefore it can be assumed that a number of employees lack access to and control of certain consumer markets. There are, however, a number of enthusiastic organisations with both the hardware and the skills to use the Internet beneficially. It is in the context of this market that small tourist businesses are beginning to exploit the potential offered by the use of new technology.

Case study evidence:

In recent years the Centre for Leisure and Tourism Studies (CELTS), based in the University of North London, undertook several research projects, which involved in-depth interviews with a number of tourist attractions in London. This paper examines the case study evidence that was collected from some of those in-depth interviews during 1999 and 2000 with staff/owners of small tourist attractions in London. It also considers the implications about the use of new technology. Some innovative approaches to web site design and use are given.

This paper provides a qualitative analysis of some SMTEs in London, concentrating on their usage and attitudes towards new technology. For practical purposes ICT Internet/web pages and related systems are discussed rather than all business IT applications. By evaluating the major impacts brought about by ICT and the World Wide Web in particular the changing relationships of time, space, and the means of communication can be demonstrated and the effect of control shown within the working environment.

The research projects completed by CELTS involved many in-depth interviews with representatives from a range of tourist attractions both from the larger better-known attractions and from smaller less well known attractions around London. This paper does not report the findings from any one-research project, but rather uses relevant ICT information collected from those interviews undertaken during the course of those projects.
Attempts to set up the interviews by email request initially attracted low response rate. This included a returned email from an organisation who said they couldn’t help with the research as the person who had set up the web pages had now left and no one else knew about them. Checking these pages recently showed that the original pages are still being used, but someone has now updated some of the information so that the events page is current. However surprising, this response showed a trend that was repeated across many of the attractions visited - namely, an organisation’s web presence was dependent on one person’s expertise or enthusiasm to create and maintain web pages. This demonstrates an obvious weakness to creating a sustainable success in using innovative approaches that maybe undertaken by an organisation. In the end, arranging the interviews was more successful using the more conventional approach of telephone and letter. This was interesting, given the importance many of the interviewees ascribed to emails. It may indicate a possible tension between how organisations perceived email technology, the means by which it should be used and how it is in fact used. Discussions highlighted that email was of growing importance for communication both externally and internally. Its asynchronous nature means that a delayed response is acceptable. Several small organisations expressed opinions that for small organisations email is important to ensure that everyone knows what is going on, that everyone is kept up to date with developments even when all members of staff are not always present. While this is also true of larger organisations, the small organisations felt it was a new means of communication available to them which was particularly important in small organisations when one person could easily feel left out and 'in the dark' isolated from the rest of a small team. At the time of interviewing many of the attractions were beginning to see the importance of compiling email listings in the same way that they create their postal mailing lists using them to keep audiences/customers up to date with events and so saving money on posting. However this is dependent on their visitors also using email and, as such, was an activity, which was expected to increase with time. Certainly postal mail-outs continued.

The Internet and their own web pages was not seen to be as useful as email by the organisations interviewed. In many cases, the new technology they were buying was an investment for the future. Not everyone had access from their own machines to the Internet, despite of computer upgrades that were happening within some of the organisations. One machine that everyone could use tended to be available for Internet access and could be used if searching for information. The reason for the Internet presence seemed to be about providing information to people at home (leisure users), and only the increase in ownership of better (and more) home computers increase would highlight the usefulness of the web sites. Interestingly, the reason given by one organisation for allowing all staff Internet access, was that it could later become an issue about personal use and that it was better not to install something that could give rise to a situation that needed to be dealt with. It was also thought that it would help to keep the phone bills to a minimum, restricting use to essential use only. The issue of personal use is likely to be difficult. Obviously small organisations need to be careful about their outgoings and keeping phone bills to a minimum is important. However, a member of staff ‘surfing the net’ may be improving their skills and finding other innovative ways of improving the organisations own site. Many of the interviewees told
how they checked search engines regularly to see how well their own pages could be found.

A number of the interviewees also reported how they had taught themselves to design web pages from computer books, magazines and the Internet. It may, therefore, be counter productive to have an over restrictive policy about the use of the Internet.

An organisation's web page(s) were not usually seen as part of their core marketing activity, but rather only a small part of their overall strategy. When asked how other members of staff perceived the web site there was a general response that everyone saw it as a good thing but most people didn't understand it. The importance of the web was mainly seen in terms of providing a presence at this stage but that is all. One organisation reported that they did not have a web page at present, (and still don’t) because:

"it is the cost of setting it up in a proper way, there are so many half-baked web sites that are really irritating so we are just listed on the main sites like London Town and the BTA site. When we develop our web site we want to have it so there is up to date information – there’s nothing worse than having an out of date web site."

Many interviewees echoed the importance of keeping web sites up to date. Maintenance of web sites was often completed by the interviewees themselves, and in many cases 'free' because undertaken in their own time. One interviewee whose wife has designed the pages for him said she wasn’t interested in maintaining them, and several interviewees said there was a move to encourage other members of staff to be interested. Some organisations were planning to train other members of staff to take over maintenance of the web site in their own areas. In one case where the organisation was in the process of upgrading their computers, web page design software was being included, because it was felt this might become important in the future. The Internet and web site design is a growing / changing area for which the interviewees acknowledged they needed to prepare. The main issues about web pages and maintenance were to do with time rather than finance or training. Many small attractions were dependant on the interviewee designing and maintaining the web pages in their own time and on their own computers at home because the attractions did not own a computer or there was not enough time during the normal working day to work on web pages.

The area for development in all cases was the potential for e-commerce. In two cases the niche for specialist book sales seemed a likely development. For another organisation, the possibility of e-commerce from their shop was deemed a possibility. Few organisations already allowed for tickets to be purchased directly from the web. One site directed visitors to the tickets.com site and for one organisation, ticket sales were their next Internet target. They were aiming to be able to provide online ticket sales (which they now do) within the following few months after the interview. They did have some worries with regards to ownership and about the control tickets.com would command as the gatekeeper for such a development and didn't know whether they or the public would be charged for using the gatekeeping service. The
management was concerned about who would retain the control over ticket pricing, and other organisations interviewed gave this as the reason why they had no intention of selling tickets online.

The issues surrounding the design of the web page tended to be centred on whether the organisation should invest in a design company to complete the work or to do it themselves. Design companies often meant interviewees felt a loss of control. However, many recognised their own limitations both with time and with design skills. The basic design rules that most interviewees engaged with included the need for pages to be simple, easy to download (It has been reported that 'users are willing to wait for just eight seconds before they move on to someone else's site' Jones 1999) and with clear designs.

"Just because you can do something doesn't mean it works in a design sense."

Understanding the target audience was also important when interviewees decided on their final designs. Placing of links was thought important for navigation around sites. As part of the maintenance, checks were undertaken to see how successfully search engines located their own sites. As care needs to be taken that information published online is not out of date, interviewees again expressed the time factor implication the web has on their jobs. For many, it is still only a small part, if any, in their overall job responsibilities.

Links were often made from sites to other attractions that offered something similar. In some cases, other links were made about the local area and other attractions close by.

Perhaps, the most telling results can be extrapolated from responses to a survey distributed to London respondents as part of Leonardo’s project TOURIT (funded by the EU). This project included a number of questionnaire and follow up survey undertaken between 1998 and 2000 (CELTS). By checking the URLs (web addresses) given on the questionnaire responses about a quarter appeared to be inactive a year later. These organisations may have had new web sites elsewhere but did not make links to the old site if this was the case. Also many web sites seem to be a reproduction of an organisations marketing literature and were therefore not interactive.

Examples of 'good practice' and innovative approaches as quoted by interviewees was a direct result of the enthusiasm felt towards their organisation and an general understanding that new technology could be an important development in providing accessible information and knowledge to the public. There are issues about who decides upon content of pages and the ultimate control this gives the so called 'web master'. As one interviewee who designed and developed his organisations web pages said:

"I enjoy doing it but if I had to put everything though the committee it would change a pleasurable task into a terrible pain!"
While the organisations visited were all very different a common area for them all was the commitment to making their organisation work. The following three examples show some interesting uses to which web pages have been put.

Firstly a small independent museum has created a web site, which links their educational, and interactive site to a page they call the ‘Webxibition’. This features a virtual exhibition tour that prepares a school party for its visit. It also means visitors unable to visit in person can make a virtual tour. This museum is also a member of the London Pass scheme, in itself a fairly new and innovative scheme run by Arrival Marketing. This membership offers visitors the option to buy a pass which will allow them access to many top London attractions and if purchased before arrival in London also includes a London Transport Travel Card. Visitors who buy this are provided with a book detailing the attractions they can visit. For the attractions this can increase visitor numbers. The attraction receives 2/3rds of the ticket admission.

Secondly, another attraction, which is also a member of the London Pass scheme, is an inner London Cathedral. It is a multi use building, which combines its primary role as a place of worship, with a popular tourist attraction, and conference venue. The web site allows for information about services to be published. A diocese newsletter to be published which also allows for information to be given to tourists, especially overseas tourists.

The Third example is the children’s theatre site, which as well as being a simple virtual tour of the theatre, also has an interactive area for children called the ‘Kids’ Area’. This includes an interactive quiz and a gallery made up of the pictures drawn by children in recent competition. There was also a chance for children to join in with story web activity.

Conclusion

This paper has outlined where some organisations see the place of technology in terms of opportunities or barriers to Tourist SMEs in an urban tourist location such as London. With major global and national competitors on their doorstep, many of the smaller attractions interviewed thought that an Internet presence was important for the future in attracting a wide audience. They did not consider themselves to be market leaders, but did not want to be left behind in terms of new technology. Most people interviewed considered the changes to internal and external means of communication via email to be much more important than the Internet for their organisation.

With many SME’s still not online, the potential of new technology has not yet been fully utilised. The opportunities for on-line networking and joint marketing across activity sectors are still underdeveloped. With little or no e-commerce taking place, the full interactive e-commerce potential is still a major obstacle for many SMEs. At present the Internet reflects a browsing culture. The practical problems of web-site design, maintenance/updating, staff training and access are still major barriers to the sustained involvement of SMEs with ICT. However as this paper has shown there is the potential to exploit the Internet and examples of innovative approaches can be seen.
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CAPITALISING ON THE MYTH OF THE ESSEX GIRL? THE POSTMODERN RE-INVENTION OF SOUTHEEND-ON-SEA

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ABSTRACT

The decline of the British seaside resort is a well-documented phenomenon. The spectacular rise of the sea-bathing or spa resort in the late 19th Century, and its subsequent transformation into a mass tourism destination, was almost invariably followed by a period of decline and stagnation in the latter part of the 20th Century. A recent English Tourism Council report (2001) analyses the overall decline of British resorts and the resort market, attributing this to a number of factors. These include increasing competition, lack of investment in product quality, poor image and insufficient marketing and information. Many resorts are perceived as being old-fashioned and lacking in product innovation, and they would appear to have lost their distinctive or distinguishing characteristics. This has subsequently led to a loss of place-identity, at best characterised by faded grandeur at worst, by degeneration into tawdry kitsch!

The social historian John Walton (2000) has argued that the oft-quoted resort lifecycle model offers an inadequate and overly simplistic analysis of the complex trajectories of resort development. Although generalisations can be made, it is clearly important to differentiate between typologies of coastal resort. Patterns of decline are variable and relative; hence this paper proposes a case study approach to its analysis of this phenomenon. The decline of resorts will therefore be discussed in more specific detail in the context of the seaside resort of Southend-on-Sea, which, along with Blackpool, Brighton and Bournemouth, was a major pre-war urban centre (Urry, 1990; Walton, 2000). However, the post-war pattern of decline has perhaps echoed that of other similar resorts, such as Morecambe (Williams, 2000).

Despite his wry account of the beleaguered British seaside town, Walton (2000:198) is highly optimistic about its resilience and capacity for re-invention, stating that: “it has [....] maintained its power as a cultural referent, and it is beginning to market itself in post-modern, ironic ways, inviting visitors to share the jokes about seaside kitsch and enjoy a distinctive experience which is also sold as part of the heritage tourism boom.”

The image of Southend as being ‘of low social status’ (Urry, 1990) and ‘cheerful cockney’ (Walton, 2000) is further embodied in the widespread and stereotyped myth of the ‘Essex Girl’, a symbol of the cheap and cheerful hedonism characteristic of such liminal places as the seaside town. How far Southend will wish to capitalise on such stereotypes in a post-modern, self-ironising promotional scheme remains to be seen! However, it will be argued in this paper that Southend’s potential for regeneration is
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significant. In the most recent Performance Plan considerable emphasis is placed on cultural and economic regeneration, especially town centre revitalisation, and the development of cultural and events tourism (Southend Borough Council, 2000). The pier (emphasised as the second most important feature of the town by residents in a recent MORI survey) should also play a key role, both as visitor attraction and a visual signifier. Southend’s capacity for re-invention and revitalisation looks set to mirror that of other successful destinations, such as Brighton and Blackpool. It is only a matter of time!

KEY WORDS

English seaside resorts, decline, renaissance, regeneration, revitalisation, re-invention, product innovation, image enhancement

“One day, I would like to think, people will rediscover the charms of a quiet break at the seaside, the simple pleasures of strolling along a well-kept front, leaning on railings, drinking in views, sitting in a café with a book, just pottering about...How nice it would be if the Government actually erected a policy to this end.”

Bryson (1995:220)

Introduction

The decline of the English seaside resort is now a well-documented phenomenon. The spectacular rise of the sea-bathing or spa resort in the late 19th Century, and its subsequent transformation into a mass tourism destination, was almost invariably followed by a period of decline and stagnation in the latter part of the 20th Century. A recent English Tourism Council report (2001) analyses the overall decline of English resorts and the resort market, attributing this to a number of factors. These include increasing competition, lack of investment in product quality, poor image, and insufficient marketing and information. Many resorts are perceived as being old-fashioned and lacking in product innovation, and they appear to have lost their distinctive or distinguishing characteristics. This has subsequently led to a loss of place-identity, at best characterised by faded grandeur, at worst, by degeneration into tawdry kitsch!

The social historian John Walton (2000) has argued that the oft-quoted resort lifecycle model offers an inadequate and overly simplistic analysis of the complex trajectories of resort development. Although generalisations can be made, it is clearly important to differentiate between typologies of coastal resort. Patterns of decline are variable and relative hence this paper proposes a case study approach to its analysis of this phenomenon. The decline of resorts will therefore be discussed in more specific detail in the context of the seaside resort of Southend-on-Sea, which, along with Blackpool, Brighton and Bournemouth, was a major pre-war urban centre (Urry, 1990; Walton,
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2000). However, the post-war pattern of decline has perhaps echoed that of other similar resorts, such as Morecambe (Williams, 2000).

The image of Southend as being ‘of low social status’ (Urry, 1990) and ‘cheerful cockney’ (Walton, 2000) is further embodied in the widespread and stereotyped myth of the ‘Essex Girl’, a symbol of the cheap and cheerful hedonism characteristic of such liminal places as the seaside town. How far Southend will wish to capitalise on such stereotypes in a post-modern, self-ironising promotional scheme remains to be seen! However, it will be argued in this paper that Southend’s potential for regeneration is significant. In the most recent Performance Plan considerable emphasis is placed on cultural and economic regeneration, especially town centre revitalisation, and the development of cultural and events tourism (Southend Borough Council, 2000). The pier (emphasised as the second most important feature of the town by residents in a recent MORI survey) should also play a key role, both as a visitor attraction and a visual signifier. Southend’s capacity for revitalisation looks set to mirror that of other successful destinations, such as Brighton and Blackpool. This paper will attempt to analyse its potential for re-invention.

The Heyday of the English Seaside Resort

A visit to the English seaside resort was once the premise of an elite group seeking the medicinal advantages of ritualised sea bathing. It was the pursuit of health rather than pleasure that dominated, especially in the late nineteenth century. Walton (2000) describes the ‘heyday’ of the English seaside resort as having been from the late Victorian and Edwardian years right up until the 1950s, but the nature of it clearly changed. The democratisation of travel and the transport revolution during the first half of the twentieth century led to an unprecedented growth in resort development. Changes in the economic welfare system, pay structures and patterns of work enabled the working classes to engage in leisure activities that were previously barred to them, and despite initial attempts by the (then) leisured classes to exclude the masses, social restriction to such a public space proved impossible. However, there was still an inherent elitism in the hierarchy of resorts, as well as in the kinds of activities that were engaged in. As stated by Morgan and Pritchard (1999:60) the seaside resort is “an arena where strong and sustained attempts were made to control social behaviour, both in terms of who was allowed access and which entertainments were sanctioned.”

Meethan (1996) also refers to the class distinctions inherent in resorts like Brighton, where ‘low’ or ‘vulgar’ cultural pursuits were confined to the seafront, whereas the more refined consumption of ‘high’ culture took place within the urban townscape. Not only were distinctions made between residents and tourists, but also between different types of tourists.

Nevertheless, mass, working-class resorts like Blackpool, Southend and Bournemouth managed to sustain their dynamism, substantial population growth, and high visitor numbers right through from 1881–1951 (Walton, 1997). By 1951, Brighton, Southend, Blackpool and Bournemouth were the leading resorts, with Blackpool and Southend leading the way in terms of visitor numbers mainly because of their high sunshine
count, sandy beaches, varied leisure and entertainment facilities, and accessible location (ibid: 2000).

It is clearly important to differentiate between the character and identity of seaside resorts, whose development is by no means homogeneous. In his final chapter to *The Kingdom by the Sea*, Paul Theroux (1983:349) describes each British coastal resort as having a definite character and a specific identity: “Every British bulge is different and every mile has its own mood.... The character was fixed...each one was unique.” Walton (2000:22) echoes this with an interesting, if obscure use of simile: “We need to generalise, but taking account of the rich and enduring diversity of the British seaside. We are dealing with a recognisable and distinctive kind of town, but with as many variations as a hawkweed or a burnet-moth.” In a 2000 survey, the English Tourism Council asked consumers to categorise seaside resorts. As a result, they identified the following which is a useful typology, but by no means comprehensive (it is noticeable, for example, that Southend-on-Sea does not feature):

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Picturesque</th>
<th>Traditional</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Lively</th>
<th>Fun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>St Ives</td>
<td>Eastbourne</td>
<td>Falmouth</td>
<td>Morecambe</td>
<td>Blackpool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lizard area</td>
<td>Bournemouth</td>
<td>Isle of Wight</td>
<td>Weston super Marc</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bude</td>
<td>Salcombe</td>
<td>Gt Yarmouth</td>
<td>Newquay</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Truro</td>
<td>Lyme Regis</td>
<td>Folkestone</td>
<td>Torquay</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robin Hood’s Bay</td>
<td>Aldeburgh</td>
<td>Scarborough</td>
<td>Brighton</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Worthing</td>
<td>Southport</td>
<td>Paignton</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>St Austell</td>
<td>Swanage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: ETC, 2001)

Morgan & Pritchard (1999) describe social tone as a ‘prime shaper’ for seaside resorts. Urry (1990) describes how major differences of social tone were established between places that were otherwise similar, establishing a kind of hierarchy of resorts. For example, he refers to Southend and Brighton as having been more popular but of “lower social tone” than Bournemouth or Torquay. He explains how “such places, the working-class resorts, quickly developed as symbols of ‘mass tourism,’ as places of inferiority which stood for everything that dominant social groups held to be tasteless, common, vulgar” (p.16). This was largely attributed to their proximity to London and the development of the railway, which encouraged day-trippers. For towns like Southend, the railway proved to be something of a lifeline, as emphasised by Theroux (1983:358) in a less than flattering portrayal, who chances upon the town during a railway strike:

“Traditionally, it was for day-trippers, Londoners. Its atmosphere wasn’t briny and coastal; it was riverbank sag, the greasy Thames, London toughness. In many senses, Southend was a part of London. The river was its spiritual link, but the river was not put to any practical use. The physical link, of the railway, had been severed by the strike, and now Southend was revealed in this empty condition as a mixture of river rawness and sleazy elegance. Other places could do without the railway, but Southend
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was expiring, because this seaside place was not on the way to anywhere except Foulness, which was one of the very few aptly named places in the country.”

Theroux (1983:76) comments on the innate ability of the English to identify the character of seaside towns, even those that they had never visited: “All English people had opinions on which seaside places in England were pleasant and which ones were a waste of time. This was in the oral tradition.” Walton (2000) describes how many resorts developed reputations for being havens for the retired, (e.g. Sussex, with its emergent ‘Costa Geriatrica’). Others became commuter towns, especially those in the southeast, West Sussex and north Kent. Certain destinations cultivated an air of sophistication and exclusivity, such as those in south Devon, Dorset and north Essex. Many destinations sold themselves on the attractiveness of the surrounding natural landscape, which is particularly true of resorts in Devon and Cornwall. The identity and ‘personality’ of these resorts is endlessly fascinating. Many of the mass, working-class resorts such as Blackpool, Brighton and Southend developed their own distinctive characteristics, mainly as fleshpots, zones of pleasure and hedonism for weekenders and day-trippers.

Urry (1990) describes how the construction of the beach as a site for pleasure was first evident in the resort of Brighton. During the first few decades of the twentieth century the town developed a reputation for its carnivalesque atmosphere, bodily exposure, social mixing and sexual excess, often depicted as the ‘dirty weekend’ phenomenon of saucy postcard fame! Theroux (1983:65) remarks; “People in Brighton were imagined to be perpetually on the razzle, their nights spent prowling The Lanes or Marine Parade, and their nights full of ramping sexuality. Think I’ll go down and have a dirty weekend, people said. Brighton had a great reputation. You were supposed to have fun in Brighton.” Similarly, Barnard (2001:23) describes Blackpool as having “a certain siege mentality.... a town where people come to free themselves of the inhibitions of home and go down the pub at four in the afternoon.”

Morgan & Pritchard (1999:60) describe the seaside resort as “an intriguing social and cultural space,” where the constraints of social mores could be eschewed. Shields (1990) refers to the pleasure beach as a liminal zone, a place on the margins where people could escape from the rites, rituals and moral constraints of everyday life. Walton (2000:4) emphasises the free rein that is given to pleasure and uncharacteristic behaviour at the seaside, with his humorous description of a place where “the prim and the Rabelaisian sides of British character come into maritime confrontation.” Blackpool Pleasure Beach is probably the best known example of the ultimate seaside pleasure zone, which was developed, in the early part of the twentieth century. Brighton and Southend also offered their own fair share of entertainment in terms of funfairs and pier entertainment. Bournemouth had its Upper and Lower Pleasure Gardens, but these were a far cry from the thrills and spills of the pleasure beach. Bryson (1995:66), who hilariously remarks that the names of the Gardens had later been changed in order to uphold Bournemouth’s genteel and sophisticated image comments on the misleading connotations of nomenclature. The lewd and deliberate innuendo that fuelled Blackpool and Brighton’s hedonistic image is deemed inappropriate here.
“some councillor or other force for good realised the profound and unhealthy implications of placing Lower and Pleasure in such immediate proximity and successfully lobbied to have Lower removed from the title, so now you have the Upper Pleasure Gardens and the mere Pleasure Gardens, and lexical perverts have been banished to the beaches where they must find such gratification as they can by rubbing themselves on the groynes.”

As well as a pleasure beach, the majority of resorts possessed a pier. Urry (1990:34) describes how, like towers (e.g. Blackpool Tower), the pier was a kind of edifying structure between sea and sky, an eternal symbol of man’s attempt to conquer nature:

“Such towers, and to a lesser extent, piers, enable people to see things in their structure, to link human organisation with extraordinary natural phenomena, and to celebrate the participation within, and the victory of, human agency over nature. They are part of that irreducibly extraordinary character of the ideal tourist site.”

However, the phallic connotations of such dominant structures in an already apparently eroticised landscape are surely impossible to disregard. Walton (2000:104) certainly does not miss this latent symbolism, describing the pier as:

“That potent symbol of the Victorian seaside…. the essence of liminality with more convincing credentials as phallic symbol than the tallest tower, as it points a stiff masculine technological probe into the mysterious feminine world of the sea, linking the elements to generate the special frisson of pleasure and the privileged gaze.”

Sadly, piers have not quite lived up to their reputations of being potent and eternal structures. As documented by both Urry (1990) and Walton (2000), piers have largely failed to withstand the test of time, proving to be vulnerable and prone to damage, destruction or neglect. Their upkeep is expensive, and their renovation even more so. For example, one pier in Morecambe was washed away and the other was half burnt down; for years both Brighton piers were derelict, and one still remains so; Southend’s pier has suffered two fires, and is currently a shadow of its former self awaiting renovation.

It is clear that piers are only one symbol of the decline of the English seaside resort. Increasing degradation of infrastructure, facilities and despoliation of both the natural and built environment have all helped to contribute to this process.

The Decline of the English Seaside Resort

The travel writers Bill Byson and Paul Theroux are sometimes less than charitable about the decline of the English seaside resort in their journeys around Britain, often marvelling at how some resorts ever became popular in the first place! For example, Theroux (1983:25) says of Margate “Margate had never been fashionable. It had never even been nice….it has always been crummy and cockneyfied.” Bryson (1995: 218)
similarly comments on Morecambe: “The surprising thing about Morecambe [...] isn’t that it declined, but that it ever prospered. It would be hard to imagine a place less likely for a resort.” This is perhaps indicative of the sorry state of some English seaside resorts, which now retain little of their once popular appeal. Bryson (1995: 214) marvels at Blackpool’s continuing popularity, commenting that: “Blackpool is ugly, dirty and a long way from anywhere, [...] its sea is an open toilet, and its attractions nearly all cheap, provincial and dire.” Theroux (1983:358) describes the people of Southend as being “between jobs, between lives, waiting for something to open up,” and Brighton as having “the face of an old tart and a very brief appeal” (p.65).

Despite their wry humour, these comments are sometimes uncomfortably close to the truth. Walton (2000) describes how many English seaside resorts suffered as a result of de-industrialisation resulting in local economic shrinkage from the 1960s onwards. Many resorts became more like suburbs, dormitory towns or retirement centres than thriving urban centres or tourist hotspots. Many resorts began to feature high on deprivation index scales with growing unemployment, drink and drug problems. Walton (2000) refers to the material deprivation index which, according to the 1991 census, featured Blackpool at twenty-first, Hove at twenty-seventh, Brighton at thirty-third and Bournemouth at forty-fifth. Blackpool still currently lies 32nd out of 354 local authorities in the government’s indices of deprivation in England (Barnard, 2001). The rate and extent of decline of resorts has been variable. As stated by Shaw and Williams (1997a:13)

“The reasons why one resort prospers and another is in crisis is due to the complex interaction of global and national shifts in culture and the economics of the tourism industry, and the way that these interact with the local dimensions of culture, class images, the built environment created by previous rounds of investment, and the capacity of both the local state and of private investors to adapt to change.”

The English Tourism Council’s (2001) report entitled Sea Changes: Creating world class resorts in England clearly documents the decline of the English seaside resort. The period from the 1950s to the 1970s was generally a time when many resorts began to decline steadily, which could be partly attributed to the following factors:

- Increasing competition from sunnier overseas destinations (namely cheap package resorts)
- Competition from other leisure and tourism attractions (e.g. theme parks), and home entertainment
- Lack of investment in product quality, leading to infrastructural deficiencies and inadequate facilities and amenities
- Failure to invest in new attractions and lack of product innovation
- Environmental factors, such as pollution of the sea and beaches
- Insufficient marketing and the lack of a distinctive image
- Negative attitudes of local communities towards tourism development

(adapted from ETC, 2001)
Urry (1990) also attributed the waning interest in English seaside resorts to the growing obsession with sun tanning, which was quickly becoming a more attractive pastime than sea-bathing. Clearly, overseas resorts were in a better position to offer the necessary climatic conditions (although ten years on, concerns about skin cancer are starting to halt this trend). In addition, Urry highlights the changing pattern of social behaviour:

"the post-modern dissolving of social identities, many of these forms of group identification within space and over time have vanished, and this has reduced the attractiveness of those resorts which were designed to structure the formation of pleasure in particular class-related patterns" (p.102).

In addition, the significance of image and place-identity cannot be under-estimated. Urry (1990) suggests that many resorts started to lose their sense of distinctiveness because of the growing availability of superior entertainment facilities elsewhere. The features that had rendered seaside destinations unique and exciting were being eclipsed by attractions such as theme parks, retail parks and water parks. Hughes (2000) laments the decline in popularity of seaside entertainment, which was always a key component of the coastal product. Resorts were increasingly unable to provide ‘spectacle’ and the ‘extraordinary,’ hence entertainment had often degenerated into poor quality cabaret or variety-type performances. Urry (1997:109) remarks that: “The very features of the seaside resort – entertainments, funfairs, bathing beauty contests, arcades and so on – are a set of cultural practices which have become much less highly valued because of the paradoxical reassertion of the value of the natural, the unspoilt, the uncontaminated, the healthy.” Cooper (1997) notes the lack of wet-weather facilities and out-of-season activities. Walton (2000) also attributes the increasing homogenisation of image to the gradual deterioration of distinctive architectural features, and the concomitant proliferation of cheap, standardised accommodation. Shaw and Williams (1997) note that although the number of international tourists in Britain have increased significantly over the past few decades, the coastal areas have largely failed to capture the market. This perhaps suggests a need for more product innovation and better promotional strategies. They also refer to the problems of state neglect of coastal resorts in terms of policy making and funding. Until the early 1990s, when the English Tourist Board made a concerted effort to address the problems of coastal decline, many resorts had suffered considerable economic stagnation.

Butler’s (1980) resort lifecycle model is of some use here, as it is evident that many resorts have passed through similar stages of Development, Consolidation, Stagnation, and Decline. However, Walton (2000:22) suggests that “as a tool of description and explanation the model is too impoverished” when dealing with the complex trajectories of resort development. He is notably reluctant to speak of the decline of the English seaside resort, preferring instead to explore the resilience of destinations and their capacity to withstand changes of fortune.
He calls for a reinterpretation of the twentieth-century British seaside and he is highly optimistic about the seaside town’s potential for re-invention, stating that:

“it has [...] maintained its power as a cultural referent, and it is beginning to market itself in post-modern, ironic ways, inviting visitors to share the jokes about seaside kitsch and enjoy a distinctive experience which is also sold as part of the heritage tourism boom”

(ibid:198)

It is interesting to analyse the phenomenon of regeneration in the context of the English seaside resort, as this is currently a major priority for the English Tourism Council, as the following section will demonstrate.

The Regeneration of the English Seaside Town

Shaw and Williams (1997) referred to two elements that are usually common to the revitalisation of tourist resorts. These are an attempt to re-position themselves in terms of market segments with the development of specialist and short-break holidays, and new innovations in the development of tourism products. As stated by Peter Moore, Chairman of the resort Regeneration Task Force:

“The English resort determined to [...] re-invent itself and evolve into a modern successful business will need to combine the original strengths that made it appealing and which differentiated it in the era (the sea, the beach, the promenade, the sea air etc.), along with new or evolved aspects which will again give it some form of differentiation. The successful resort will need to differentiate not only from its peer resorts, but from the spectrum of other leisure and tourism experiences with which it is competing both domestically and abroad.”

(ETC, 2001:5)

The need for product innovation, differentiation, and re-branding appear to be the underlying concepts here. The ETC report (2001) broadly adheres to these concepts, and is a useful document to consider in terms of its objectives. It recognises that the market for resorts will not return to its heyday and that tourism alone cannot be a regeneration solution for all resorts. Many need to diversify their economies, and perhaps to move away from tourism altogether. Although tourism development is still an important element for many resorts, it is not always the central focus of regeneration strategies. A combined approach is arguably the way forward: “resorts must realise that no single element, no matter how powerful, will be a panacea on its own for the current problem of decline” (ETC, 2001:32).

Many regeneration strategies emphasise the enhancement of the environment and town centre renaissance, but often principally for the benefit of local communities who may feel disenchanted or disaffected with their town. Beach, sea front and town centre management are listed as key priorities, both in terms of environmental quality and
Innovation in Tourism Planning

safety. Ambience is also mentioned as an important element, especially in terms of the evening economy. Clearly, a high quality infrastructure is fundamental to both tourism development and community well being, not only in terms of accommodation and transport, but also signage, interpretation, and the provision of adequate public facilities and amenities.

In terms of potential tourist markets, the ETC plans to build on the already thriving VFR market as well as developing business and health tourism. Heritage or cultural tourism may also prove popular. However, Barnard (2001) is critical of the ETC’s failure to consider the role of museums in their regeneration guidelines. The ETC are currently using cultural tourism as a kind of crisis management tool in the wake of Foot and Mouth disease, so why not apply this concept to the beleaguered English seaside resort? The idea of a museum of the seaside is already being discussed in both Scarborough and Weston-super-Mare, which could have potential appeal for visitors. Destinations like St Ives in Cornwall have used the Tate Gallery as a kind of ‘flagship’ for regeneration. However, Barnard (2001) argues that the area was already attracting a large number of visitors due to its natural beauty. The gallery, therefore, serves as a mere adjunct to, and re-enforcement for, an already successful product.

It is acknowledged that small attractions such as the Grundy Art Gallery in Blackpool are unlikely to draw in the crowds. Branard (2001:25) quotes Flintoff (the curator of the museum) as quipping: “The problem is that they [the town’s few cultural attractions] are not a full day’s trip and there is little else of the same kind to see. ‘This is the cultural corner of Blackpool. We’re the gallery, next door is the library and down the road is the transvestite review bar’, and that kind of puts things in context.”

However hard they try, many seaside resorts are unlikely to sell themselves as cultural tourism destinations of the traditional or conventional kind. Should they therefore capitalise on their capacity for kitsch in a kind of post-modern, ironic re-invention based on the appeal of popular culture, as described by Walton (2000) earlier? Some resorts have clearly made a good start!

It is interesting to consider the ways in which resorts like Brighton and Blackpool have started to re-invent themselves. Although there are other interesting examples (e.g. Bournemouth and Torbay), they have tended to focus on their environmental qualities and stylish image in an attempt to regain their ‘popular fashionability’ (see for example, Morgan & Pritchard, 1999; English, 2000; ETC, 2001) in accordance with their past reputation for being slightly more salubrious and sophisticated destinations. Brighton, Blackpool, and to a lesser extent, Morecambe, have all undertaken measures to overcome their tendency towards decline. Along with Southend, they were all previously mass, working-class destinations, and in the ETC’s (2001) categorisation of seaside towns, they fall under the heading of ‘lively’ or ‘fun.’ As stated by Meethan (1996:190) in the context of Brighton, they are the kind of seaside resorts that capture “the boisterous nature of the seaside holiday [which] is marked by the consumption of trivia, absurd hats, ice cream, fish and chips and Brighton rock, goods and pastimes set against the aggressively modern background of amusement arcades, flashing lights, plastic, chrome and noise.”
Williams (2000) describes how Morecambe has integrated tourism and leisure into its regeneration strategy. The promenade has been refurbished and a small number of commercial attractions such as a cinema and ten-pin bowling alley have been built. Attempts at creating a ‘flagship’ attraction have not been entirely successful as the failure of Mr Blobby’s Crinkley Bottom Theme Park in 1994 demonstrated (evidence perhaps that the concept of post-modern kitsch can be taken too far!). Performing arts events such as festivals are increasingly being used as regeneration tools, as are watersports activities. However, the tidal estuary creates problems for developing extensive watersport features, a problem shared by Southend, which lies on the Thames Estuary. Ultimately, Morecambe clearly has further to go than Brighton or Blackpool in terms of re-inventing itself as a popular destination.

Blackpool is currently focusing on upgrading its holiday accommodation, as well as enhancing the quality of its infrastructure (ETC, 2001). The aim is also to promote the town as a kind of ‘Las Vegas of the North’ with the potential development of a casino complex (Barnard, 2001). Walton (2001:48) refers to Blackpool’s vigorous pursuit of cheapness, kitsch and the pink pound.” Indeed, Blackpool, Brighton and Bournemouth all featured in the BTA’s ‘Britain – Inside and Out’ marketing campaign in 1999 which targeted gay tourists, and all three resorts pride themselves on their gay-friendliness. Bournemouth is arguably more sedate than either Brighton or Blackpool, which have both laid claim to being the ‘gay capital of Europe,’ and sell themselves partly on their gay nightlife. Walton (2000:162) refers to Blackpool’s spectacular array of gay nightspots which have been developing gradually since the 1960s, as well as its “kitsch and ribald traditions...camp appeal...[and]...reputation as a centre for theatrical aspirations,” not to mention the lure of bingo, an apparent “widespread gay obsession”! Self (2001:9) traces Brighton’s history as a gay-friendly destination from the 1920s and 1930s onwards, through to the 1950s, where “a strong queer culture in Brighton was quietly thriving”. Brighton University’s Brighton Ourstory Project (1992:7) stated that “many lesbians and gay men, walking down Queen’s Road from the station felt, for the first time in their lives, like they were coming home.” Brighton now has a prominent gay community (second to London), and its annual Pride Parade in August is the largest in the United Kingdom. It was described by the BTA (2000:18) as a “gay and lesbian wonderland”!
The Future of Resort Regeneration

Many seaside resorts are clearly recognising the need to re-invent themselves through the creation of a distinctive image or identity. Blackpool seems likely to re-position itself as 'The Las Vegas of the North' whilst Brighton seems content with its status as 'Gay Capital of Europe.' Differentiation and the identification of a unique selling point are clearly central to their revitalisation strategies. In addition, the upgrading of infrastructure and facilities is becoming imperative when trying to attract more discerning niche markets, such as high spending ‘pink pound’ or business tourists.

It is clear that resorts need both public and private sector support and substantial investment if they are to be successfully regenerated. The production of the ETC Report (2001) is perhaps indicative of national commitment to resort regeneration, and the Government has increasingly made Single Regeneration Budget, new Structural Funds (Objective 2), and Neighbourhood Renewal Funds available for Coastal Areas.

The ETC (2001:50) recommended that future Action Plans for assisting resorts should cover the following issues:

- Funding for resort regeneration
- The profile of resorts
- The role of local authorities
- Improving quality in resorts
- Product development and diversification
- Research and intelligence
- Transport links
- Use of information and communications technologies
- Support from the Regional Tourist Boards
- Small businesses and entrepreneurs

It is the role of partners at national, regional and local level to take relevant action to achieve these goals. The Government’s Urban White Paper recognises the important role that tourism; leisure and culture can play in the regeneration of a local area. Emphasis is placed on the enhancement of local community provision, small business development, and the promotion of innovation and enterprise. Local authorities have a duty to administer and implement these goals at local level, including the development of an innovative and high quality tourism product, which benefits both visitors and local people alike.

The following section will analyse the implementation of some of these measures in the context of the seaside resort of Southend-on-Sea in Essex.

A Profile of Southend-on-Sea

Historically, Southend was, for decades, a popular seaside resort that served tourists mainly from the London area. But like other similar resorts, it was adversely affected in the 1970s and 1980s by many of the factors identified in the ETC report. However, the
Innovation in Tourism Planning

town managed to avoid economic shrinkage during this period, because of its relative success in attracting the financial services sector. These industries generated a significant number of jobs in the town and offset the decline in tourism. Nevertheless, in terms of popularity, Southend was still ranked as the fourth most popular seaside destination for day trips in the country (after Blackpool, Brighton and Southport) in 1989 (Geoff Broom Associates, 1995).

However, Southend was hard hit during the economic recession of the early 1990s. In a 1992 Town Centre Study, Worpole (1992) attributed the decline of many town centres in Britain to the standardisation of retail provision, an under-developed evening economy, lack of adequate security provision, and loss of identity. Southend was one of the town centres included in the study. It was also found that the pedestrianisation of the High Street, although pleasant by day, had exacerbated feelings of insecurity at night.

Coupled with the excessive drinking culture in the town, this had lead to considerable degradation of the town's image and local pride. Southend also faced increasing competition from retail parks and shopping centres in the region such as Lakeside and Blue Water.

Capital investment in Southend during the 1990s resulted in the construction of a number of new attractions. These included the Sea Life Centre in 1992, Garon Leisure Park; Kid's Kingdom, Peter Pan's Adventure Island, and an eight screen multiplex cinema in 1995/1996, and the Kursaal in 1998. In addition existing features and attractions were refurbished or improved, such as The Cliffs Pavilion, the seafront and Victoria Plaza Shopping centre. The following table gives an indication of the popularity of some of the new and existing attractions in Southend.
Table Two

SOUTHEND-ON-SEA ATTRACTIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attraction</th>
<th>1998</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adventure Island</td>
<td>1,000,000</td>
<td>1,500,000</td>
<td>1,500,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kursaal</td>
<td>750,000</td>
<td>700,000</td>
<td>700,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southend Pier</td>
<td>331,646</td>
<td>391,898</td>
<td>355,440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cliffs Pavilion</td>
<td>312,377</td>
<td>293,320</td>
<td>330,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kids Kingdom</td>
<td>165,500</td>
<td>169,000</td>
<td>164,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sealife Aquarium</td>
<td>160,000</td>
<td>145,000</td>
<td>130,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palace Theatre</td>
<td>75,000</td>
<td>Closed</td>
<td>99,861</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southend Bandstand</td>
<td>60,000</td>
<td>70,000</td>
<td>58,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prittlewell Priory</td>
<td>32,319</td>
<td>19,171</td>
<td>18,114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Museum and Planetarium</td>
<td>29,247</td>
<td>22,302</td>
<td>21,478</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never Never Land</td>
<td>23,171</td>
<td>21,434</td>
<td>#20,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beechcroft Art Gallery</td>
<td>16,489</td>
<td>15,105</td>
<td>17,651</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southchurch Hall Museum</td>
<td>15,712</td>
<td>12,357</td>
<td>12,276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southend Pier Museum</td>
<td>6,760</td>
<td>6,198</td>
<td>6,903</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

# Permanently closed in 2001 (Southend Tourist Board, 2001)

Unsurprisingly, the large commercial attractions are the most popular, especially Adventure Island, which is the modern-day equivalent of the Pleasure Beach, and the Kursaal, with its ten pin bowling centre, themed restaurants and retail units. The Sealife Aquarium and Kids Kingdom are also high on the list. However, it is nice to see that the pier (apparently the longest in the world) retains its popularity despite awaiting renovation.
The popularity of the Cliffs Pavilion and the Palace Theatre as venues for concerts and musicals is also worth noting, as Southend appears to be keen to capitalise on its arts, cultural and events tourism. The Cliffs Pavilion is the region’s premier live entertainment venue, and with its 1630 seat capacity, it is the largest purpose built auditorium in the South East. The Bandstand retains its popularity because of its open air concerts, plays, the Jazz Festival, and Brass Band competitions, not to mention afternoon tea-dancing! Beechcroft Art Gallery is rising in popularity again, and it is interesting that Worpole (1992) commented on the thriving amateur arts scene in Southend, which is reflected in these changing exhibitions of local artists. However, visitors to Southend’s small heritage attractions such as the Central Museum and Planetarium, Prittlewell Priory and Southchurch Hall Museum are gradually declining. They therefore perhaps need to feature more prominently in future marketing strategies. At present, Old Leigh is regarded as Southend’s premier heritage attraction, with its cobbled streets, arts and crafts galleries, traditional pubs, and seafood stands.

It is interesting that Southend is focusing increasingly on cultural and special events in its marketing strategy, including the annual Airshow, Carnival, Water Festival, Old Leigh Regatta, Cricket Festival and Jazz Festival, amongst others. The Airshow is Europe’s largest free Airshow, and it attracts over half a million people to the seafront over the Spring Bank Holiday. It is also worth noting that many of Southend’s beaches have won much-coveted awards such as the Seaside Award Flag by the Tidy Britain Group for the 2000 season. Some of the parks and gardens have won Green Flag awards, ‘Britain in Bloom’ awards, and numerous medals at the Chelsea Flower Show. Southend is also a Site of Specific Scientific Interest because of its marine bird activity. In addition, Southend has recently been twinned with a Polish seaside town near to Gdansk called Sopot, which helps to enhance its status as a ‘European’ destination. It is also going to be home to part of the University of Essex in the near future, which will add another dimension to its profile.

In terms of its image, Southend has built up a good relationship with the media, and has featured in popular T.V. programmes such as ‘Eastenders,’ ‘The Naked Chef,’ ‘The Priory,’ and ‘Big Brother,’ which has helped to raise the profile of the town. Southend’s marketing campaigns have focused predominantly on the changing nature of the town, with its slogan ‘Moving with the Times’ in 2000, and ‘Experience the Changes’ in 2001, perhaps heralding a new era for Southend.

The Southend Tourism Study 1995 showed that Southend had around 242,000 staying visitors, each staying an average of three nights, which has positive benefits for the local economy. However, it is worth noting that two thirds of visitor bed nights were spent with friend and relatives. Only around one in ten holidaymakers visiting Southend are on their main holiday, and four out of ten are there for business purposes. The total number of day visits is estimated at around 2,517,000 for the year. The majority is leisure day visits (68%) and visits to friends and relatives (21%) with business and other visits at 8% and 2% respectively. The most popular locations visited were the High Street shops followed by the beach and the pier. The average daily spend was about £20. Visitor surveys have revealed that most tourists are impressed with Southend’s sea and environment, as well as the shopping facilities. Many however,
identified problems of tidiness, cleanliness and vandalism, and many disliked the atmosphere (Geoff Broom Associates, 1995).

The Potential Renaissance of Southend

Clearly, any successful regeneration programme should firstly take into consideration the needs of the local community. It is important to note that the internal perception of Southend as a place to live is currently almost as negative as the external perception of Southend as a place to visit. The Southend Citizen’s Guide (2001a: 7) therefore makes a concerted effort to promote Southend’s attractions to its own residents and to encourage local pride, deeming the resort worthy of the following epithets:

“Southend has a cosmopolitan atmosphere and is a vibrant seaside resort with a multitude of exciting new visitor attractions, thrilling adventure rides and dazzling illuminations. Everyone is invited to discover the changes, and experience the difference, with award winning gardens and beaches, splendid shopping facilities, a superb range of restaurants, and exciting theatre and musical performances.”

A MORI survey undertaken on behalf of the Council in 2000/2001 revealed that local residents support the development of tourism and believe that more could be done to promote the town. They were also keen to see the Pier renovated, perceiving this to be Southend’s premier ‘flagship’ attraction and the second most important feature of the town after safety and security concerns. Objective 2 funding has been secured for the next seven years, some of which (approximately £10m) will be used for the SSHAPE (Southend Seafront, High Street and Pier Enhancement) project, which focuses on the physical and environmental regeneration of these areas, including the pier. Southend has also received additional SRB funding for further economic regeneration as it is now part of the extended Thames Gateway corridor, and hence eligible for additional regeneration funding. It is interesting to read the ten-year vision of the South East Essex Economic Strategy (SEEES):

“A vibrant economy with a highly skilled workforce and in which all sections of the community participate. A positive, forward looking area noted for the range and quality of its visitor attractions.”

(SBC, 2001b:7)

The actions are determined by a set of six priorities:

- Business competitiveness
- Skills development
- Infrastructure development
- Tourism, retail and leisure opportunities
- Regeneration of areas suffering multiple problems of deprivation
- A positive image for South East Essex

(Johnston 1996:7)
These objectives correspond to the national agenda and the government’s New Commitment to regeneration initiative, which focuses on tackling poverty, crime, social and economic exclusion. It is also clear that tourism is viewed as an important means of diversifying the economy and creating employment. Key priorities are addressing industrial decline and poor infrastructure, and tourism has a significant role to play within this.

Southend Council also sees culture as a major component and catalyst for social and economic regeneration, and the Council is one of only fourteen local authorities to develop and pilot its local Cultural Strategy in line with DCMS recommendations. Emphasis is placed on the celebration of Southend’s cultural and collective heritage, the development of a stronger cultural identity and the creation of a more positive cultural image. Culture is defined broadly as:

"The sweaty and the cerebral! Put simply, it means that for us, the football team that we support is as much part of our cultural identity as is whether we visit the ballet or opera. The bright lights of the ‘Golden Mile’ and the theme park excitement of Adventure Island are every bit a part of Southend’s cultural identity as are its theatres and museums and its parks and gardens"

(SBC, 2001c:10)

The scope for cultural tourism development in its broadest sense is significant, especially given Southend Council’s obvious commitment to cultural and tourism development in the Borough. The emphasis on cultural events as described earlier is a good selling point, not to mention the various interesting, albeit small heritage attractions. Nevertheless, Southend is still primarily a seaside resort whose most important assets are arguably its seven-mile seafront, ‘longest pier in the World’, and beach-based leisure attractions. The Tourism Officer argues strongly that Southend has always been, and will continue to be, predominantly a leisure-based, day-trip destination, rather than a main holiday resort like Blackpool, Brighton or Bournemouth.

Its future renaissance as a destination is perhaps, therefore, dependent on its ability to differentiate its assets from those of other comparable day-trip resorts and weekend break destinations, such as Margate or Clacton.

The Future of Southend as a Seaside Resort

As a summary, the potential for the renaissance of Southend will be analysed using the model outlined in the table below. It is suggested that this could also serve as a useful tool for the future analysis of other similar resorts:
The Three ‘R’s of Seaside Renaissance:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regeneration</th>
<th>Revitalisation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- The diversification and strengthening of the local economy through tourism, culture and leisure services. This includes employment creation, the development of SMEs, and boosting visitor expenditure and multiplier effects.</td>
<td>- Product enhancement, including the upgrading of infrastructure and local facilities, environmental improvements, and town centre renaissance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Product innovation, including the development of new attractions, re-branding, image enhancement and the creation of a distinctive place-identity.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regeneration

The importance of tourism, leisure and culture to the local economy in Southend cannot be under-estimated. It was estimated in 1995 that 1870 direct jobs, including part-time and seasonal employment, are generated from tourism activity in Southend of which 43% are in the catering sector, 26% in retailing, 16% in accommodation, 9% in attractions and 6% in the travel sector. The number of indirect (linkage) jobs was estimated to be in the region of 280 (mostly suppliers of goods and services), and the number generated by multiplier effects was estimated to be around 170 (most of these in the service sector). The total number of jobs generated by visitor spending was calculated to be 2,322, many of which are in business sectors (Geoff Broom Associates, 1995). Commitment to education and training in the development of tourism and customer care (e.g. Welcome Host schemes) is clearly imperative to the creation of new and enhanced employment opportunities, which has been recognised by Southend Borough Council. Some SRB funding has been secured for this purpose, and there are training, education and skills development schemes complementing cultural and tourism development.

Visitor expenditure, at an average of £20 per day is fairly significant, although day-trip spending is lower on average at £13.70. Total visitor spending amounted to £63,435,000, much of which is spent on shopping, the evening economy, and tourist attractions (Geoff Broom Associates, 1995). Opportunities for more expenditure could be created through the development of new attractions, more competitive retail outlets, and a thriving evening economy. This could include visits to arts venues or concert halls (e.g. the Palace Theatre or Cliffs Pavilion), as well as expenditure in the numerous bars and restaurants. This economic imperative is fundamental to the Objective 2-funded SSHAPE project, which will focus on increasing daily visitor expenditure, and distributing spending more evenly throughout town. The further strengthening of the
evening economy will include the development of a number of continental-style pavement cafes, bars and restaurants which will encourage people to stay out later in the town and to spend money during the current ‘dead period’ between 6pm and 9pm. This will also increase the degree of animation in the town and enhance the atmosphere.

The most recent *Tourism Development Strategy and Action Plan* (1996) highlighted the relatively small number of bed spaces in serviced accommodation. Despite the large number of VFR visitors, this is clearly an issue that Southend needs to address if it is to attract more holiday tourists.

One bonus is that tourism in Southend is largely non-seasonal, therefore the hotels tend to run at 70% occupancy all year-round. This has positive implications for the local economy. The development of more business tourism could prove to be lucrative, but increased provision of high quality accommodation and improved conference facilities would be required. There is also a need to increase the number of budget hotels if Southend wants to encourage the European backpacker or foreign language student. Southend’s external image is still currently perceived to be a major barrier for potential investors, but this should hopefully change once Phase One of the SSHAPE project is underway.

**Revitalisation**

In terms of physical regeneration, the SSHAPE project is currently the most significant initiative in Southend. Briefly, the aim of the project is to regenerate the High Street, pier and foreshore in an integrated and seamless fashion. These areas will be enhanced aesthetically, using new paving, street furniture and by making architectural improvements to buildings and shopfronts. The long High Street leading to the seafront will be broken down into sections, which will be themed and landscaped to give them each an individual sense of identity and atmosphere (for example, with distinctive areas for relaxation, cultural activities such as street performers, cafes and restaurants, arts and crafts). This is an innovative initiative, which is perhaps comparable to Brighton Promenade, which has been similarly themed. In addition, heritage trails will be developed, and signage will be improved. SSHAPE will be linked to an integrated transport system to facilitate access and parking provision.

Environmental quality is fundamental to the success of a tourism destination, therefore Southend needs to focus on enhancing the quality both of its general environment (seafront, beaches and green spaces) and it town centre. The SSHAPE project, as discussed, will soon be implementing its three-phase re-development of the town centre, seafront and pier. The pier is seen as being significant for the future revitalisation of Southend, but it is currently deemed “the most disappointing and least value for money attraction in the town” (Pressling, 1996:9). Its potential return to its former iconic status is a very positive development. In addition, a foreshore revitalisation, beach replenishment and flood defence improvement programme is underway. Cleanliness and sea water quality have been a priority for the Council for some time, and ‘Seaside Award’ flags have flown over many of the beaches in recent
years. Blue Flag status for the beaches is a future aspiration, and may be applied for in due course.

Following a ‘Quality of Life Forum’ in 1999, Southend Council identified local community priorities for the future, which included better transport, a healthy economy, a thriving community and a greener environment. An integrated transport strategy is planned, encouraging the use of public transport, but also improving car-parking provision. Local security has been improved with the introduction of CCTV and various community safety initiatives, and consequently, a reduction in unsociable behaviour has been achieved. In accordance with Local Agenda 21, Southend has introduced other initiatives such as the Biodiversity Action Plan (including wildlife audits and the protection of Sites of Specific Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and the Green Corridors Programme and the greening of public spaces).

Many of the resort attractions have been improved significantly in recent years as the capital investment table showed earlier. Seafront gardens and many historic buildings and features have received a face-lift. Heritage Lottery Funding has already been secured for the further re-vitalisation and landscaping of some of the Cliff Gardens.

Re-invention

It is interesting to note that poor image is still cited as being one of Southend’s main barriers to further development. This is perhaps not surprising, as the Lonely Planet (2001:292) says of Southend “If you want to explore a typical, tacky English seaside resort then head for Southend-on-Sea,” and the Rough Guide (2000:446) states that Southend “has come to epitomise the downmarket English seaside resort of fish and chips, candy floss and slot machines.” One of the country’s leading women’s magazine, recently voted Southend ‘the worst resort in Britain,’ which did little to enhance Southend’s profile!

The Tourism Development Strategy and Action Plan (1996) emphasised the importance of public perception and the problem of image, which is adversely affecting the town’s ability to attract not only tourists, but also inward investment and business, which are fundamental to successful regeneration projects. The most recent draft Cultural Strategy (2001:5) refers to the need “to challenge external perceptions of Southend and ‘strike-out’ the archetypal ‘Essex man’ stereotype.” This no doubt refers to Southend’s reputation as being a centre for anti-social, aggressive drunken behaviour (Worpole, 1992; Pressling, 1996), as well as being home to the notorious ‘Essex girl’ – one of those “geographically specific, gendered stereotypes of working class people” (Keith & Pile, 1993:3). The media and a spate of joke books perpetuated the myth of the Essex girl in the 1990s. Her ‘spiritual’ home was usually thought to be towns like Southend, with their garish and kitsch array of nightclubs and nouveau-riche wine bars. The myth of the Essex girl became so widespread as to be almost a post-modern attraction in itself. However, the more discerning visitor was unsurprisingly deterred by this tarnished image! Despite its negative image the Cultural Strategy (2001) claims to want to make Southend the ‘Cultural Capital of the East of England by 2010. An ambitious
goal, but an accolade to be coveted if attained, and one which is likely to improve internal perceptions of the town, and to increase community pride.

Unfortunately, Southend’s marketing budget has traditionally been small in comparison to many comparable resorts (Pressling, 1996). However innovative and quality-orientated product development becomes, appropriate promotion of a resort is fundamental to its future success as a seaside destination, and Southend has a long way to go before its re-positioning strategy becomes effective.

Conclusion

Like many other English seaside resorts, Southend is clearly striving to diversify its economy, to focus on product innovation, and to enhance its image. Tourism is central to the regeneration process. But as stated in the ETC report, no one form of development is a panacea, as re-enforced by Pressling (1996:23):

“As the largest seaside town on the East Coast, we are not just a leisure destination but have a number of roles, as an important residential, commuter and retirement location, regional shopping centre and business centre, and as such any action plans implemented should also link with an overall economic development plan for the town, but full support for tourism and recognition of its benefits is however essential.”

Nevertheless, culture and leisure look set to play an important role in Southend’s future, both in terms of improving the quality of life of local residents and the quality of experience for Southend’s visitors. Southend cannot, perhaps, hope to compete with more environmentally attractive holiday destinations such as Bournemouth or Torbay resorts, and it arguably needs to create a more distinctive sense of place-identity like Brighton and Blackpool have done in order to differentiate it from its competitors. Its unique selling points need to be highlighted further, and the potential attraction of new tourism markets (e.g. business, youth, backpacker) perhaps warrant further investigation.

The extent to which Southend will be able to discard its traditional image of being the ‘Kiss Me Quick’ capital of Essex remains to be seen. After all, the spirit of the Essex girl lives on in the post-modern kitsch of the ever-popular Golden Mile, beach-based leisure attractions and vibrant nightlife. However, Southend has a great deal more to offer besides, a fact, which is clearly reflected in its dynamic and forward-thinking strategies for the future. Just watch this space!


Southend-on-Sea Borough Council (2001a) *Citizen’s Guide.* Southend: SBC.

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council (2001b) *Southend’s Quality of Life Plan: The First Steps.* Southend: SBC.


