

Heritage and tourism

John Nurick discusses the categories of 'heritage' and 'tourism', considers their connections, and outlines the challenges facing the heritage in an increasingly competitive destination marketplace.

We often talk of 'heritage', but to what are we specifically referring? Heritage is anything transmitted from the past, especially:

- original cultural and natural material;
- the built environment;
- the archaeological resource;
- the intangible heritage;
- the natural heritage,

that 'heritage' is perceived by our multicultural society as having a quality or significance that makes it worth preserving for its own sake and for the appreciation of current and future generations. The UK's heritage as such is a major contributor to the country's tourism industry. Again, 'tourism' needs some defining.

A tourist visit is usually defined as a trip away from the traveller's normal place of residence lasting at least 24 hours or an overnight. There can be many reasons or motivations for the visit. These are generally categorised as:

- business;
- holiday inclusive (i.e. a packaged trip);
- holiday independent;
- VFR (visiting friends and relatives);
- study;
- other (including medical visits, pilgrimages, etc).

These categories are the 'main purpose of visit'. There is nothing to preclude a business visitor spending part of a visit indulging in heritage-related activities, so all categories are relevant to the heritage. A day visit is defined as a trip away from the place of normal residence for a minimum of three hours, excluding regular trips such as to one's place of work. Extended shopping expeditions count as day visits – especially where shopping is a leisure activity rather than just a means of acquiring necessary goods. As with tourist visits, day visits may have multiple motivations.

Central role of heritage

The heritage is a very important motivator for tourism to and within the UK. In fact, one can argue that virtually all tourism in the UK is at least partly motivated by natural or cultural heritage. For instance, snowy mountains – which are undoubtedly part of the natural heritage – are an intrinsic part of even the most laddish snowboarding trip to the Cairngorms. Likewise, the 'club' scenes of cities such as Manchester – which attract weekend tourists from London – are, like it or not, expressions of the cities' cultural heritage. What this means is that it is not possible to draw a firm line between 'heritage tourism' and 'non-heritage tourism'. In general, heritage is far more

important for the success of the UK's tourism than for many of our competitor destinations, where sun, sea and sand rank very high. This can be shown through the results of the Overseas Visitor Survey. The 1996 Survey asked leisure visitors to the UK (i.e. excluding business visitors) how important certain activities in Britain were in the decision to visit the country. The enormous significance of the country's heritage in motivating tourism by overseas visitors was illustrated, with heritage being listed directly or indirectly in each answer mentioned by 4% or more of the survey's respondents.

Importance of activities in decision to come to Britain on a leisure visit

Visiting 'heritage' sites/castles/monuments/churches/etc	37%
Exploring historic/interesting towns/cities	29%
Visiting artistic/heritage exhibits (museums/art galleries/ heritage centres/etc)	29%
Attending performing arts, etc (theatre/cinema/opera/ballet)	18%
Visiting gardens	16%
Hiking/walking/rambling/orienteering	8%
Pleasure motoring	4%

Source: Overseas Visitor Survey 1996

In terms of the tourist attractions attended by all visitors, overseas and domestic, the vast majority of those which receive 10,000 or more annual visits have direct or partial relevance to our heritage. This emphasises the pivotal role played by the heritage in the UK's tourism trade.

Number of visitor attractions in the UK with 10,000 or more visits in 1998

Attraction Category	England	Scotland	Wales	N. Ireland	Total
Historic houses and monuments	448	101	38	8	595
Cathedrals & churches	185	11	4	4	204
Gardens	129	18	2	5	154
Museums & galleries	563	107	39	9	718
Wildlife attractions/zoos	126	20	9	4	159
Country parks	128	28	13	27	196
Farms	105	7	4	3	119
Leisure parks	57	1	2	0	61
Steam railways	48	2	11	0	61
Visitor centres	109	82	19	12	222
Workplaces	61	31	9	5	106
Miscellaneous attractions	171	18	26	12	227
Totals	2130	426	176	89	2821
% of attractions	76	15	6	3	

Source: Visits to Tourist Attractions 1998

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Heritage fatigue?

In the three years 1994 to 1997 visits to attractions, the majority of which are heritage-based, increased by 5.5% from 375.3 million to 395.9 million. Over the same period, visitor days increased by 10% from 5,807 million to 6,404 million. It is clear that other activities are increasing their share of visitors' time and that the attractions' share of the growing visitor cake is decreasing.

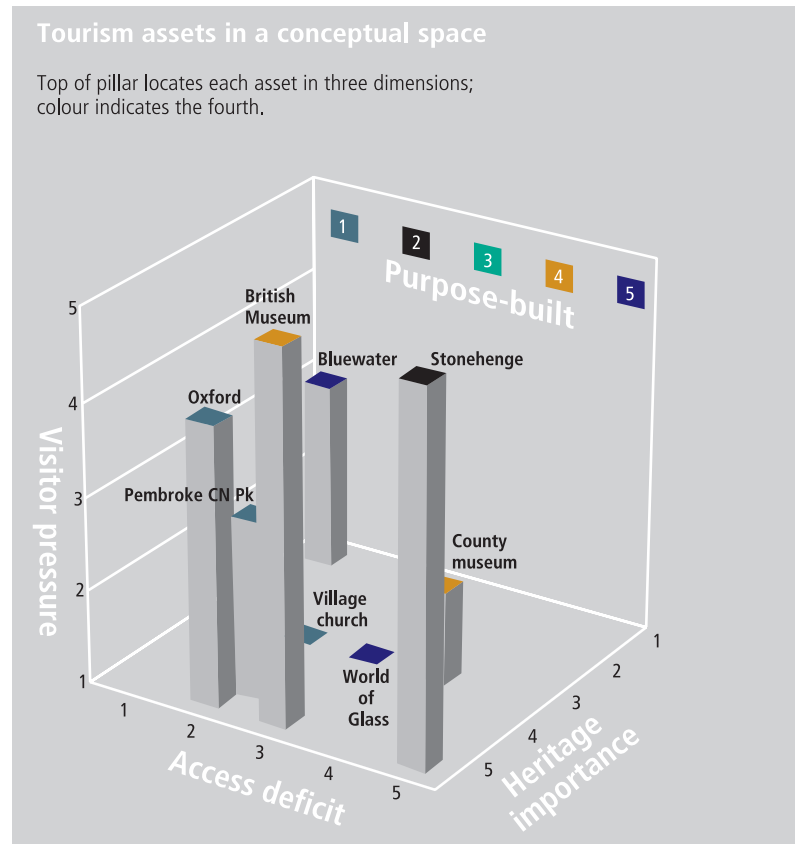
Meanwhile, the number of attractions has been increasing – by some 9.4% over the 1994-1997 period, and with many more subsequently, in part as a result of Millennium Commission funding – in short, the marketplace is becoming more competitive. Even though the visitor market has been growing overall, new, alternative activities such as leisure shopping, combined with an increase in the number of destinations on offer, mean that heritage attractions have to work harder to maintain current visitor levels, let alone increase them. This has implications for their long-term viability – and much less obviously, implications for heritage funding organisations such as the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF). Some of the work Locum Destination Consulting has recently done for the HLF has been to provide frameworks that can clarify these implications and aid the development of appropriate policies, whether by the HLF, by government, or by the tourism and heritage industries.

Hyperspatial tourism

For instance, it is possible to classify tourist destinations on several independent measures, such as:

- heritage importance;
- visitor pressure – number of visits in relation to capacity to accommodate visits without degradation;
- regional tourism – level of development of tourism in the region or locality;
- access deficit – potential for improving intellectual and physical access to the asset and knowledge about it;
- purpose-built – extent to which the asset and/or site (including interpretative facilities) was built to serve as a tourist asset.

We can compare the positioning of the assets on four of the five scales by locating them in the conceptual hyperspace illustrated in the graph below. The first three dimensions are heritage importance, 'access deficit' and 'visitor pressure', and the fourth, 'purpose-built', is indicated by colour.



This illustrates the variety of competing tourist destinations, along with the challenges confronting each of them. Stonehenge, for instance, is a heritage site of huge importance, but it suffers from access difficulties and visitor pressure. Bluewater, at the other extreme, has high numbers of visitors, who, due to good access, create only average pressure; at the same time, it has little or no heritage value. The primary purpose of this classification was to clarify the competing claims for support of hugely diverse attractions, but it can also provide input into benchmarking processes by identifying non-obvious comparators (attractions that are close together on the chart even if they appear very different on the ground).

Selected tourism assets scored on five scales

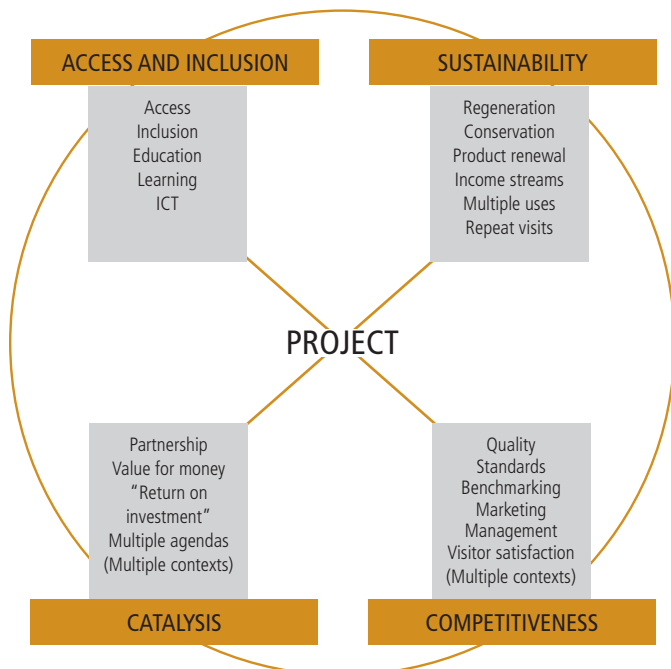
	Heritage importance	Visitor pressure	Regional tourism	Access deficit	Purpose - built?
Bluewater shopping centre	1	3	4	1	5
British Museum	5	5	5	3	4
A county museum	3	2	3	4	4
Oxford (city and colleges)	5	4	5	2	1
Stonehenge	5	5	4	5	2
A village church	3	1	2	2	1
World of Glass, St Helens	3	1	1	3	5
Pembroke Coastal National Park	4	3	3	2	1

Key: 1=least; 5=most

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Four key issues

Locum's analysis for the HLF revealed four key issues facing heritage tourism projects: *access and inclusion*, *sustainability*, *competitiveness*, and what we have called *catalysis*.



The four key issues facing heritage projects

Access and inclusion

- Access is currently the key issue as far as national government is concerned. It includes everything to do with providing wider (more people), deeper (more detail) and richer (more enjoyable) access to all aspects of the cultural and natural heritage. Access also includes access in person and remotely (via old and new media, most importantly in future via the internet and specialised broadband links), and access for the disabled – which itself includes things such as designing websites to be accessible to the print-handicapped, and access for people from other cultural backgrounds.
- *Inclusion* overlaps with access: paying due attention to social groups that might not ordinarily benefit from a heritage initiative, not least minority ethnic groups.
- *Education* means schools and colleges and all other aspects of formal education. Learning and lifelong learning refer to all aspects of informal education and learning for oneself, at all ages. Information and communications technology is of growing importance in providing wider, deeper and richer access to many aspects of the heritage and allowing it to be seen in wider and more varied contexts.

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Sustainability

Sustainability can be looked at from the outside – the whole question of 'sustainable tourism' – or the inside: how can a single attraction or other destination best assure its future?

The continued motivation of tourism by both natural and cultural heritage assets depends upon their being protected from the possible negative impacts of visitors. That is easy to say, but hard to apply in practice. The International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), however, has put forward 'seven principles of sustainable tourism'. None of these principles mentions natural or cultural heritage specifically, although they are to some extent implicit in the terms 'environment', 'community' and 'place'. Nevertheless, they are useful in encouraging explicit consideration of long-term versus short-term, of environmental (and heritage) conservation versus economic development, and of change versus stagnation.

Two of the principles read:

- The relationship between tourism and the environment must be managed so that it is sustainable in the long term. Tourism must not be allowed to damage the resource, prejudice its future enjoyment or bring unacceptable impact.
- In any location, harmony must be sought between the needs of the visitor, the place and the host community. These principles conceptualise sustainability in tourism in terms of balance between tourism and the natural environment, harmony between resident and guest.

Such principles are valuable, but destination managers need a more strategically and commercially focused approach to the question of sustainability, as shown in the diagram:

- *Regeneration*: 'heritage' should not be considered in isolation, but in the larger social and economic context.
- *Conservation*: protection of the resource against degradation, deterioration and damage.
- *Product renewal and enhancement*, in the case of many heritage-based attractions, to ensure that (at a minimum) they remain attractive and accessible, and preferably that access (of all kinds) improves over time. The concept applies not only to single attractions, but also to wider destinations such as country parks and town centres.
- *Income streams* are needed to cover the continuing costs of conservation and renewal to assure the long-term future of the resource.
- *Multiple uses* of a heritage resource and/or its associated facilities help both to bind the resource into a support network and to generate additional income streams.
- *Repeat visits* – encouraged by multiple uses and strong product renewal – are vital to many heritage destinations. Even destinations that reach maximum capacity on many days can benefit from additional repeat visits at non-peak times; there are comparatively few destinations for which this is not the case.

Catalysis

This covers the whole area of partnerships, fund-raising, and value for money.

Partnerships are key. A heritage tourism project might involve – directly – the organisation that owns or cares for the heritage asset, local government, bodies such as the HLF and English Heritage, a regional museums service, a regional development agency, the Church of England, a tourist board, private sector organisations, and voluntary organisations. Indirectly, European and international organisations might also be involved. Even small projects usually involve several organisations and benefit from an explicit partnership-building approach which may offer further longer-term benefits.

Value for money must be a major consideration in all expenditure of Lottery and public funds. The best projects are catalysts that maximise value for money by delivering multiple objectives to multiple organisations.

Return on investment is a measure of value for money. Inevitably, much or all of the 'return' from an 'investment' in the form of a grant will be hard to quantify, but nevertheless there are some practicable measures which, properly interpreted, are better than nothing.

Multiple agendas are an inevitable issue in partnerships of the kind being considered here, because no two organisations involved in a project will have precisely the same objectives.

Catalysis issues also apply in *multiple contexts*. There are local, regional, national, European and international policy and planning contexts; there is the heritage and conservation context; there is the tourism and visitor attraction context; and so on.

Competitiveness

Competitiveness is in some ways an aspect of sustainability, but it is diverse and important enough to be a key issue in itself. Important aspects include the following:

- *Quality* of the overall visitor experience (i.e. not just the individual attraction but the wider destination and the whole bundle of products and services that go to make up a visit).
- *Standards and benchmarking* which enable attractions, destinations and local or regional authorities to assess their performance on visitor satisfaction and a wide range of other measures which can feed into management and marketing to improve quality and strengthen competitiveness.
- Effective *marketing* includes, but is much more than merely, advertising and promotion. It has become essential to competitiveness in the modern visitor market, where heritage destinations face an ever wider range of competitors for the leisure pound.
- *Management* in this context includes not merely the smooth running of the operation, but requires the continual development of the organisation's human resources, processes and internal systems.
- Last but not least comes *visitor satisfaction*. In today's tourism market, *the product is experience itself*.

Like catalysis, competitiveness exists in *multiple contexts*. Each tourist destination competes with other destinations in the vicinity; with similar destinations further afield; and with other uses of people's leisure time and money. Likewise, each region or country is competing with others. And,

How can a single attraction or other destination best assure its future?

of course, every project competes with other projects for funding. At the same time, however, competitiveness must usually be built on cooperation. Destinations may be competing with each other in one context and cooperating in another. When tourists go to Portsmouth, for instance, there are several museums competing for their visits – but the same museums cooperate with each other and with other organisations to market Portsmouth as a whole. Museums may compete with each other to attract visitors while cooperating in a benchmarking programme.

Lessons for the future

As long as there are heritage destinations there will be tourists, and lots of them. But as the number of ways for people to spend their free time increases daily, competition to traditional attractions and even the natural heritage grows, potentially threatening their economic well-being. Heritage attractions are no different from other tourist destinations in that they must plan carefully for all aspects of their operation. As little as possible should be left to chance. No one can predict the future, but equally anyone can take measures to reduce uncertainty. The right advice, from external bodies and fellow destination operators alike, coupled with the right development, operational and financial planning, maximises the chance of a successful future, and is increasingly vital to a destination's prospects of support from public, private or voluntary sector funding sources.

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This article draws on a report on Heritage and Tourism commissioned by the HLF, and will be used to help formulate policy and develop understanding for potential applicants. Locum Destination Consulting has also recently advised the Heritage Lottery Fund on financial needs assessment of applicants for funding.