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A New Model to Assist in Planning for Sustainable Cultural Heritage Tourism

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ABSTRACT

A natural link exists between tourism and cultural heritage management, yet little discourse and debate occurs between them on the sustainability of heritage tourism. What also is missing is a process whereby elements of both areas can be included in the identification and actualisation of the tourism potential of cultural heritage places. This paper presents a new model that is in the process of development, but which has the potential to assist in planning for sustainable cultural heritage tourism. Future testing of the model is likely to make a significant contribution to the advancement of both disciplines and also should help break down barriers between the two. The model is a matrix into which heritage places can be classified as falling into nine general areas of suitability for tourism in terms of their market appeal and ability to withstand the impacts of visitation likely to be associated with that appeal. Copyright © 2001 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

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INTRODUCTION

Cultural tourism, of which cultural heritage tourism is part, is defined as 'visits by persons from outside the host community motivated wholly or in part by interest in historical, artistic, scientific or lifestyle/heritage offerings of a community, region, group or institution' (Silberberg, 1995, p. 361). This is a useful definition of the phenomenon as it recognises that the motivation of visitors to experience 'culture' in some way is what separates it from other forms of tourism. A wide array of not just publicly, but also privately owned cultural tourism attractions is available to visitors at most destinations. Tourism products continue to be developed, which include cultural heritage tours, heritage art galleries, museums, visitor/cultural centres, heritage trails and purpose built cultural heritage theme parks (Yale, 1991; Prentice, 1993; Swarbrooke, 1995; Walle, 1998).

The lack of effective tourism planning that

includes market appeal, economic factors and conservation policy/assessment is evident in the way many cultural heritage places are managed around the world. Such heritage places often require commodification to enhance the visitor experience and actualise the tourism potential. Ideally this should occur in a balanced way that also will conserve the cultural significance of the heritage place so that future generations have access to such non-renewable resources. Many countries have a dwindling amount of funding to put towards the management of key heritage places and therefore are receptive to new approaches to plan for commercial and conservation management of such heritage places (Jacobs and Gale, 1994; Silberberg, 1995; Walle, 1998). Even so, it is becoming increasingly important that for the survival and economic health of the tourism as well as the conservation of such non-renewable heritage places, planning for sustainability occurs.

The main objective for sustainable heritage tourism planning is to answer two questions, namely, 'which are the most appropriate cultural heritage places for development for tourism?' and 'what is the best way to manage those heritage places for sustainability?' Firstly, a model is needed that will show the relationship between commercial expectations and conservation management in deciding the tourism potential of a place. Although assigning priorities in this way may seem an obvious or banal exercise, it is one that many site developers or heritage managers still fail to undertake at strategic times in the development of a heritage attraction.

Classifying heritage places will clarify which heritage places are most appropriate for initial or further development as tourism attractions. It is proposed that it is more of a challenge for place managers and tourism operators/planners to plan and manage a heritage place for sustainable large-scale tourism than it is to do such planning for small-scale tourism. As such, it is necessary to use an audit procedure in conjunction with the model in the initial stages of planning any major development or growth of cultural heritage tourism in a region. It will encourage the development of suitable heritage places and prevent the waste of resources or stop negative impacts on unsui-

table ones misguidedly developed as major cultural heritage attractions.

CULTURAL HERITAGE MANAGEMENT AND CULTURAL HERITAGE TOURISM

It is impossible to discuss cultural heritage tourism planning without mentioning cultural heritage management. Most countries encourage the preservation of heritage as an asset for all the community. It can be used to evoke a sense of continuity of culture, enrichment of people's lives, as a link with the past and to allow society to make sense of the present. Understanding cultural heritage can be fundamental to the lives of present and future generations. It is an increasingly recognised goal for the curatorship of such assets that conservation aims to 'retain the meaning of places by keeping their cultural significance and interpreting them to people' (ICOMOS, 1998a, p. 3). However, cultural heritage management is a recent phenomenon (mainly of the last 20 years), which has tended in many countries to concentrate on the heritage 'resource' or asset as the central element in the management process. The public interpretation of cultural significance carried out for some places does not always accord much importance to the needs of the visitor and the local community (Hall and McArthur, 1993).

Most cultural heritage managers are aware that cultural heritage and cultural heritage values are therefore a cultural construct. Accordingly, it might be said that 'culture is dynamic and this affects cultural heritage' and philosophies for management of such heritage may change over time (Pearson *et al.*, 1998, p. 12). Debate in many countries about the nature of such changes and their impact on planning for sustainability is only just beginning (Hall and McArthur, 1998; Sofield and Li, 1998; Sofield, 1999; Shiren, 1999).

Cultural heritage tourism also has attracted debate in academic tourism circles (see, for example, the special issue of the *Annals of Tourism Research* **23** (2), 1996; Dodson and Clarke, 1999). Walle (1998, p. 80) has commented that cultural heritage tourism has to go beyond this type of debate and include perspectives from individuals skilled in stra-

tegic planning, negotiation and policy forma-tion. He sees it as being in flux and subject to stress as it is caught in a transition from public sector to private sector identification.

Cultural heritage tourism also has been the subject of growing interest by peak global organisations (WTO, 1995; ICOMOS, 1998b; UNESCO, 1999) and governments (e.g. Tour-ism Canada, 1991; ATSIC and the Australian Office of National Tourism, 1997; Williams and Stewart, 1998). Such organisations see plan-ning as a key issue and are seeking to encourage some structure and ethics in cultur-al heritage tourism development.

Ideally, cultural heritage tourism should bring economic benefits to host communities and provide a significant means and motiva-tion for them to manage their cultural heritage and continuing traditions. Also, co-operation between the stakeholders is a basic necessity for a sustainable tourism industry, that is, an industry that supports the protection of cul-tural heritage for future generations of the host community and visitors (ICOMOS, 1998b). Achieving this ideal has proven elusive in many situations, as large-scale tourism and cultural heritage management objectives are often felt to be incompatible (Berry, 1994; Jacobs and Gale, 1994; Boniface, 1998; Jansen-Verbeke, 1998). Indeed, in many such in-stances, a lack of balance between short-term commercial concerns and long-term goals of sustainability has caused a heritage place's cultural significance to be altered or ignored.

Cultural significance of a place can be social, educational, historical, scientific, aesthetic or a combination of several or all of these percep-tions. The cultural significance of a place for a community is evoked by its tangible and intangible cultural values. A heritage place under pressure from heavy visitation, with little attention to its conservation management, will suffer physical damage to its tangible cultural values. Poor planning, however, also can compromise intangible cultural values. Aspects of its history, for instance, that should have been emphasised to encourage a proper understanding of its cultural significance can be submerged by the need to present the place only as a form of entertainment (Urry, 1990; Daniel, 1996). Often the problem lies in the way such values are treated by the standardi-

sation of visitor experiences (Dodson and Clarke, 1999; Henderson, 1999).

On the other hand, market appeal may be sacrificed when a management attitude exists that any commodification of a heritage place is seen as a corrupting influence (Hovinen, 1995; Fyall and Garrod, 1996). Various authorities have argued that a compromise of this kind is not necessary (Moscardo and Pearce, 1986; Hall and McArthur, 1993; Silberberg, 1995; Pearson and Sullivan, 1995; Dodson and Clarke, 1999; Henderson, 1999). However, an effective means of integrating cultural heritage management and tourism development goals is rarely achieved, particularly in the crucial early planning phase where it is most needed.

MODEL

There is a two-way relationship that exists between the key elements of a cultural heritage place and its tourism potential. On one hand, is its cultural integrity or robusticity (the physi-cal remains and their conservation status), and on the other hand, the commercial factors associated with transforming a heritage place into a cultural heritage tourism attraction. Ideally, a mutually beneficial relationship can exist, but in practice there is often a trade-off that can affect either the conservation of cultural values or enhancement of market appeal. The best way to avoid such a situation is to identify in advance heritage places with the best potential to both withstand heavy visitation while appealing highly to tourists.

In planning and developing cultural heri-tage places as tourism attractions, successful integration of cultural heritage management and tourism concerns should recognise that there will be different priorities for each. Although this seems obvious it does not always occur. A process is needed that illuminates the priorities clearly, which then can be used as a guide for conservation and visitor management policies for successfully developing appropriate places into attractions.

Heritage places can become different types of attractions and can be assessed as occurring along a management priority continuum (see Figure 1). For instance, heritage places that require strict attention to conservation mea-sures to reduce visitation impacts or heritage
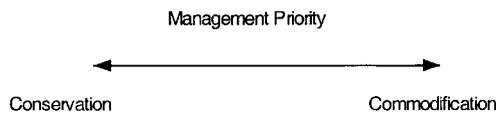
Management Priority

Conservation   Commodification

Figure 1. Continuum for management priorities in planning a cultural heritage attraction

Figure 2. Matrix indicating the relationship between the continuums of robusticity and market appeal

places that should not be opened to tourism will occur near the conservation end. Alternatively, heritage places that are found to have a higher priority for tourism promotion and place interpretation than conservation measures will occur at the opposite end. Inevitably there will be some heritage places that need attention to both and these will appear in the middle of the continuum.

This relationship between cultural heritage management and tourism development can be explored further by considering it as a matrix. Within the matrix, heritage places can be plotted based on their appeal to tourists and their robusticity or ability to withstand high levels of visitation (see Figure 2). The matrix presents both elements of the two-way relationship as dynamic and as such could be shown to represent two continua. One continuum would be that associated with the conservation status or robusticity of the place, and is of greatest concern to cultural heritage managers with long-term conservation of cultural values in mind. The other continuum would express the worth of the heritage place as a tourism attraction and its market appeal, which is of more interest to the tourism sector.

According to certain criteria (still to be developed), each heritage place to be assessed can be plotted in the matrix with regard to its position in relation to each continuum (see Figure 2). It then could be linked to an appropriate overall tourism development and conservation management policy. The priorities for the management (as in Figure 1) would be set by where the heritage place occurs in the matrix. For instance, heritage places with high market appeal and high to moderate robusticity (in squares A1 and A2) are ideally suited for significant tourism activity. They would require minimal to moderate conservation measures to protect the cultural values from the impact of heavy visitation. Such heritage places also could be considered to be peak
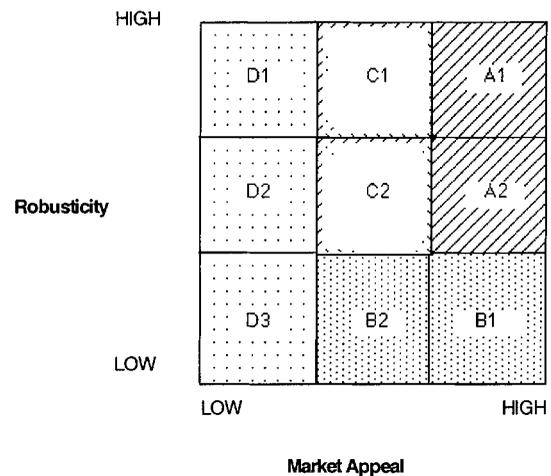
options for tourism development as key attractions in a region.

Heritage places falling into squares B1 and B2 have high to moderate market appeal but low robusticity. The management challenge here is to ensure that visitation does not damage the cultural values of the place. In some cases, such heritage places would have visitation restricted or discouraged, because of the fragility of the place fabric and setting, possible public liability problems or danger to the fabric associated with modifying the place for tourism infrastructure. In other cases, it may be possible to put conservation and visitor management measures in place that will make tourism sustainable at these heritage places. Another option is to provide an alternative for visitors to a well known but fragile place nearby, as has been done by the reconstruction of rock paintings at a visitors centre near the original Pleistocene location at Lascaux in France. Needless to say, fragile heritage places are on the high end of priorities for investment in conservation measures, unless commodification can include such conservation measures (as in the Lascaux example).

The heritage places in squares C1 and C2 would have high to moderate robusticity, but only moderate market appeal. The management issues associated with such heritage places relate to optimising market appeal while maintaining or improving visitor man-

agement and conservation programmes. Such heritage places could continue as secondary attractions or more investment could be put into improving their market appeal to become primary attractions in a region if the tourism potential is there.

The heritage places falling into the low market appeal side of the matrix (D1–D3) would be unlikely to attract significant visitation no matter how much they are admired by their owner or place manager. The key management issue for these heritage places is that they are being preserved for reasons other than tourism, such as research potential.

CONCLUSION

The model described above is, however, yet to be finalised. It is possible that political considerations and community concerns may still have to play a role somewhere. Such underlying issues probably will need to be acknowledged as part of the way priorities are likely to be awarded.

Further research about to be carried out into this topic will develop and test a set of criteria for assessing heritage places for placement within the proposed matrix. As a methodological procedure is required to apply the criteria, an auditing process also will be tested on a sample of heritage places within a region. The efficacy of both the model and the auditing process in integrating the dual elements of cultural heritage management and tourism also will be under examination during this research. It is envisaged that the results of this work will be published at the completion of the project.

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