

Putting Down Routes: An Examination of Local Government Cultural Policy Shaping the Development of Heritage Trails

Debi Hayes

Principal Lecturer in Arts Management

Nicola MacLeod

Senior Lecturer in Cultural Tourism

The Business School, University of Greenwich

Debi Hayes is Principal lecturer in Arts Management and has research interests in audience development and cultural policy and strategy.

Nicola MacLeod is Senior Lecturer in Cultural Tourism and has research interests in landscapes of leisure and tourism.

Abstract

This paper explores the significance of trails within local government cultural strategies by presenting the results of an audit of 1000 trails, content analysis of local cultural strategies and a series of interviews with local government cultural officers. It highlights the growing sophistication of trails as flexible and multi-faceted products promising an array of social, environmental, cultural and economic benefits. However, key issues emerge as challenges for local government cultural officers. These include the need for a realistic assessment of the relative importance of competing rationales, the design of methodologies to enable evidence based policy making and more effective engagement with commercial organizations

Keywords

Heritage trails, local government, cultural policy, strategy

Introduction

This paper examines the need for a more thorough analysis of local government cultural policy for the planning and development of heritage trails in England. Heritage trails have been a familiar recreational and tourism product in the UK for a number of years but have received very little attention both from national policy makers and academic researchers. Trails are highly diverse and there is a trails continuum ranging from the very simple to the highly sophisticated each type displaying their own individual characteristics. Across this continuum, trails have been found to be flexible and useful tools for economic and social regeneration and environmental management. However despite their potential, there is no overarching strategy or coordinating body overseeing trails in the UK unlike, for example, the US, Australia or New Zealand. The approach to trails strategy and development within the UK is highly fragmented and the current provision of over 1,200 trails has developed in an ad hoc manner with local authorities and their partners working in isolation to use trails as a means of satisfying a diverse number of cultural policy objectives.

This paper explores the significance of trails within local government cultural strategies by presenting the results of a trails audit, content analysis of Local Cultural Strategy documentation and a series of interviews with local government cultural officers. In particular the paper will address the cultural rationales for trails development, the benefits that trails may afford and the levels of monitoring and evaluation that take place after trails have been launched. The paper offers recommendations for a more coordinated and strategic approach which will enable local authorities to use trails to their best advantage.

The Evolution of the Heritage Trail

The heritage trail is a means of organizing the visitor experience by providing a purposeful, interpreted route that can be followed by foot, by car, bicycle or horseback and:

“that draws on the natural or cultural heritage of an area to provide an educational experience that will enhance visitor enjoyment. It is marked on the ground or on maps, and interpretive materials is normally available to guide the visitor.”
(Silbergh et al. 1994:123)

Heritage trails, as defined above, are a relatively new phenomenon in the UK although there is a long history of what Goodey describes as ‘informed urban walking’ (Goodey 1975:29) and the very popular illustrated *Picturesque Tours of England and Scotland* ‘led visitors on a pre-ordained route through places of literary and artistic association’ in the 1700s (Aitchison et al 2002:79). Such information was provided by the afficianado as a guide for the interested public and following such routes was a clear indicator of taste and class. These leisured visitors to the countryside were engaging their mind and their artistic sensibilities and turning the act of walking into an acceptable recreational pursuit. Thus, ‘the practice of walking long distances was liberated from its former connotations of need, homelessness and suspicion of criminality’ (Ibid:53).

The practice of informed walking is therefore certainly not new but as Goodey suggested in 1975, the interest that trails aroused within conservation bodies in that decade was a new development. We might now add in our present century a whole range of additional organizations, including local authorities that are currently interested in the benefits that heritage trails may bring. Trails can assist in increasing access to the countryside, in marketing an under-visited destination, in easing congestion in popular sites or in interpreting a variety of historic periods or themes within a region. First appearing in the UK as nature trails in the 1960s-70s (DART 1978), the trail quickly developed to encompass a range of different heritage themes including architecture, famous people, local industries and wildlife. Currently, the UK has a plethora of trails covering such diverse themes as witchcraft, the fishing industry, the Vikings, the life and work of Thomas Hardy and the history of cinema. Ongoing research by the authors has highlighted the fact that the majority of these trails have been developed within partnerships, usually led by local authority cultural, leisure, recreation and tourism departments. Partners include tourism organizations, local development agencies, conservation bodies, civic societies, local history groups and the operators of attractions that form part of the trail. European funding is also a fairly common feature within partnerships.

Rationales for Trails Development

The level of trail development in the UK suggests that these products are perceived as being useful tools in aiding local authorities and partners in satisfying their policy objectives. Trails are flexible and multi-faceted products and their benefits have been categorized as social and physical; environmental and cultural; and economic (Government of South Australia 2002).

The social and physical benefits of trails highlight the sense of shared experience and purpose that visitors enjoy whilst following a trail. Trails can also create or increase a sense of local pride when visitors are attracted to communities through the development of a trail. The health benefits of walking or cycling trails are clear and being increasingly promoted. The authors have found a number of trails in England that have been developed with health being the predominant theme. Information on the cardio-vascular and fat-burning benefits of following the trails are included within the interpretive materials as an added incentive for users.

Trails can satisfy conservation objectives by routing visitors away from congested or sensitive areas and consequently contributing to effective visitor management in destinations. Those trails which encourage visitors to walk or which are connected to public transportation will reduce the environmental impacts associated with car usage. Through interpretation, trail users can also learn about environmental management and their contribution to this (Weaver 1995).

The economic benefits to be gained from trail development are linked predominantly to their tourism potential. In a survey of Scottish trails developers, Leask and Barriere discovered that an important motivation for the creation of trails was economic development: encouraging longer stays, attracting more visitors, progressing product development and spreading visitation across regions are all cited as benefits (Leask and Barriere 2000:A117). In their study of the economic impacts of the Path to Progress trail, exploring the industrial heritage of South Western Pennsylvania, Strauss and Lord present some interesting data on the nature of trail users. The launch of the Path to Progress trail, which linked a series of already existing attractions, did not increase the numbers of visitors overall at the sites but did increase the proportion of non-resident visitors and hence, considerably raised the additional spend in the region (Strauss and Lord 2001). The nature of the trail also promotes strategic alliances between service providers and tourism sites thus increasing the income generated within regions and encouraging collaboration (Telfer 2001).

The contribution that trails development makes to satisfying cultural policy is the main focus of this paper and it is clear that trails can offer a number of important cultural benefits. The natural or cultural heritage of a region is conveyed through the trail interpretation thus contributing to a deeper knowledge of place for visitor and the community. Trails can increase community ownership and help to foster or strengthen cultural identity (Cheung 2003, Patullo 1997). In culturally diverse regions, trails 'have the ability to begin stitching these groups together through a common goal of creating a neighbourhood amenity' (Ryan 1993:7). The current emphasis on access and social inclusion have added further impetus to trail development.

Trails therefore have a significant presence in the UK and demonstrate much potential as tools for social, cultural and economic regeneration and environmental management. However, despite this potential, there is no overall strategy for the planning, development and evaluation of trails in England. A number of authors have commented on this lack of strategy over the past three decades (Goodey 1975, Silbergh et al 1996, Leask and Barriere 2000) and recommend a more coordinated approach to trails planning and management.

Management and Evaluation

The literature indicates that the most significant management challenges associated with trails are in the lack of ownership (Leask and Barriere 2000), the coordination of a variety of stakeholders (Government of South Australia 2002), the management of conflict between different user groups (Murray and Graham 1997) and the monitoring and evaluation of trails (Leask and Barriere 2000, Government of South Australia 2002). There are a number of mechanisms for monitoring such as simply counting trails users (Leask and Barriere 2000), self-registration schemes (Weaver 1995) or the use of certificates or passports to record usage along trails (Murray and Graham 1997) and the authors have found a number of individual trails that encourage feedback and evaluation from users, for example The Hampshire Millennium Pilgrims' Trail includes a reply-paid questionnaire within the trail information pack. These methods, however, are infrequently utilised in the UK and developers and managers are generally unsure how and why their trails are being used.

It is within this context of uncoordinated provision, lack of evaluation and multiplicity of rationales that the local authorities interviewed for this paper develop and promote their trails. The following section explores the policy context and the role of local authorities within trail development in more detail.

Local Authority Cultural Policies

Over the past fifteen years two interrelated trends have become evident in UK cultural policy. Firstly, there has been a shift from the supply-led preoccupation through the provision of cultural amenities to a demand-led approach that emphasizes diversity and democracy, but above all is concerned with developing opportunities for access. Secondly, successive governments have sought an acceptable rationale for the public support of culture and have found solace in justifying their expenditure using instrumental outcomes including, social integration, regeneration and economic development. Bianchini (1993) suggests that this has led to an expansion of the cultural remit, shaping planning at both national and local levels. The cultural planning perspective makes the case for cultural resources to be used within the wider context of strategic development in order to achieve social, economic, environmental benefits for communities and places. This assumes a broad set of stakeholder relationships, emphasizes a culturally sensitive approach and uses longitudinal methodologies for auditing cultural resources and their impacts (Gilmore, forthcoming).

In 2000, the Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) produced the guidance document *Creating Opportunities* for local authorities, which, although not a statutory duty,

recommended the development of Local Cultural Strategies (LCS) within a two year time-frame. It advocated the cultural planning perspective, with local authorities bringing together external partners (public, private and voluntary) and taking the lead in cross sector working to deliver against thematic outcomes that enhance community well-being. The guidance encouraged local authorities to adopt a broad, inclusive definition of culture and highlighted the themes of quality, raising standards, job creation in the creative and cultural sector and broadening access to cultural activities (Gilmore, forthcoming). Formal strategies have been developed by 70% of all local authorities (Audit Commission 2002/03), spanning the tiers of local government (district/ borough, metropolitan / unitary, county and regional). They provide a formal, public statement of intent that can be used to lever funding and are linked to the Best Value performance management framework for evaluating outcomes. The BV114 indicator specifically examines the scope of the strategy (arts, heritage, sports, tourism, and outdoor recreation); external involvement of public, private and voluntary sector partners; the consultation process; links with other corporate plans and policy documents; action plans; arrangements for monitoring and review (ODPM 2003). Local government modernization also emphasized the need for evidence based policy, which Gilmore (forthcoming) suggests was a challenge for cultural services as reliable data was in short supply.

In this climate dominated by outputs and performance indicators, local authorities have a preference for solutions that demonstrate 'joined up practice' i.e. those that fulfill a number of diverse policy outcomes simultaneously and cross departmental boundaries. It is no wonder then, that local authorities have utilized trails for delivering against these complex agendas, since they are highly flexible and cost effective tools that can be judiciously designed to achieve a wide variety of social; cultural; environmental and economic objectives.

Research Methodology and Findings

The authors are in the process of auditing and mapping trails within England and have identified in excess of 1000 ranging from those that focus on tangible elements such as the built and natural heritage to those that are more intangible, celebrating the identity and distinctiveness of place and communities, through the telling of stories. This process has revealed that local authorities are the dominant providers and managers of trails - it is estimated that they have involvement in the provision of over 90% of those audited. Increasingly they are catalysts for trail development, occupying a central role in the coordination and management of provision, utilizing their local knowledge and community links to deliver appropriate sets of expertise for specific projects.

To explore trails as tools for achieving policy outcomes, the research methodology initially involved web-based searching of local authority LCS for hits on 'trails'. This revealed the involvement of a variety of departments and council officers in their provision. For the most part these officers had responsibility for tourism, leisure and culture and to a lesser extent had expertise in environmental planning and economic regeneration. Rarely are trails the singular responsibility of one department or directorate but instead a shared tool for realizing a multiplicity of outcomes, which suggests that joined-up thinking is operating in practice. Further investigation of LCS reveals that trails are initiated and owned by a lead department that usually reflects the overall priorities of a specific authority. For example an area already dependent on tourism is more likely to focus on the provision of trails as an opportunity for creating new tourism products and a device for linking and

marketing diverse leisure attractions, so as to achieve greater footfall in key locations or longer stays in the area. By contrast, a region with a disproportionate number of excluded social groups and declining employment in traditional industries are more likely to develop trails to promote social inclusion or as a device for building pride in shared community identities.

Content analysis of 33 LCS documents was undertaken. The objectives were twofold: to explore the national and global policy initiatives driving the development of trails and to understand the rationale supporting trail provision.

Figure 1 (appendix 1) illustrates policy drivers grouped under four headings: social; economic; environmental; cultural. The authors recognize that these are not a fully comprehensive listing of policy drivers but are a sample to suggest the range and diversity of national and global initiatives and key documents that shape trail development. These are superimposed on the local government context, which highlights the importance of partnerships, cross-sector working, Best Value indicators and the diversity of funding sources used for trail development and improvement.

The table below groups the rationales identified in the LCS under the headings: social; cultural, economic and environmental, reflecting the nature of the service objectives. Locating rationales under a discrete objective could be misleading, since in reality they overlap. However, it is useful because it reflects the involvement and interests of the directorates within the authority and demonstrates the commitment of local authorities to the pervasive cultural planning perspective.

Fig. 2 - Trail Objectives and Rationale

Social	Cultural	Economic	Environmental
Life-long learning	Preservation & memory	To attract funding and build stakeholder network	Rural renaissance / sustainability
Community engagement / participation	Celebratory	Destination image	Spatial planning and monitoring
Social inclusion	Identity	New visitor attractions and recreational opportunities	Visitor management
Widening access	Linking cultural attractions	Branding / marketing diverse attractions	Conservation built and natural heritage
Health / safety benefits	Context for the display of public art	Regeneration	Protection (wildlife; landscape; archaeology)
	Story telling		

The LCS revealed that trails usually have complex rationale and contribute to more than one objective. For example South Gloucestershire Council justified the development of the Thornbury Millennium Trail on the basis of the rationale outlined below:

1. To explore, understand, record and celebrate character and diversity **(Cultural)**
2. To contribute to the perception of South Gloucestershire as being a good place **(Economic)**
3. To encourage, promote and provide sustainable physical and intellectual access to the heritage **(Cultural/Social)**
4. To develop a sense of cohesion and community identity **(Cultural)**
5. To value everyone's heritage **(Cultural/Social)**
6. To support and build on heritage activities undertaken by voluntary organizations **(Social)**
7. To ensure that links between heritage and tourism are exploited **(Economic)**
8. To encourage sustainable tourism **(Environmental)**
9. To celebrate and promote heritage in new and imaginative ways. **(Cultural)**

(South Gloucestershire Council 2001)

The rationales have been mapped against the objectives in Figure 1, to show their range and complexity. There is no indication given as to their relative importance, consequently, it is difficult to see how an interdisciplinary team can employ resources and develop appropriate strategies to realize these goals.

25 semi-structured interviews were undertaken with cultural officers from local authorities representing all tiers of local government, who have responsibility for contributing to the development of LCS and the implementation and management of trails. The objectives were to:

1. Build up typologies of trail provision
2. Explore trail development: key drivers and future prospects
3. Identify arrangements for cross-sector and partnership involvement in trail provision
4. Arrangements and methodologies for monitoring and evaluation

Trail Typologies

From the audit and interviews it is apparent that trails vary in terms of scale, presentation format, governance, purpose, usage, partnerships and management, development, costs and evaluation methodologies. To illustrate this, trails can be viewed on a continuum ranging from simple trails to sophisticated trails. Fig 3 highlights the characteristics of each and demonstrates the diversity of trails within the sector.

Fig. 3 Characteristics of Trail Typologies

Criteria	Simple	Standard	Sophisticated
Scale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small, discrete area of coverage • Specific theme • One-off 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discrete area of coverage • One or part of a portfolio of trails • Could encompass a number of themes or sub-themes probably as a part of the portfolio • Linked to TIC, museum, visitor centre or civic amenity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large scale or network encompassing sub-trails and attractions • Closely linked to other trails and tourism attractions • Branded trails with common identity
Presentation format	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Virtual (leaflet or website based) • Limited promotion, heavily reliant on word of mouth • Leaflet produced and printed in-house • Leaflet black and white • Website accessed through third party • Interpretation, largely text based • Often hand illustrated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Virtual although may have some limited signage • Promoted through TIC and other cultural/tourism attractions • Glossy leaflets using full colour • Leaflets and website may incorporate visual interpretative devices e.g. photography and illustration • Dedicated web site 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Virtual and physical presence • Heavy promotional activity through a range of media • Guide book • Full colour • Branding linked to signage and interpretative devices • Wide range of interpretative devices • Website with extensive links • Professional designers and interpretative consultants used • Dedicated visitor centres

Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Named individual • Local authority ranger service, heritage/museum officer • Historical or Civic Society • No formal governance structure, decisions made when necessary • Parish and District councils 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent trust or small consortia, usually led by the local authority representatives • Expertise co-opted when appropriate • Evidence of formal record keeping • All tiers of local government 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dedicated trail manager, possibly with a remit that extends across a number of trails • Defined skill sets and expertise • Clear reporting structures and responsibilities • All tiers of local government and national agencies
Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific benefits • Social and community focus • Limited rationale and range of outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mixed benefits • Integrated rationales 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primarily environmental and economic benefits relating to tourism impacts • Social, community, cultural benefits are secondary • Complex rationale and range of outcomes
Usage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discrete community groups e.g. schoolchildren • Local • Low visitor numbers • May be seasonal instigated by promotions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broader range of appeals • Local and possibly national tourists • Likely to be year round • Secondary attraction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wide range of users reflecting rationale and benefits • Primary emphasis on expanding tourism (regional; national; international) • Primary tourist attraction • High awareness among gatekeepers • High visitor numbers

Partnerships and Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small number of partners, if any • Volunteers and enthusiasts involved • Informal relationships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average 5 partners and funding agencies • Primarily regional partners although some national representation • Formal relationship • Partners acknowledged • Local authority range of expertise involved • Local authority is likely to be the lead partner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large number of partners and funding agencies • National and international funding agencies • Professional expertise brought in • Formal relationships defined by contractual obligations • Acknowledged on documentation
Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead times up to 1 year • Ad hoc 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead times 1 - 3 years • Single phase 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead times in excess of 3 years • Multi phased
Costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimal budget, below £2,000 • Reliance on volunteer time • Staff time usually not costed • Often self financing through sale of leaflet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget up to £25,000 (LHI maximum) • Capital costs, management costs absorbed in other budgets • Typical sources of funding Local Heritage Initiative • One-off grants • Often a discrete part of a larger bid 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large capital and management budgets • National and International funding including SRB and EU Structural Funds • Examples: Hadrian's Wall Trail £6m Mineral Heritage Tramways Project £6m
Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rudimentary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rudimentary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited

Trail Development

There has been considerable expansion of trails during the last three years due in part to the desire of local authorities and their communities to mark the millennium, celebrating the distinctive identities and heritage of their regions. The impetus for this was the funding available to communities through the National Lottery: River Lune Millennium Trail, Hawes 2000 Mosaic Walk and the Christchurch Millennium Trail are just a few examples. Whilst it is unlikely that this growth trajectory will continue to be as marked, respondents consider that the number of trails is likely to increase further as they are now perceived as an established tool for delivering integrated cultural, community, environmental and economic outcomes. They suggested that their priority will be to maximize the potential of existing trails by upgrading provision and enhancing marketing to ensure that their potential for achieving local government priorities is realized.

Cultural officers identify access, life-long learning and social inclusion as the most important rationales for trail provision. Interpretation can be tailored to specific user groups and thematic storytelling can stimulate interest. Cultural attractions are often incorporated on the route and respondents perceive that this enhances their accessibility.

Respondents identified two key areas of development reflecting current strategic priorities of local authorities. These are trails that focus on children, families and young people and those that encourage walking and have obvious health benefits. Chester City Council recognizing the gap in provision for family friendly trails has recently developed provision targeted in this way. Their Gargoyle Trail encourages children to identify gargoyles carved in the medieval and Victorian eras and to compare them with contemporary manifestations on recent building within the city walls. The trail leaflet designed for 6-12 age group, incorporates a quiz, historical and architectural information, gargoyles to color and a competition to design your own gargoyle. Bolton City Council has developed a similar approach for their Elephant Trail, however these are rare examples since most trails are developed with adults in mind, whether they be visitors or local communities. Local Government is tasked with developing strategies to enhance the health of their communities and trails are perceived as an excellent mechanism for achieving this. The emphasis on purposeful walking or cycling is attractive to many people who would not engage in traditional fitness regimes, because they offer additional benefits such as learning more about heritage and their environment. Local authorities are approaching this in two ways: either through the development of new health trails which provide options in terms of terrain and levels of difficulty or by repackaging existing trails to emphasize health dimensions. Whatever the approach, these trails typically provide the user with information on calories expended, general fitness and lifestyle advice and are often promoted under GP referral schemes.

The economic benefits of tourism are also a major driver. In traditional tourism destinations, local authorities are often seeking to add value through the development of additional attractions to encourage longer stays in the area and to differentiate their core product. The Forest of Dean, for example, is already popular because of the natural landscape and the variety of wildlife. However, the council, keen to attract new and younger visitors has developed a contemporary Sculpture Trail in partnership with the Forestry Commission. Similarly, the Kent Maritime Heritage Trail is a large-scale project following a 325 mile tour of Kent, Medway and Nord-Pas de Calais coastline, highlighting sites of seafaring heritage using a virtual trail format, aimed at car users. The purpose is three-fold: to unite disparate towns and sites through the development of a coherent and enticing story; to increase the volume of domestic and international visitors and encourage longer stays in the region; to use a proportion of the funding to enhance heritage attractions in the area.

Newcastle City Council has invested heavily in regeneration that has resulted in an expansion of visitor numbers. In order to manage the flow and improve the visitor experience they have developed the Grainger Town Project, which is an industrial heritage trail situated in the north of the city, an area not usually visited by tourists. This will extend the boundaries of the city in the mind of the tourist and provide additional attractions.

Many non-traditional urban and city locations are attempting to establish their credibility and reinvent themselves as sophisticated short stay destinations. Trail products have been developed as a tactic for transforming destination image. This is exemplified in north-west England, the traditional manufacturing heartland with the development of the Bradford Sculpture Trail, the Burnley Public Art Trail and Bolton's Cultural Loop.

Trails are becoming increasingly sophisticated, often developed as a part of regeneration schemes or 'packaged' to deliver additional tourism revenue. Respondents suggested that this driver will increase trail professionalism in terms of presentation, marketing, management and evaluation. Local authorities are responsible for developing a unique selling proposition for their region and sophisticated trail development can help to achieve this. An explicit aim of the £6 million Mineral Tramways Heritage Project based in Cornwall, is to develop a network of trails linking key attractions and locations in order to sustain their bid for designation as a World Heritage Site.

Local authorities are conscious of serving local communities through the development of trails. They may focus on the issue of contested identity (Jewish Trails in Liverpool and Manchester); as a device for delivering life-long learning (Victorian Trail Watford); or as an opportunity for engaging communities as partners in the development of trails (Fenny Stratford Town Trail). The Jewish Trails explore the emergence of the Jewish community within these cities and highlight their contribution to shaping the political, cultural and economic spheres. The Victorian Trail in Watford is a simple but evolving product, designed in response to requests from local teachers and community groups who were keen to explore the Victorian architectural heritage of the town. A leaflet with map and interpretation linked to museum exhibits and the national curriculum key stages was produced within 6 weeks. The community experience of preparing and developing the trail can be as important as the finished product as the example from Fenny Stratford illustrates. The local historical society lobbied the council for a Heritage Trail and provided research to underpin its development. Schools were involved in design, photography and undertook a social reminiscence project that was interpreted in the trail leaflet. Subsequently students undertaking National Vocational Qualifications designed and produced the leaflet and website.

Environmental drivers will continue to be important in the development of trails particularly as devices for visitor management, conservation and protection. They often feature in Local Agenda 21 planning documents and specific funding is available to support these initiatives. These aspects were the primary considerations underpinning the development of the Hadrian's Wall National Trail.

Partnerships and Cross Sector Working

Simple, low budget trails are often developed exclusively by the cultural officers or in partnership with local voluntary groups such as civic or local history societies and the museums service. It was acknowledged that cross sector working is essential for the development of standard and sophisticated trials since these require interdisciplinary expertise possibly involving planners and environmental specialists. Cultural officers are

highly experienced in cross sector working because this has become the primary mechanism for sustaining discretionary cultural services. It is difficult to ascertain the degree of cross sector working since this definition is dependent upon the structure of a council's services. In some cases all or most of the relevant skill sets will be under one directorate e.g. Leisure Services, whereas, in other councils this expertise is dissipated across a number of directorates. Regardless, the emphasis on joined up provision has resulted in a more coordinated approach to trail development and respondents could cite many examples of cross sector involvement. However, this does not necessarily result in a truly holistic approach, since the directorate responsible for trail initiation will exert a strong influence on the shape and style of provision. This is evident in the philosophies, lexicon and priorities shaping the trail's specification and approach to implementation. For example outdoor recreation is often located with the environmental and planning service and their remit can dominate the offer with the heritage and interpretative dimensions becoming a secondary consideration. Cultural officers are then called upon to 'service' the development of a specific element of trail provision rather than contributing to the overall concept. This indicates that the cultural planning perspective is not as widespread in practice as the theory might suggest.

The strategic development of trails and other cultural services across the tiers of local government is variable in practice, with some regions or county councils demonstrating a highly integrated approach, these include Cornwall, Kent and Cheshire County Councils. From analysis of the cultural strategies produced by Cornwall and Kent County Councils and their respective tiers of local government, it is evident that both have demonstrated leadership, through the development of common rationale for trails and a coordinated approach to the implementation of projects within their areas. Cheshire County Council undertakes promotion of trails, providing an umbrella branding and glossy guidebooks for walking, cycling and car trails. It also provides expertise and best practice advice on trail development to the other tiers of government.

Local authorities have developed close working relationship with many public sector and not profit agencies and these partnerships are critical to the development, funding and management of trails. Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) were mentioned by over half of the respondents as partners with a particular interest in regeneration and tourism issues, who provide funding for standard and sophisticated trails. By contrast none of the respondents identified Regional Cultural Consortia as partners and these agencies will be the focus of future research. Specialists such as the Countryside Agency and the Forestry Commission are of significance, because they have responsibility for national trails and contribute extensively to those managed by local authorities and trusts.

Local government cultural officers have become expert in identifying sources of funding and delivering projects that meet a funder's criteria, but also achieve the outcomes required by the authority. Respondents recognized that trails are highly flexible tools in this respect, and they stressed that the nature and scope of the trails developed in the future will mirror the funding available. Those developing health trails are able to draw down funding from the local health authority and national sources. Similarly, Thurrock Council is in the process of developing three trails that are funded by the Landfill Tax Credit Scheme, which requires that the trails are located within a specified proximity to a land fill site. Surprisingly there were no examples of trails funded through 'planning gain', (this is the mechanism by which local authorities grant planning consent on the understanding that the applicant finances or contributes to a socially worthwhile project). This must, however, be a potential source of funding in the future.

The major sources of funding are Heritage Lottery Fund, Single Regeneration Budgets, Regional Development Agencies and a variety of EC structural and specialist project

funds. Simple trails are often seed funded by the local authority and subsequently costs are recovered through the sale of maps and leaflets.

Sponsorship of trails is virtually nonexistent and most respondents had not considered this as an option. Analysis of 1,000 trail brochures collected as a part of the audit revealed only one major sponsor, Timberland (an outdoor clothing manufacturer), who provide funding for the Forestry Commission trails and receive acknowledgement in the form of co-branding. Some isolated examples were also noted, but these were local arrangements such as Holiday Inn Windsor and Maidenhead who sponsor the Maidenhead Trail and the Chiltern Way trail leaflet funded by the Buckinghamshire Building Society. Two pub trails (funded by the local authorities and European projects) provide detailed histories and promotion for pubs on route, yet there is no evidence of the pubs or breweries contributing to the costs of producing these leaflets. The authors consider that sponsorship is a missed opportunity. Further exploration of this issue revealed that although officers had no ethical concerns with sponsorship of trails, they regard themselves as inexperienced in developing relationships with commercial organizations and this may be a barrier to arranging deals.

Trail Management and Evaluation

The cultural officer (recreation or heritage) or the museums service manages simple trails on an ad hoc basis. For the most part they are virtual trails and the main management tasks are promotion, reproducing the leaflet and maintaining the website. Standard trails are likely to be managed by an independent trust who include representatives of the partners, or a management team within the lead local authority. Either way they are able to draw upon expertise to assist with this task. If the trails have a physical presence it is usual for the environmental services department to undertake maintenance of the route. Respondents suggested that the maintenance of signage and interpretative devices is often forgotten and these can fall into a state of disrepair. This usually occurs because no single department has responsibility and cultural officers may not be informed about damage to or work undertaken on physical infrastructure. Signage or studs at pavement level in town centers are often at risk because of the volume of work undertaken by utility companies. Sophisticated trails usually have a dedicated management team with specific responsibilities for maintenance, marketing and interpretation.

Evaluation of trails is limited. Council officers complain of 'evaluation fatigue' arising from the introduction of PIs, which have resulted in the quantitative evaluation of many service areas. As there is no statutory duty to provide trails, they are regarded as additional, and consequently there is a reluctance to engage in evaluation. Rudimentary measures are used by cultural officers such as recording the number of leaflets distributed and hits on the website, however, this does not reflect patterns of trail usage. Informal, qualitative feedback from users is sometimes provided by organizers of group visits.

Managers of standard trails have experimented with surveys incentivized by a prize draw but response rates are often low and the quality of information provided is variable. Surprisingly few of the leaflets provided any feedback mechanisms, but respondents suggested that this is due to space limitations. Approximately a third of the leaflets collected as a part of the audit had a contact point, inviting comments but few named an individual. If sponsorship were to become widespread, it is likely that data capture would be a key issue for sponsors, requiring the development of these mechanisms. Managers of sophisticated trails are aware of the need for evaluation, but few employ devices like passport schemes that mark the users to progress along the route. They tend to count users at start and end points, such as tourist information and visitor centers and at key

attractions along the route. However, the shortcomings of this approach are well established - the difficulty of identifying and isolating trail users from generic visitor groups and in the case of long distance trails identifying the segment and length traveled.

A key issue emerging from the research is the expectation that trails will achieve complex objectives, spanning the interest of directorates within local government, such as those proposed by South Gloucestershire for the Thornbury Trail. This is the basis on which their development is justified. However, given the lack of evaluation or impact analysis, this is hardly be a shining example of evidence-based policy making.

Conclusion

Trails have grown haphazardly from their 18th Century origins of 'informed urban walking' (Goodey 1975:29) to the present day, thereby increasing access to diverse rural and urban locations. Modern trails are flexible and multi-faceted products promising an array of social, environmental, cultural and economic benefits.

The cultural remit for local government has expanded since the widespread adoption of a cultural planning perspective. This emphasizes that strategic development of core services is best achieved by ensuring that cultural considerations are present in all processes of planning and development. This approach highlights the significance and flexibility of trails, since they can be judiciously designed to deliver complex social, economic and environmental outcomes using existing cultural resources cost effectively.

The audit of trails, content analysis of local cultural strategies and interviews with cultural officers suggest that there are complex rationales underpinning trail development, and that a wide variety of internal and external stakeholders are responsible for the design, funding and implementation of this provision. Whilst a cultural planning perspective has not been universally adopted, cultural officers play a key role in shaping the trail offer, contributing to cross sector working and the development of partnerships.

Typologies are offered to distinguish purpose, usage, scale and governance of trails and the approaches used for their development, presentation and management. The research highlights the growing sophistication of trails and exemplifies good practice. The authors consider that the key challenges for cultural officers are to provide a realistic assessment of the relative importance of stated rationales; substantiate the efficacy of trails as tools for achieving diverse outcomes; design evaluation methodologies to enable evidence based policymaking and engage more effectively with commercial organizations who may be able to fund further development of the sector. Finally, trail provision is highly fragmented and the authors suggest that consideration be given to the development of a national body who could provide advocacy to policy makers, advise on best practice, develop umbrella branding, raise public consciousness, undertake benchmarking and develop practical evaluation methodologies.

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