



# MANAGING HERITAGE TOURISM

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**Abstract:** This article discusses the findings of a Delphi survey of owners and managers of historic properties, officers of heritage-based organizations, consultants, and academics from across the United Kingdom. The purpose of the study was to investigate the major constraints and imperatives relating to the long-term management of built heritage attractions. Three related issues were assessed: the fundamental mission of heritage attractions; the factors which impact upon decisions relating to charging for tourist entry; and the perceptions of heritage managers as to the respective roles of such attractions and public agencies in funding tourism management and heritage conservation programs. The paper then considers the significance of these issues in assessing potential strategies for moving heritage tourism toward sustainability. **Keywords:** heritage tourism, Delphi technique, mission, pricing, funding, sustainability, United Kingdom. © 2000 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

**Résumé:** La gestion du tourisme patrimonial. Cet article discute des résultats d'une enquête Delphi parmi des propriétaires et gérants des propriétés historiques, des comités directeurs d'organisations patrimoniales, des consultants et des universitaires de partout dans le Royaume-Uni. L'objet de l'étude était d'examiner les contraintes et impératifs liés à la gestion à long terme des attractions patrimoniales construites. On évalue trois questions apparentées: la mission fondamentale des attractions patrimoniales, les facteurs qui influent sur la tarification et les perceptions des gérants au sujet du rôle des attractions et des organismes gouvernementaux pour le financement de la gestion du tourisme et des programmes de sauvegarde. On considère ensuite l'importance de ces questions pour évaluer des stratégies éventuelles pour faire progresser le tourisme patrimonial vers la durabilité. **Mots-clés:** tourisme patrimonial, technique Delphi, mission, tarification, financement, durabilité, Royaume-Uni. © 2000 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

## INTRODUCTION

The recent literature of tourism studies has been captivated with the notion of sustainable tourism. Rarely before has one single dimension of this research attracted so much attention and raised so much controversy. Indeed, a great many academic textbooks and journal articles focusing on the concept of sustainability have emerged over the past decade, some conceptualizing the main issues (Clarke 1997; Hunter 1995, 1997; Krippendorf 1987), some

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generally endorsing the concept (Cater and Goodall 1992; Eber 1992; Hunter and Green 1995; Inskeep 1991; Middleton and Hawkins 1998), and others censuring it (Hughes 1995; McKercher 1993; Wheeller 1994). There has also been a large number of collected works published on the theme of sustainable tourism (Bramwell, Henry, Jackson, Prat, Richards and van der Straaten 1996; Bramwell and Lane 1994; Briguglio, Archer, Jafari and Wall 1996; Cater and Lowman 1994; Hall and Lew 1998; Priestley, Edwards and Coccossis 1996; Stabler 1997).

Given this context, it is perhaps surprising that the heritage tourism sector has received relatively little attention from scholars interested in the concept of sustainable tourism. With a few notable exceptions (Anfield 1994; Cope 1995; Croft 1994; Johnson and Thomas 1995; van der Borg, Costa and Gotti 1996), the academic literature has preferred to concentrate on the cultural, educational, and practical conservation aspects of heritage tourism. Yet the heritage sector represents a highly significant component of tourism in many developed economies. In the United Kingdom, for example, the heritage sector has been described as "a major strength of the British market for overseas visitors" (Markwell, Bennett and Ravenscroft 1997:95) and is estimated to generate around 28% of all UK tourism expenditure annually (Carr 1994). The heritage sector has also been vaunted as a major potential growth area for tourism in the UK (Prentice 1993a). In view of the economic significance of heritage as a tourism "product", it is curious indeed that so little interest has been shown in assessing the conditions that must be met in order to secure its sustainability.

It is surprising that so little academic attention has been paid to exploring the relationship between heritage tourism and sustainability because the two concepts evidently share a common theme. Sustainable development has been defined as a process which ensures that "we pass onto the next generation a stock of [natural and built] capital assets no less than the stock we have now" (Pearce 1992:4). Heritage tourism, meanwhile, has been viewed simply as "tourism centred on what we have inherited, which can mean anything from historic buildings, to art works, to beautiful scenery" (Yale 1991:21). The pivotal concept in both of these definitions is clearly that of "inheritance", yet the connection between heritage tourism and sustainability still remains largely unexplored.

The purpose of this article is to investigate some of the possible reasons for this disparity. In particular, it is hypothesized that the notion of sustainable tourism is an "essentially contested concept" (Hall 1998), meaning that its definition and use is inherently a matter of dispute. As such, the term sustainable tourism has come to mean a great number of different things, according to the differing backgrounds and perceptions of those who are defining and employing it. This much is widely acknowledged in the literature (Garrod and Fyall 1998; Hunter 1997; McKercher 1993). However, the particular contribution of this article is to apply this analysis to the context of built heritage tourism. In short, it sets out to determine

whether the relative slowness of the heritage tourism sector to catch on to the sustainability imperative can be explained by the distinctive institutional conventions and ideological imperatives of heritage managers. In so doing, the article considers the significance of three core issues: the fundamental mission of heritage attractions; the factors which impact upon decisions relating to charging entry fees; and the perceptions of managers as to the respective roles of heritage attractions and public agencies in funding such management and conservation programs.

### MANAGING HERITAGE TOURISM

It has long been recognized that the ideological and institutional context of heritage tourism is fundamentally different from that of general tourism. In particular, it has been argued that a so-called "curatorial approach" still pervades the heritage sector (Leask and Goulding 1996). This implies a heritage mission that is primarily one of caring for the property and maintaining it in as pristine a state as possible, with issues such as financial solvency and public access entering into the decision-making process only as secondary considerations. In other words, the heritage mission tends to be perceived as comprising a conservation goal with financial and public access constraints. Indeed, many heritage managers do not even consider themselves to be in the "tourism business" (Croft 1994), preferring to view their role more as guardians of the national heritage than as providers of public access to it. The notion has even been advanced that some of these managers, particularly those in the museums and galleries sector, actually resent tourists for distracting them from their curatorial goals (Thomas 1998). One of the important consequences of this lack of attention to economic management issues by the heritage establishment has been the emergence of a considerable backlog of urgent maintenance and repair work, as access to traditional sources of public funding has been restricted by successive government spending cuts. The situation is now said to be critical with respect to historic buildings, which are especially prone to both natural decay and a wide range of negative tourist or user impacts (English Tourist Board 1991b).

Nevertheless, heritage managers have generally been reticent to explore more direct means of raising the revenues necessary to fund the maintenance and repair work the properties in their care inevitably require, whether they are open to the public or not. While the "user pays principle" is now widely recognized as a potential vehicle for promoting sustainability in the context of other major forms of tourism (Burns and Holden 1995; Forsyth, Dwyer and Clarke 1995; Laarman and Gregersen 1996), many heritage managers are apparently wary of adopting this principle. The effect is that users are presented with "token" admission prices which reflect only a part of the "full social costs" of their activities (Pearce, Markandya and Barbier 1989). The implications of this failure to recognize the "true" value of natural assets are well documented. The lack of

representative prices tends to generate excessive demand for such assets, resulting in their physical overuse. Further, the absence of truly representative asset values tends to lead society to “underinvest” in their conservation, resulting in their physical deterioration. It might well be argued that these implications are equally valid in the context of built “heritage” assets.

Yet heritage managers generally remain unconvinced by the logic of the user pays principle. The literature suggests a number of reasons why this may be the case. First, it can be argued that heritage managers have tended to associate the pricing of access to heritage with its commodification, and the concern is that this will lead to the established “golden rules” of conservation (such as uniformity of concern) being displaced by contradictory commercial values (Newby 1994). It is argued that heritage has a value far beyond the price that can be put on it; a cultural value to society, both present and future, which one must not allow to become compromised by base commercial values. A second possible reason for the apparent lack of enthusiasm among heritage managers for charging for admission is that they find the notion difficult to reconcile with their ideological beliefs about the wider mission of the heritage sector (Curtis 1998; Glaister 1998; Leask and Goulding 1996). If potential visitors or tourists are prevented from experiencing the heritage property because it is too expensive, then whose heritage does the property represent and for whom is it being preserved? Charging anything more than a token price for admission is evidently a concept with which many heritage managers feel intensely uncomfortable; yet it would appear to have enormous potential as part of a strategy for moving the heritage sector toward sustainability. Not only does admission pricing offer the opportunity of managing tourist numbers, it also represents an important potential source of funds for managing their impact and for funding vital conservation programs.

### *Study Methods*

With these research issues in mind, the authors conducted an initial postal survey of 300 managers and owners of built heritage properties, officers of organizations with a heritage remit, and heritage tourism consultants. The study took place during the summer of 1997 and the survey achieved a response rate of 28%, following a telephone reminder in September. The questionnaire used a Likert scale to elicit respondents’ opinions on a range of issues relating to the management of built heritage tourism attractions, broadly defined as any property that attracts the public by virtue of its explicit connection with the past. The issues investigated included how the decision whether or not to charge admission prices is determined, how they are set in places where they are used, the types of visitation impact experienced at these attractions and the degree of severity of such impacts, and respondents’ perceptions of what should be the fundamental mission of heritage attractions.

The initial survey generated some interesting and instructive findings with regard to management and pricing issues facing the heritage sector. Table 1 presents a summary of the major findings of the survey. Further details can be found in Fyall and Garrod (1998). On reviewing the results of the survey, a number of contextual issues were raised which it was felt required further exploration. In particular, how do pricing decisions fit into the overall mission of the heritage attraction? What are the major institutional constraints on the pricing of admission to heritage attractions? How far are present pricing practices contributing to, or perhaps detracting from, the sustainability of heritage attractions?

Issues such as these are probably too complex and abstract to be addressed using standard questionnaire techniques. First, they

**Table 1. Principal Findings of the Initial Survey**

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**Visitor Impacts**

- Occasional overcrowding of parts of the site was considered to be a very important or extremely important problem by 62% of respondents; persistent overcrowding of parts of the site was considered to be a very important or extremely important problem by 48% of respondents.
- Almost all respondents reported some form of wear and tear due to visitors, including trampling, handling, humidity, temperature, pilfering and graffiti.
- Traffic congestion was deemed to be a relatively minor problem in comparison to the above; nevertheless the majority of traffic related problems were considered to be persistent rather than occasional.
- 82% of respondents reported the potential for management to compromise the authenticity of the heritage property as either a very important concern or extremely important concern.

**Admission Pricing Practices**

- Profit or surplus maximization was not widely employed in the heritage sector, while revenue maximization and revenue targeting were very widely employed; 48% of respondents considered the need to achieve revenue targets a very important or extremely important factor in their admission pricing strategy.
- The strategic use of admission pricing to influence the volume of visitors was not considered an important factor in influencing admission price decision-making; 53% of respondents considered the use of low admission prices to attract users unimportant; 67% considered the use of high admission prices to limit visitor volumes unimportant.
- Many managers did not consider admission pricing to be an essentially moral issue; 33% of respondents reported that they saw no need to keep prices low to avoid the exclusion of disadvantaged social groups.

**The Heritage Mission**

The following criteria were suggested for what makes a “successful” heritage attraction:

- The attraction must be inexpensive and visitor-friendly.
  - It must be physically and intellectually accessible.
  - It must balance the needs of the visitor and the conservation imperative.
  - It must be able to maintain authenticity and the integrity of the site.
  - It must deliver value for money.
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require respondents to have specialist knowledge of the main concerns at stake and a good awareness of the major contextual issues relating to the study. Unless the survey is well targeted there is a risk that the respondents will not have sufficient expertise and familiarity with the issues at hand to provide meaningful responses to the questions posed. Second, such issues are not well disposed to being addressed within the framework of a standard postal questionnaire. With issues as complex and abstract as these, the respondents must be given every opportunity to address them at as deep a conceptual level as possible. Replies based on gut reactions or snap judgements are not likely to be especially valuable. It can be argued that traditional questionnaire-based survey techniques do not encourage the respondents to explore far enough beneath the surface of the issues being addressed.

In order to investigate these critical issues in greater depth, a follow-up study was undertaken using a version of the Delphi technique. The Delphi technique, originally developed in the early 50s (Dalkey and Helmer 1963), involves the formation of a panel of experts who are asked to perform some specialist task, such as forecasting a future variable or teasing out the critical elements of a practical problem. This takes place over a number of survey "rounds", which are usually conducted by mail, although studies have sometimes employed face-to-face interviews or computer-based conferences (Smith 1995). The purpose of the first round (known as the "scoping round") is to allow the panelists to establish the conceptual boundaries of the study; what the key issues to be considered are, and how they are to be framed. Subsequent rounds (known as "convergence rounds") seek to move the panel towards consensus on the issue at hand by circulating the results of each successive round back to the respondents, who are then asked to reappraise their responses in the light of those made by other panel members. As the technique progresses through a number of rounds, the panelists' responses can be expected to converge around a central value or key concept.

The major advantage of the Delphi technique is that it enables complex and polemical issues to be investigated over an extended period of time. The technique is iterative, so that respondents get to air their views and then to reconsider them in the light of those put forward by other panelists. Many researchers believe that this is preferable to the traditional "one shot" questionnaire where respondents are asked to make on-the-spot judgements in isolation from others (Pan, Vega, Vella, Archer and Parlett 1995). By enabling respondents to evaluate their responses against those of other experts, the Delphi technique attempts to achieve a higher quality of response on expert issues than a single round questionnaire is able to achieve. The panelists in a Delphi study do not meet one another and ideally should not know who else is sitting on the panel. The merit of this approach is that it encourages the panelists to express their expert opinions freely. Other research methods that attempt to synthesize expert opinion (such as focus groups) do

not preserve the anonymity of their respondents and run the risk of generating findings that are biased either by the institutional loyalties of the individual participants or else by peer pressures arising among the group during the course of the study (Frechtling 1996).

The Delphi technique is well established as a tool of tourism research. It has been used in a range of contexts and in a number of different ways. The most common use of the technique in tourism is in forecasting future market conditions (Kaynak and Macaulay 1984; Liu 1988; Moeller and Shafer 1994; Yong, Keng and Leng 1989). Other studies, meanwhile, have applied the Delphi technique to resolving a specific issue, such as identifying the environmental impacts of an individual development (Green and Hunter 1992; Green, Hunter and Moore 1990a, 1990b) or determining appropriate marketing strategies for a particular destination (Pan et al 1995). It has also been suggested that the Delphi technique might be useful in estimating the non-market values associated with tourism (Grant, Human and Le Pelley 1998; Sinclair and Stabler 1997). Clearly this technique has considerable potential as a study method of both qualitative and quantitative tourism research.

#### *Formation of the Panel and Study Format*

Heritage tourism has traditionally involved individuals from a wide range of backgrounds, including conservators and curators, planners, operations managers, strategic experts, public relations experts, and marketing professionals. Therefore, it was felt that the panel should encompass as wide a range of professional expertise as possible. The final panel comprised heritage management consultants, local authority officers, heritage organization administrators, tourism academics, and museums officers in approximately equal numbers. A rather higher number of historic property managers sitting on the panel was considered appropriate given the applied nature of the issues being addressed.

While previous Delphi studies have sometimes included tourists in the panel (Green et al 1990a, 1990b), the present study does not. There were two main reasons for this. One, the focus of the study was on heritage managers' perceptions of the sustainability issue, which were felt to be important in explaining the relative slowness of the heritage sector to embrace the concept of sustainable tourism. While tourists' perceptions may have some bearing on heritage management practices, this is only likely to be an indirect influence (in as much as they may influence the perceptions of heritage managers). Two, the Delphi technique clearly relies on the opinions of experts; whether panelists drawn from the general public will possess sufficient expertise with regard to the specialist subject matter under investigation is a matter of some dispute in the Delphi literature (Hill and Fowles 1975; Masser and Foley 1987; Preble 1984). Therefore, the panel comprised individuals from the supply side of the heritage tourism sector. The panel was drawn from two separate sources. First, a number of respondents to the initial postal

questionnaire expressed a willingness to be involved in a follow-up study. This questionnaire was aimed at owners of historic properties, managers of heritage attractions, heritage consultants, and those working in government or near-government organizations with a significant heritage remit. As such, the members of the panel drawn from the initial survey work represented a wide range of professional functions and expertise. Second, a number of academics, selected on the basis of their reputation as researchers in tourism, were included. The panelists were asked to commit themselves to completing three survey rounds; a scoping round and two convergence rounds. Table 2 illustrates the diverse backgrounds of the 17 members of the panel.

While the small panel size might be criticized for its lack of statistical representativeness, it should be borne in mind that the Delphi technique is not intended to serve as a substitute for a randomly sampled, statistically rigorous survey, but as a complement. Furthermore, previous research into the methodological basis of the technique tends to suggest that the absolute number does not determine the quality of the study findings, the balance of expertise represented on that panel does. Indeed, Delphi studies have been successfully undertaken with as many as 900 and as few as four panelists (Sinclair and Stabler 1997).

An important consideration in applying this research technique is to ensure that the panel members are permitted to employ their expertise effectively in exploring the subject matter of the study critically and in as much depth as possible. Many previous Delphi studies have been criticized for not making this allowance (Sackman 1975). Clearly panelists need to be given sufficient scope to interpret the questions according to their understanding of the issues involved and to apply their own perspectives to the problem set; otherwise they will either fail to address the issues in sufficient depth, or will become bored and disillusioned with the study (Martino 1972). Another consideration, actually common to many techniques of qualitative research, is the need to minimize the potential for bias to creep into the analysis because the different panel members, and they and the researchers, interpret the questions posed and the answers offered differently (Hill and Fowles 1975).

**Table 2. Membership of the Delphi Panel**

Membership	First Round	Second Round	Third Round
Heritage Management Consultant	2	2	1
Local Authority Officer	2	2	2
Heritage Organization Officer	2	2	2
Historic Property Manager	6	5	5
Academic	3	2	2
Museum/Working Museum Officer	2	2	2
Total	17	15	14

This may result in those involved in the study using the same words but speaking different languages. This eventuality is particularly relevant to the context of this study, given the comments made in the first section of this article regarding the conceptual flexibility of the notion of sustainable tourism.

Clearly a fine balance is required among the above considerations. The approach adopted by this study was to allow the panelists to define their own terms and to allow them every opportunity to explain their assumptions and reasoning within the framework of the questionnaire. Rather than to impose researcher-led definitions of key terms, such as sustainability, conservation, and heritage, the approach taken by the study was to allow the panel to define these terms for themselves and to ensure that these individual perspectives were highlighted and drawn to the attention of the other panelists. Given that the purpose of the study was to explore different perceptions of the sustainability concept and its application in the context of heritage tourism, it was considered that the imposition of a set of definitions of the key concepts would have frustrated this purpose. A common set of definitions would also have failed to capitalize on one of the major strengths of the Delphi technique: to enable the panel members to draw out and explore such differences, rather than to neglect them, as most other survey methodologies do. Thus, the questionnaires were left very "open" in style in order to facilitate this process. Panel members were also given copious feedback between study rounds, including a five-page document summarizing the responses of individual panelists to the questions posed in the scoping round.

The purpose of the Delphi study remained as the follow up on the initial postal survey, to provide a more qualitative context to the findings that had been generated and to fill in some of the gaps that had emerged in the coverage of the initial questionnaire. Accordingly, the following issues were isolated for further investigation: what heritage experts perceive the fundamental mission of heritage attractions to be; what they consider the major imperatives and constraints relating to the charging for admission to heritage properties to be over the next ten years; and how they perceive the respective roles of heritage attractions and government agencies in funding such management and conservation programs.

### *Study Findings*

The scoping round began by asking panelists to offer their opinion as to what should be the fundamental mission of heritage attractions in general. It is clear from the responses that while the term sustainability was mentioned only by a small minority of panelists, there is nevertheless a substantial affinity between managers' perceptions of the fundamental mission of heritage attractions and the principles of sustainable development.

In order that the panelists might be able to reflect meaningfully upon their responses to the scoping round, the initial responses

were synthesized under eight headings, each representing a different conceptual element of the heritage mission. As Table 3 shows, these conceptual elements demonstrate a strong resonance with the notion of sustainable development. First, there is a strong emphasis on conservation. If the use of heritage assets by the present generation is not to conflict with their potential use by future generations, then the fundamental task of the heritage sector must be to ensure an appropriate balance between the contemporary use of those assets and their conservation for the future. Access and relevance were also considered important elements in the mission. If heritage is to have meaning, either to the present or future generations, then it must be made accessible and relevant to those who wish to experience it. Again, a strong relationship with the principles of sustainable development is evident. The panelists also identified a need to recognize the importance of the local community in this mission—a requirement that is widely endorsed in the sustainable tourism literature.

**Table 3. Typology of Elements in the Mission of Heritage Attractions**

<b>Conservation</b>	The role of the heritage manager is to safeguard the heritage asset for posterity; to ensure that the use of heritage assets by the present generation does not compromise the ability of future generations to use and benefit from those assets; and to ensure that the present generation properly manages the heritage assets it holds in trust for the nation as a whole.
<b>Accessibility</b>	Heritage only has significance to the extent that it benefits people. If people are prevented from experiencing a heritage asset, it can no longer be considered part of their heritage. However, high levels of accessibility can lead to heritage assets becoming damaged. At the same time, conservation requirements can prevent the present generation from enjoying and benefiting from the heritage assets to the fullest extent.
<b>Education</b>	Education plays an important role in achieving accessibility. In order to appreciate the heritage asset, visitors must be able to understand its nature and significance, including why it should be conserved. This requires the use of an array of interpretational techniques, ranging from the very formal to the very informal. Education is most effective if it is also entertaining.
<b>Relevance</b>	Heritage attractions must be relevant to as wide an audience as possible; they should not be the preserve of a small minority of “heritage enthusiasts”. Ideally, all visitors should leave with a better appreciation of why the heritage asset is relevant to them, the local area, and to the nation as a whole. Heritage attractions should also seek to be something with which the local community can identify, giving them a greater sense of place and pride.
<b>Recreation</b>	Part of the mission of heritage attractions must be to entertain visitors and provide a recreational opportunity. If they do not enjoy themselves then they will be less likely to make return visits or to recommend the attraction to others. Conservation requirements may limit the recreational potential of a heritage site.
<b>Financial</b>	Heritage attractions must be financially sound if they are to fulfil their overall mission. Finances need not, however, be generated entirely by charging for admission and some external funding, particularly for expensive conservation work, will inevitably be required.
<b>Local Community</b>	The heritage attraction should seek to work in harmony with the local community. Visitors should not be afforded use of the heritage asset at the expense of locals. Heritage attractions can also have important economic multiplier effects throughout the local community.
<b>Quality</b>	Heritage attractions must increasingly provide a high quality service to their visitors if they are to compete in the ever more crowded tourism marketplace. This includes providing a range of facilities, flexibility, a high standard of cleanliness, well-trained staff and adequate car parking. If a charge is made for admission then the heritage attraction should aim to exceed visitors’ expectations.

In the two convergence rounds of the study, the panelists were asked to prioritize the eight elements identified in the scoping round. While several members stated that they found this task difficult, the degree of consistency evident in the rankings nevertheless indicates the development of a broad consensus. Indeed, a Spearman's rank correlation coefficient ( $r_s$ ) of 0.9762 was recorded, indicating a very high level of agreement between the two sets of rankings (Table 4). The highest-ranked element in both rounds was conservation. The relatively low mean score attributed to conservation by almost all of the panelists suggests a widespread consensus on the importance of conserving heritage assets for the benefit of future generations. This contrasts with the considerably higher mean scores (and hence lower rankings) attributed to those elements relating to the contemporary use of the asset, such as recreation and relevance. The implication is that the importance of the heritage asset as an endowment for future generations is generally considered to outweigh its significance as an asset for contemporary use.

Whether this emphasis is to be considered consistent with sustainable development thinking is very much open to debate. As already discussed, sustainability is a highly contested concept and academics have identified a wide spectrum of philosophical positions on what it means in the context of tourism, ranging from the light green or "technocentric" to the deep green or "ecocentric" (Garrod and Fyall 1998; Henry and Jackson 1996; Hunter 1997). Deeper green viewpoints tend to place a greater emphasis on the importance of resource conservation over economic growth than lighter green perspectives. Some commentators might therefore argue that the higher priority that is accorded to conservation as compared with contemporary use is entirely consistent with sustainability, given the increasingly evident need to defend the interests of future generations against the highly adverse impacts associated with the contemporary use of heritage assets. Others, meanwhile, might choose to argue that conservation for the future is worthless in

**Table 4. Prioritization of Elements in the Mission of Heritage Attractions**

Mission	Second Round		Third Round		
	Mean Score	Rank	Mean Score	Rank	Change
Conservation	1.73	1	1.27	1	–
Accessibility	3.40	2	3.07	2	–
Education	4.60	4	4.00	3	↑
Relevance	5.33	6	5.07	6	–
Recreation	5.80	7	5.67	7	–
Finance	4.00	3	4.27	4	↓
Local Community	6.07	8	5.73	8	–
Quality	4.73	5	4.33	5	–

$r_s=0.9462$

itself. If each generation denies itself the use of heritage assets in order to conserve them for future generations, then no generation will ever allow itself to experience and engage fully with its heritage. The result will be to strip the heritage asset of its human dimension, consign its significance to the past, and deprive it of its fundamental identity. This latter view suggests rather less precedence being given to conservation as compared with other objectives relating to contemporary use (Bender and Edmonds 1992).

One can only speculate as to why conservation might be ranked so far above the other elements. Conceivably, the higher weighting that is generally accorded to conservation might be the result of the particularly strong notion of futurity that is often associated with heritage assets. Indeed, it is argued that the struggle between conservation and contemporary use is particularly evident in the case of heritage assets because the chain of bequest and inheritance is more explicit (Millar 1991). Alternatively, this heavy emphasis might be a reflection of the curatorial background of many of the respondents. A significant proportion of heritage attractions in the United Kingdom is owned by public sector authorities and organizations with trust status (Markwell et al 1997). Not only does this organizational context usually require managers to open the properties in their care to the public, at least occasionally, but it also confers a strong curatorial imperative upon them. They are charged with managing the nation's heritage on their behalf; if it is allowed to become damaged and degraded, then clearly they cannot be deemed to be acting responsibly (Cossons 1989; Cope 1995).

Another interesting feature of the rankings is that visitor or tourist education was ranked substantially higher than both relevance and recreation. While the panel recognized that education is more effective if it can be made entertaining, the panel still considered it more important to educate users than to offer them an entertaining recreational experience. Some writers have queried this view, arguing that the importance of education in the heritage mission has often been overplayed in the past (Berry 1994). Research into motivations suggests that they are not generally looking to be educated but to have a general leisure experience (Prentice 1993b). Indeed, it has been suggested that the motivation for visiting heritage attractions might better be likened to window shopping than knowledge gathering (Markwell et al 1997). There is a danger, therefore, that the heritage mission may overemphasize education at the expense of the more mundane role played by the heritage attraction in providing an opportunity for popular entertainment and recreation. On the other hand, the ranking of education above relevance might lend further support to the argument that users of heritage attractions often do not understand what they are gazing at (Urry 1990). Heritage clearly needs interpretation if it is to be of relevance to them. In this way, they may come to recognize the true value of the heritage asset experienced, including the need to maintain and conserve it (Moscardo 1996). Yet, as other writers have pointed out, heritage interpreters tend to be highly intelligent

people, and there is a danger that the interpretation they provide will be comprehensible only to an educated elite of heritage devotees (Bramwell and Lane 1993).

Perhaps the most intriguing finding is that the mission of heritage attractions to the local community is ranked as least important of all the elements listed in Table 4. Much of what has been written about sustainable development in the context of tourism takes as its central theme the need to “maintain a balance” between the interests of the site, the user, and the host community (English Tourist Board 1991a). The latter is likely to experience many of the negative social and environmental impacts of heritage tourism, including traffic congestion, parking and access problems, and anti-social behavior on the part of tourists. On the other hand, the local community stands to benefit through the various economic multiplier effects generated by the attraction and the contribution of the heritage asset itself to the local social fabric and culture. If these impacts are not given sufficient weighting in the overall “balance”, then the management of heritage attractions must surely be unsustainable.

#### *Factors Influencing Pricing Strategy*

The second task set before the Delphi panelists was to consider the principal factors likely to influence pricing strategy in the UK heritage tourism sector over the coming decade. Table 5 shows that the responses fell into four major categories: financial pressures, the state of competition, the user profile, and issues relating to the management of access. In the two convergence rounds, the panelists were asked to rank these factors according to their assessment of their likely importance. As with the previous exercise, while some reported that they found this task quite difficult and taxing, a remarkable degree of unanimity emerged in the responses. Table 6 illustrates the rankings achieved and shows that a Spearman's rank correlation coefficient ( $r_s$ ) of 0.9835 was recorded, again indicating a very high level of agreement between the rankings achieved in each of the two convergence rounds.

Overall, it would appear that the commercial environment of the heritage tourism sector is set to become more difficult and challenging over the coming decade. The striking feature of Table 6 is that the highest ranked factors generally relate to the financial pressures experienced by heritage attractions. Indeed, the final rankings suggest that the most important influence on pricing strategy over the coming decade will be the need to cover further increases in maintenance and conservation costs. This expectation is widely echoed in the academic literature (Berry 1994; Cossons 1989) and is particularly significant in view of the considerable backlog of conservation and maintenance work that has already been referred to in this article. Meanwhile, the second highest ranked factor suggests that it will become increasingly difficult for heritage attractions to obtain external sources of revenue over the coming decade. Clearly

the panel expects the unfavorable financial situation in which much of the heritage sector already finds itself to worsen over the next decade.

The heightened financial pressures faced by the heritage sector may also be a function of the increased competitive pressures, both internal and external, that are being brought to bear on heritage attractions. This notion is supported by the third and fifth highest ranked factors, which suggest that the competitive pressures experienced are likely to become more intense over the coming decade. Not only will there be heightened internal competition from within

**Table 5. Typology of Factors Influencing Pricing Strategy**

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**Financial Pressures**

- *Increased operating costs*: particularly as maintenance and repair costs continue to mount.
- *Tighter external funding*: especially in terms of obtaining external funding from local authorities, business sponsorships, legacies and charitable organizations.
- *Enhanced role of ancillary activities in revenue generation*: ancillary activities, such as gift shops and tea rooms, are likely to play an increasingly important part in generating revenues for heritage attractions.

**Competition**

- *Increased competition from other leisure activities*: including theme parks, shopping malls, and multimedia entertainment complexes.
- *Increased competition within the market for heritage visits*: the market for heritage attractions itself looks set to become increasingly crowded.
- *Increasing international character of the market*: with international tourists becoming an ever more important market segment.

**Visitor Profile**

- *Reduced emphasis on the traditional family group*: as society changes there are likely to be fewer traditional family groups visiting attractions.
- *Increased participation by older people in the market*: with an ageing national population, a growing tendency towards early retirement and wider car ownership, the share of older people in the visitor profile is likely to increase.
- *Increased interest in nostalgia*: with the millennium drawing near there will be an increased interest in the nation's heritage.
- *Increasing visitor expectations*: especially with regard to the standard of presentation, interpretation and on-site facilities as visitors experience improved standards in other leisure market sectors.

**Managing Access**

- *Pricing will become more important as a tool for managing demand*: charging for admission will be required if carrying capacities are not to be exceeded.
  - *Social pricing will be less important*: that is, strategic price-setting designed to allow people across all income brackets to visit is becoming an outdated concept.
  - *Prohibitive pricing will be resisted*: token pricing will continue to be the norm.
  - *Managing visitor impact will be more costly*: managing the impact of visitors will become more challenging and hence more costly. This will force heritage attractions to review their current pricing practices.
-

the increasingly congested heritage market, but this as a whole will also face greater external competition from other related leisure markets (such as theme parks, leisure centers, and shopping complexes). If individual heritage attractions do not compete successfully at both of these levels, then user numbers—and hence admission revenues—will surely continue to fall. The fourth and (jointly) sixth ranked factors suggest one possible response to the

**Table 6. Factors Likely to Influence Pricing Strategy Over the Next Decade**

Factor	Second Round		Third Round		Change
	Mean Score	Rank	Mean Score	Rank	
<b>Financial Pressures</b>					
Increased operating costs	3.53	1	3.14	1	–
Tighter external funding	4.73	3	3.86	2	↑
Enhanced role of ancillary activities in income generation	5.47	4	5.64	4	–
<b>Competition</b>					
Increased competition from other leisure activities	4.60	2	5.07	3	↓
Increased competition within the market for heritage visits	5.73	6	6.36	5	↑
Increasingly international market place	10.13	12	10.21	12	–
<b>Visitor Profile</b>					
Reduced emphasis on traditional family group	10.27	13	10.35	13	–
Increase share of older people in visit rates	7.47	9	9.00	9	–
Increased interest in nostalgia as millennium draws nearer	10.40	14	11.57	14	–
Increased visitor expectations regarding standards and facilities	5.53	5	6.64	6=	↓
<b>Managing Access</b>					
Pricing will become more important as a tool for managing demand	6.20	8	6.71	8	–
Social pricing will be less important	8.53	10	10.21	11	↓
Prohibitive pricing will be resisted by those managing heritage attractions	9.53	11	9.79	10	↑
Managing the environmental impacts of visitors will be more costly	6.00	7	6.64	6=	↑

$r_s=0.9835$

problems of increased financial and competitive pressures: to attempt to increase spending by visitors in on-site gift and tea shops, restaurants, craft outlets, supplementary exhibits, and so on. This view seems quite common in the heritage sector. For example, it is argued that, as a benchmark, a heritage attraction should aim to double its adult admission revenue through secondary spending by users once they have come on-site (Markwell et al 1997).

There are, however, several reasons to question whether this strategy is entirely consistent with the sustainability of the heritage attraction. First, investment in such facilities can be very expensive and must surely be at the opportunity cost of investment in better interpretation, conservation programs, and management practices. Second, users can only spend on-site if they are first admitted to it. Under such conditions it is tempting for the heritage manager to set admission charges relatively low in order to encourage more people to visit their attraction, hoping that any loss of admission revenue can be made up through secondary spending. This is often seen as an attractive strategy because of the long-standing tendency of the heritage sector to judge the "success" of an attraction by the number of visitors it has admitted. Unfortunately, this tendency has been reinforced by the academic literature. For example, Yale (1991) explicitly correlates success with attracting greater numbers. It has also been reinforced by the industry itself, in the annual "league tables" based on visitor numbers produced by organizations such as the British Tourist Authority and English Heritage. The danger is that as numbers grow so too do resulting impacts on the heritage property and its surrounding area. In this case the short-term success of the attraction in achieving greater numbers might turn into long-term failure as the heritage assets that serve to promote visitations become damaged and degraded (English Tourist Board 1991b).

In contrast, while the potential for the use of admission charges in managing access was widely raised in the scoping round, the results of the two convergence rounds suggest that the panel does not consider the issue particularly significant. Indeed, none of the factors relating to the use of pricing as a tool for managing access was ranked in the top five. The general lack of enthusiasm for the use of pricing as a strategic tool for managing demand perhaps indicates the widespread tendency for heritage attractions to adopt "token" pricing strategies. This means the setting of "neutral" admission charges which are intended neither to encourage nor to discourage visitors. Opponents of admission pricing often propose alternative methods of managing access to heritage properties, such as timed tickets, limiting parking space, or adopting low key marketing strategies (Cadogan 1995). It should be noted, however, that these forms of physical restraint are just as liable to restrict access to the heritage property. While it could be argued in the context of other forms of tourism that admission pricing is socially inequitable in that it may serve to deter poorer social groups, while measures based on physical restraint have a more even impact across the

social strata, care should be taken in applying this assertion to the context of the heritage sector. Users of heritage attractions are often from the more wealthy social groups in any case. Poorer members of society do not visit heritage attractions because they are too often inaccessible to them, either socially or physically. Moreover, the reality of the situation is that managers typically seem to be more concerned with admission prices *per se* deterring repeat visits than they are about *enhanced* admission prices excluding poorer people (Curtis 1998).

It is also relevant to note that of the four factors relating to the use of admission charges to manage access, the expectation that visitation impacts would impose increasingly significant costs was ranked highest. This tends to suggest that the panel expected heritage attractions to adopt a largely reactive strategy towards the sustainability issue, or to accept that more costly impacts are inevitable rather than to take strategic measures to moderate them. Perhaps this is to be expected given the stated mission of many attractions in the heritage sector to provide access to the general public. However, it is worrying because many writers on the subject of sustainable development argue that proactive strategies are needed in addressing the sustainability imperative.

This raises the question of the extent to which the duty of the heritage sector to provide access to the public should be considered unconditional. Given the damage that visitors can do to the fabric and ambience of a heritage site, and the higher priority given by the panel to conservation as opposed to contemporary use, it might be argued that charging for admission is the lesser of two evils. This may limit access to the heritage attraction, but at the same time this will reduce impacts on the fabric of the site and the local area, and perhaps provide additional funds for presentation, interpretation, management, and conservation works. As tourism practitioners are now beginning to recognize, free and unlimited access to a heritage asset can serve to destroy that asset, thereby limiting access for future generations. Where heritage assets are provided essentially as “free goods”, there is always the danger of “free riding”, leading to excessive and unsustainable use (Grant et al 1998).

### *Funding Priorities*

The third question in the scoping round asked the panel to consider what they felt the criteria should be for setting the conservation-funding priorities of organizations such as the National Trust and English Heritage. The Delphi questionnaire asked the panelists to identify a range of possible criteria and to explain their reasoning. As Table 7 shows, the responses to the scoping round fell into four major categories: significance, risk elements, economic aspects, and management considerations. In the two convergence rounds the panelists were asked to rank the criteria established in the scoping round according to their importance. Table 8 illustrates the rankings achieved after the second and third rounds.

**Table 7. Typology of Public Funding Priorities****Significance**

- *Uniqueness*: significance can be defined in terms of an asset's intrinsic rarity value: a unique heritage asset should be conserved at almost any cost.
- *Relevance*: significance can be equated with relevance to the visitors, the local community, and the nation as a whole: a heritage asset that is not relevant to people has no meaning.
- *Public appeal*: can be used as a measure of significance. It can be argued that the public are the best judge of what is important to them.
- *Educational merit*: significance can also be defined in terms of the actual or potential educational merit of the asset in question.

**Risk Elements**

- *Irreversibility*: this conception of risk relates to the possibility that a heritage asset may be permanently lost if it is not appropriately conserved.
- *Visitor impact*: some heritage sites are under serious threat because of the pressure of visitor numbers and/or the behaviour of users.
- *Depreciation*: all heritage assets, regardless of whether or not they are open to the public, are inevitably vulnerable to the ravages of time.

**Economic Aspects**

- *Financial independence*: those attractions that are more likely to be able to generate their own funds in the future should be prioritized.
- *Complementary funding potential*: priority should be accorded to those attractions that are more able to attract matching funding from other funding sources.
- *Avoiding commercial pressures*: special consideration should be given to those attractions that find it hard to compete in the market without investment in ancillary facilities.
- *Multiplier effects*: public conservation funding should be awarded to those attractions that have the greatest potential to contribute to local economic development.

**Management Considerations**

- *Timeliness*: conservation funding should be channeled toward those attractions for which timely conservation will save greater conservation costs in the future.
- *Managerial prudence*: those attractions that have introduced parallel measures to prevent further deterioration should be considered more worthy of public conservation funding.
- *Consolidation*: priority should be given to those sites that, if conserved, enable the consolidation of existing holdings and more effective management over all.

The question of how to prioritize conservation funding proved to be the most controversial of the three issues addressed by the study. For this particular question, a Spearman's rank correlation coefficient ( $r_s$ ) of 0.7890 is reported. While this figure in itself indicates a high degree of correlation between the two sets of rankings, the coefficient proved somewhat lower than that which was calculated for either of the two preceding questions. The implication is that the panelists were more than ready to refine their initial responses after further reflection. Evidently the members found the iterative

**Table 8. Heritage Conservation Priorities for Funding Organizations**

Priority	Second Round		Third Round		
	Mean Score	Rank	Mean Score	Rank	Change
<b>Significance</b>					
Those attractions that are most rare and/or unique	2.21	1	2.14	1	–
Those attractions that have the greatest relevance to visitors, the local community and the nation	4.57	3	2.93	3	–
Those attractions that are most heavily visited by the public	9.00	13	9.21	10	↑
Those attractions with the highest educational merit/potential	7.86	7=	7.43	5	↑
<b>Risk Elements</b>					
Those attractions that are likely to be permanently lost unless conserved	2.36	2	2.71	2	–
Those attractions under the heaviest pressure from visitor numbers	8.71	10	9.36	11	↓
Those attractions under the greatest threat from the natural elements	6.86	5	9.00	8=	↓
<b>Economic Aspects</b>					
Those attractions most able to generate their own funding in the future	9.71	14	11.21	14	–
Those attractions most able to attract matching funding from other sources	8.50	9	9.00	8=	↑
Those attractions that would find it hard to compete without investment in their ancillary services	8.93	12	8.36	7	↑
Those attractions with the greatest potential to contribute to local economic development	7.86	7=	8.00	6	↑
<b>Management Considerations</b>					
Those attractions for which timely intervention will save greater conservation costs in the future	4.64	4	4.86	4	–
Those attractions introducing parallel measures to prevent deterioration	8.79	11	10.07	13	↓
Those attractions that permit the consolidation of existing holdings	7.21	6	9.79	12	↓

 $r_s=0.7890$

Delphi process helpful in assisting them to form their opinions on this particular issue.

Table 8 shows that the highest ranked criterion related to the rarity value or uniqueness of the heritage asset in question. This would tend to suggest that those assets that are representative of a particular genre of which there are few other remaining examples should be conserved in preference to those where many good examples still exist. This is resonant of the traditional conservation viewpoint, that the conservator's duty is to preserve archetypal examples of what remains of significant heritage sites, buildings, and artifacts. Public appeal, as demonstrated by users' rates, was ranked much lower by the panel (13th in the second round, rising to 10th in the third round).

It could be debated whether this view is fully compatible with the principles of sustainable development. On the one hand, it might be argued that today's general public is not in a strong position to anticipate the needs and wants of future generations regarding heritage assets in general, and heritage tourism in particular. If this is true, then decisions about what is to be conserved for posterity and what is not are best placed in the hands of experts, who are in a much better position to choose on behalf of future generations. It does not necessarily follow that those heritage assets that have the greatest public appeal at present will be of relevance to people in the future. Nor does it necessarily follow that those heritage properties that currently have only a limited public appeal, or about which the general public knows or cares little, should be considered any less worthy of preservation for the future. This view is often put forward by the heritage establishment (Newby 1994).

On the other hand, it might be argued that the best way to judge the preferences of future generations is to examine those of the present generation. If persons making conservation decisions are drawn from the ranks of intellectuals and the social elite, then arguably they will not be in a good position to determine what kind of heritage the general public of the future will wish to inherit (Newby 1995). There is then a danger that the heritage sector will remain largely the province of middle class "heritage enthusiasts", and hence accessible and relevant only to a very narrow cross-section of society as a whole.

There are also a number of features (Table 8) which relate back to the previous study question on admission pricing strategy. First is that the panel did not generally feel that the pressures imposed by visitors on heritage attractions should be a major criterion for determining conservation funding. Perhaps the panelists assumed that the attractions facing the most pressure from users would be the most frequently visited locations and associated this with public appeal, which was itself not considered to be an important criterion for making decisions about conservation funding. It is unclear, however, where this leaves small, fragile sites that are put under intolerable pressure from even a small trickle of visitors.

Second, it was noticeable that the panel did not place a high priority on directing external conservation funding towards those attractions that would otherwise have to make further investments in their on-site ancillary services in order to raise the required funds internally. This may be viewed as a matter of some concern, given that one of the most significant impacts noted in the initial study was that of facilities (such as signs, stairways, ramps, toilet blocks, gift shops, and car parking facilities) on the authenticity of the heritage asset. Maintaining a high throughput of visitors may also have ramifications in terms of direct impacts, such as trampling, handling, pilfering, traffic congestion, and so on. It can be argued that this is hardly a sustainable strategy, especially in comparison to the low volume, high revenue strategy suggested by admission pricing (Fyall and Garrod 1996).

Third, and perhaps most significantly, the panel did not consider the ability of the attraction to generate its own funding in the future to be an important criterion for assessing conservation priorities. This suggests that the panel assumed the external funding of heritage conservation will always be required. Perhaps this is true, but it is of some concern that the panel considers the ability to generate independent funding so low an imperative for heritage attractions. If the panel's predictions of more difficult financial times ahead are correct, then heritage attractions will simply have to become ever more self-reliant as a survival tactic. Again the discussion turns back to the potential role of strategic pricing in pursuing the heritage mission.

## CONCLUSION

Perhaps the most striking feature of this study was the emergence of a fairly close association between the fundamental elements of the heritage mission and the widely acknowledged principles of sustainable development. This judgement is supported by Cope (1995) and Phillips (1995), both of whom interpret the founding philosophies of the National Trust as being essentially synonymous with the principles of sustainable development. Nevertheless, it is evident from the Delphi ranking exercise that a number of important interpretational disparities remain in practice. These relate particularly to the balance that is to be achieved between conservation and contemporary use, the part that is to be played by education in the heritage mission, and the nature of the relationship among the heritage attraction, tourists, and the local community. Further exploration of these issues suggests that the proposed correlation between the heritage mission and the objectives of sustainable development may in fact be somewhat misleading. The results of the Delphi survey suggest that the heritage establishment tends to place more emphasis on conservation and education, and less on contemporary use and local community, than is evident in most other interpretations of the sustainability imperative. Whether this approach is capable of achieving genuinely sus-

tainable development is open to debate. Proponents of more eco-centric versions of sustainability might argue that this is entirely in keeping with the sustainability imperative; if heritage properties are not conserved, then they will ultimately become lost and unable to be part of the heritage of future generations. Others adopting a more technocentric perspective, however, might wish to argue that futurity should not be achieved at the expense of equity in the pursuit of sustainable development. If the present generation is denied access to the heritage property, then it will just as surely cease to be a relevant part of their heritage.

The survey also highlighted a number of important contextual issues relating to the subject of pricing strategy among heritage attractions. While previous studies have examined pricing practices among attractions in a quantitative manner (Leask and Goulding 1996; Rogers 1995), none have attempted to interpret their results in the light of a qualitative understanding of the prevailing constraints and imperatives of tourism management. What is particularly revealing about the findings of the Delphi study is that while the panelists generally anticipated more difficult financial times ahead for the heritage sector, elevated admission prices were not generally thought to be a suitable strategic response. This might be considered surprising given the enthusiasm for applying the so-called "user pays principle" that is often expressed in the context of other economic activities, including various tourism sectors. Nevertheless, heritage managers tend to argue that elevated admission pricing usually runs counter to the fundamental mission of heritage attractions, which explicitly includes providing public access to the property or site concerned.

Two alternative approaches to elevated admission prices were proposed in the course of the Delphi study: the use of physical restraints and attempting to increase visitors' secondary spending. It is not clear why the former is considered acceptable while strategic admission pricing is not, as both would appear to restrict access. The strategy of trying to increase secondary spending, meanwhile, carries with it a number of inherent dangers. One, the pursuit of secondary spending usually requires investment in additional on-site facilities, such as gift shops, restaurants, and other ancillary services. This kind of development is widely acknowledged to detract from the authenticity of the heritage experience and can divert investment away from vital repair, maintenance, and conservation work. Two, the strategy of attempting to increase secondary spending is often only viable when visitor numbers are stable or increasing. If the heritage property is approaching its carrying capacity, or has already exceeded it, then this strategy is likely to prove counter-productive in the long run.

The study also proved of significant value in exploring experts' perceptions of what should be the conservation funding priorities of major heritage organizations. Perhaps it was to be expected that managers would consider factors such as rarity and uniqueness to head the list of funding priorities. This approach places the respon-

sibility for selecting what is to be conserved and what is to be inherited firmly in the hands of experts and resonates strongly with the traditional curatorial approach to heritage management. Whether this is entirely consistent with sustainable development thinking is, however, open to debate. This article suggests that unless a wider range of stakeholders is involved in the decision-making process, heritage runs the risk of losing its relevance and meaning. It is hard to see how an attraction could be considered part of a “sustainable” heritage sector if this were allowed to happen.

Finally, the study generated a number of new insights into the relationship between conservation funding priorities and pricing practices. The establishment largely accepts that individual heritage properties will need some degree of external funding in order to pay for the repair, maintenance, and conservation work all such properties inevitably require. Nevertheless, it was not generally considered acceptable to prioritize properties that are most threatened by excessive visitation numbers, nor was it considered necessary to prioritize properties that would otherwise be forced to adopt pricing policies aimed at increasing secondary spending. What becomes clear is that the establishment is firmly wedded to what has been called the “curatorial” view of heritage management. This article suggests, however, that this approach is not entirely synonymous with the more generally accepted notion of sustainable development. If one thing is clear, it is that sustainable heritage management will not be achieved by maintaining the *status quo*. New management philosophies and practices will have to be adopted. ■

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