

Sustainable heritage practice: digital options in the Scottish Highlands and Islands. Margaret Grieco, Professor of Transport and Society, Edinburgh Napier University e-mail: m.grieco@napier.ac.uk

This presentation will provide a discussion of the sustainable heritage practice available to the Scottish highlands and islands which is not as yet effected. It will discuss the ways in which digital technologies can contribute towards the public understanding and consciousness of history and assist in the better anchoring of sustainable tourism in the economy of the Scottish highlands and islands. The presentation will discuss the new horizons opened by digital options for citizen participation in rural heritage policy. It addresses the goal identified by the Rural Digital Economy Research Hub as: “Use of new mobile technologies to provide personalised information about culture, heritage and environment to enhance tourism and the experience of visitors, and to create new business models”.

Introduction: precluding peripherality.

The policy discussion about the existence of a digital divide in respect of Scotland’s ‘remote’ communities is an active one (<http://forargyll.com/2010/02/high-speed-broadband-provision-complete-for-the-public-sector/>) and the need for a continuous mapping of the deficiencies in respect of maintaining appropriate levels of digital access an ever-present requirement if the accentuation of peripherality is to be combated but our purpose here is not to focus on the quality of access. Our purpose is to consider how digital technology can be more creatively harnessed in developing sustainable heritage practice within the Highlands and Islands of Scotland so as to ameliorate or preclude the construction and intensification of peripherality.

Raising the standard: the potentials of digital heritage signing

This presentation has been developed from a transport perspective but it has also been developed from a social perspective: it asks questions around 'sustainability' from an inclusive heritage perspective. It starts with a simple observation: better cultural use could be made of Scotland's ferry space. Tourists travel on Scotland's ferries with little to alert them to the significant history of the places they journey past in a period when technology can be readily harnessed to providing rich information on past history and present activities with consequences for a stronger anchoring of tourism. Similarly, the better utilization of the cultural space of the ferry can be harnessed in the development of the public consciousness of history with consequences for greater community participation in the culturally appropriate management of heritage. Communities can (http://www.gaelic-rings.com/gaelic_journeys/index.php?top=2&mid=0&base=0#) and should be involved in the production of heritage frameworks for dissemination to tourists and others. Transport operators can and should include communities in the content and design of heritage materials for public communication.

The absence of adequate heritage signing on Scotland's ferries despite the presence of heavy and vital tourist traffic is matched by the absence of heritage signing, on Scotland's equally important scenic railways. The West Highland Line with its magnificent views and heavy tourist trade has received the most minimal of heritage treatments. Travellers on its lengthy route receive no information on or about where and what they are passing through apart from the station names - traveling the line, the desire for further information is audible within the rail carriages. Walkers and ramblers are in discussion about what it is they might be seeing and the provision of more information at this point is better fitted to anchor tourism than the simple passage of tea cart which is the present extent of customer service (though welcome that teacart is!).

So my first point on inclusive heritage practice and my point of departure is that there is an opportunity within the various travel forms of Scotland to provide in journey information on heritage matters, and to do this in a way that enhances journeys and

better anchors tourism and expands communities own public consciousness of their history. Importantly, heritage information can be provided on the small and remote places that constitute the component parts of these journeys and not just upon the larger scale communities which constitute journey's end at either end of the experience. For Scotland and for the Highlands and Islands, the history of communities which have disappeared through 'clearance' or other forms of attrition represents an important part of heritage and the use of the various travel forms to mark this heritage represents an important affordance: changing electronic information boards with visual images on a train or a ferry linked to GPS systems or programmed to provide appropriate geographically located cultural information would provide an efficient mechanism for changing virtual exhibitions, updates and activities. Ferries, trains, buses and planes can all play a part in inclusive heritage practice – they can become channels through which the experience of communities - which are often simply traveled through - can become relayed with greater richness but without the very often unaffordable expense of maintaining a separate physical location for cultural dissemination – where physical museums are not practicable such virtual museums become possible. Inclusive heritage practice should make use of the virtual and the mobile to permit enable the small, the remote and the sparse to be properly represented and reconsidered.

Sustainable communities, sustainable identities: networks as heritage frameworks

'Heritage' has become an important cultural sector within modern society. The activities of the Heritage Lottery Fund provide us with an indication of the scale of this development (<http://www.hlf.org.uk/English/MediaCentre/Archive/Half+a+billion+in+Scottish+heritage.htm>). The contemporary organization of 'heritage' invites communities into the process soliciting bids from communities for 'heritage trails' and 'heritage centres'. And this is a positive step forward from more traditional public institutional arrangements around the scale, scope and content of museums which made the definition of history and heritage the preserve of experts and large civic funding authorities alone. But for the local genre of heritage activities to be sustainable they need to connect to external resources as well as to local communities. Experts can be helpful in connecting heritage centres with the technologies that better connect to

markets and experts can be helpful in the designing of heritage trails to better capture the markets that are available to such local trails. Connecting free standing heritage centres and heritage trails into a wider network that relates to regional and national identities is likely to enhance the sustainability of the communities that support such centres and trails. Sustainable identity is never simply a purely local matter – sustainable communities are necessarily in negotiation and exchange with others. It is the terms of such negotiation and exchange which define and determine sustainability and the wider network support of local activities can improve upon and better the terms which would otherwise hold.

Attracting tourists and developing business on the basis of heritage and local identity requires the understanding of how such heritage and local identity is understood both outwith and within a locality. Regional networks can help in such understanding and definition and guide a custom base. Currently, I have been engaged in research into the travel and travails of Scotland's herring girls with a set of colleagues (<http://www.transportandsociety.com/routine.html> ; de Fresnes, 2007) and in the course of this research, it has become clear that the very, many distinct but historically connected locations of this legacy of work and travel around Scotland's seaboard (and down to Yarmouth) could and would benefit from a Herring Girl Heritage Trail but in fact and practice the evidence of this major social occupational movement is fragmented into small exhibits in many museums with no established link or mapping between these various heritage points. Sustaining the heritage of the occupational community and social identity of herring girls requires a wider regional heritage framework than that provided by localised heritage provision: this wider regional heritage framework could be produced by resourcing the networking of the different locations with herring girl exhibits and recruiting herring girl heritage interest in those locations of past importance where no present 'marker' on the heritage is available. The exhibits of Stronsay's small but perfectly placed museum should be indexed and indicated through on-line information facilities at the larger heritage centres of Scotland's maritime experience. Stronsay, an important location of the herring gutting industry, has no heritage trail which marks the past of herring girls and more surprisingly neither does Shetland.

Shetland has seen major investment in 'heritage' activities and hosts a modern purpose built museum with auditorium and conference facilities of the first order (<http://picasaweb.google.com/Margaret.Grieco/Shetland#>): it has a first class archive of photographic images of herring girls but the archiving of documents associated with the herring girls into an accessible path for community use has still to take place. Interestingly, Shetland saw monies provided by HIE for the restoration of herring gutters' huts and this was done to a very high standard. These huts are under five minutes walking distance from Shetland's spectacular museum but there is no sign leading to them or indicating their presence and there is no documentation proximate to these herring gutter huts (which now have the appearance and function of a modern office environment) to indicate their history or provide a visual image of their past appearance (even though the museum holds excellent old photographs which would do the job very well indeed). The absence of a herring girl heritage trail is Lerwick's and Shetland's loss: and indeed a loss to the transport history of Scotland. The proximity of the lovingly restored herring girls' hut and the absence of signs or pointers to its presence provides an understanding of the small paths by which history and heritage are lost.

The culturally appropriate management of heritage requires the inventory of experience and the appreciation of power in the recording of that experience (Grieco, 1996). The 'experience' of the herring girls was historically disattended to: the scale of the experience creates a cultural image of routine or mundane activity. It is only with the passage of time and the erosion of the industrial base that produced it that the pattern of the herring girls' lives appears distinctive and worthy of record. But therein lies a major issue of sustainability – the 'capturing' of the herring girls' distinctive voices on their own experience now becomes a race against time. Both gender and region have played their part in the paucity of the existing record but developing a heritage network to make good this gap is a do-able activity and utilizing such a network to develop heritage trails and link heritage centres on this theme is a path which should be taken. Understanding communities and social identities in terms of employment histories and employment and unemployment histories provides for greater sustainability in terms of heritage practice: creating heritage trails which appreciate the significance of the local in terms of wider regional frameworks has greater potential for anchoring tourism.

Community participation in heritage activities: harnessing the rarely recorded.

We've drawn attention to the missteps which happen so easily in heritage practice as a consequence of institutional fragmentations: money can be spent on the restoring of a historic building but the subsequent steps necessary to place firmly in the public consciousness of history are not taken with a loss to civic understanding and a failure to capitalize on the potential leverage on tourism. Starting the activity from the other end can go some way to correcting this. Involving communities in the identification of key cultural locations within a locality alongside the professional researching of history will provide a more refined map of the appropriate shape of a heritage trail. Places and spaces which have been eroded by new buildings, land forms or modern practices can be 'retrieved' through old images and through collective memory: new information communication technology provide for wider networks for information collection than was previously the case. Family photographs can be copied and collated with those of other families to provide 'virtual entry' into the past: the availability of distributed technologies such as Picasa enable the ready development of communal archives (<http://picasaweb.google.com/Margaret.Grieco/Shetland2#>). Resourcing history and heritage through the memorabilia of ordinary families is not confined to those families that remained in a locality but can be organized relatively easily to extend to those families that have migrated out of a locality. The Internet and world wide web host virtual communities in abundance which are the sites of interaction between the residents and out migrants of 'heritage' locations.

Organising the virtual reproduction and retrieval of community pasts has not yet taken an established form; there has been no major institutional funding concerned with reproducing 'heritage' sites at high levels of accuracy through the sequence of history (<http://picasaweb.google.com/Margaret.Grieco/Shetland3#>). The overlapping of historical maps with detailed images of the experience which took place upon that footprint through virtual tour technologies is possible but not systematically harnessed. The photographic materials and experiential materials of the family can be better harnessed but for this to happen the approach to community participation needs to be widened in the undertaking of cultural inventories and deepened in

terms of strengthening community acquaintance with technology. The historically rarely recorded is now more easily recorded through technology and the aggregation and display of the recorded is no longer subject to the same restricted material limits. Historically, the exhibiting of one set of artifacts by a museum required the storing of other artifacts as a consequence of space constraints but electronic exhibition has no similar constraint.

The development of the electronic aspects of heritage practice will enable those who are too remote to access museums to participate in viewing, researching, providing material and engaging in discussion around local and regional history and heritage. It is good inclusive heritage practice in which the remote has better opportunity to provide authentic voice and to ensure the better representation of that voice. New information communication technology not only opens up the potential for the recording of more voices but also opens up the opportunity of the recording of more distant voices – and there is evidence that this potential is being used increasingly within the remote locations of Scotland (<http://www.knoydart-foundation.com/>).

Through new information communication technology matches can be readily made between those offering 'heritage' experiences and those seeking them. Importantly in this arrangement, those in remote locations can make arrangements with visitors directly through on line booking systems. This current pattern could be moved even further forward through the linking of museums and heritage centres with households in remote locations – and even in not so remote locations. Whilst running a small museum in a remote location requires personnel to provide opening times with the consequence that access to such facilities is often restricted (for example, see http://www.austintaylorphotography.com/galleries/landscapes/burra/content/2008_08449_large.html Easthouse Croft, Duncanslate, Shetland) , the linking of households of history to a museum programme could bring revenue to such households and provide an opportunity of experience to the visitor. The idea here is that museum technologies be developed which can match tourists and households where the household can provide the tourist with the heritage experience of the locality. Incorporating the household in heritage practice is viable given the affordances of new information communication technology: and it is a practice already well developed elsewhere most particularly in South Africa. Exposure to history through

the local household represents an important new potential in inclusive heritage practice and its sustainability. Community participation can be enlarged to include the individual household in the communication of history and heritage though such enlargement should be accompanied by the appropriate networked organization of cultural resources: clearly a first step is to connect households through technology to the appropriate networks and resources.

Cultural policy and heritage practice: the identification of neglected experience.

In the preceding discussion, we have drawn attention to the issue of neglected experience and provided an argument for the development of a thematic network to support the heritage area of herring girl history. We have suggested that the involvement of those involved in the herring gutting industry is essential to this exercise and that such a programme would increase the density of heritage activities available in a multitude of Scottish seaboard locations with the benefit of the better anchoring of tourism.

But the herring gutting is not the only neglected experience of Scottish heritage which requires enhanced visibility and cultural repair. There are many others. Current focus on green energy has resulted in the refloating of policy attention on Scotland's hydro electric power potential and resources. But Scotland has a whole history of hydro electric power which required an army of labour to produce. Scotland's navvies (and this included Irish and Polish labour) and the locations of their labours have yet to receive adequate heritage attention. And before, the hydrodams, the railways, piers, canals and waterways of Scotland have their own tales yet to be told within the new framework of the public consciousness of history made possible by new information communication technologies. There is a need for substantial institutional involvement in the identification of the set of themes and neglected experiences which can contribute to a more holistic framework of a sustainable Scottish history.

Information communication technology will permit public involvement in the identification of issues and priorities: the institutional framework for this activity is not

yet in place. Individual applications for funding for heritage activities by individual heritage locations can not of themselves create a framework. In working with new information communication technologies and heritage practice it is important to recognize that the electronic museum has no walls: technology can be used to deliver the history of Glencoe in Glencoe itself and outside of any building through hand held technology. Similarly, the herring gutting past of Stronsay can be brought to life through hand held technologies as the visitor or the resident walks out Stronsay with or without guide.

There needs to be an institutional commitment to investigating the new heritage arrangements possible in remote locations through the interaction of new information communication technologies and community participation. The seaboard communities of Scotland are an excellent location for the emergence and evolution of such a vision; institutions such as HIE, the new Scottish government and the European Union are all candidates as primary movers in developing such a reality. The Heritage Lottery Fund is another: reviewing the path and pattern to funding may increasingly focus on the now remote, the now small, the previously neglected in the recognition that life was not always this way. The Scottish seaboard was a busy industrial place; its industrial employment patterns were not sustained perhaps its heritage will receive kinder treatment in the hands of the sustainability paradigm

References:

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Useful links:

<http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/CFS%20and%20CCP%20-%20Digital%20Britain%20Event%2011109%20-%20Main%20Report.pdf>

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/Releases/2010/03/19114307>

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