

THE “FORGOTTEN LANDSCAPES”

CONSERVATION, HERITAGE MANAGEMENT AND LIFELONG LEARNING IN THE COMMUNITY

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, attention will be drawn to the Blaenavon Industrial area in South Wales which in 2000 was declared a WHS. This recognised the ‘unique’ legacy of the forgotten, industrial landscapes with their ecological, geological and *cultural* significance.

The Forgotten Landscapes Project, as it has become known, introduces *cultural learning* as a means to encourage local communities to recognise and maintain their own heritage landscapes. This involves targeting all age groups but also 16-19 year olds in a bid to avoid what can be referred to as the regression of WHS’ into ‘theme parks’ which is both a challenge but also, ironically, often a prerequisite for WHS sustainability.

KEYWORDS

Education, Tourism, Policy, Heritage Management, Widening Access, Sustainability.

1. INTRODUCING THE FORGOTTEN LANDSCAPES PROJECT

‘*Forgotten Landscapes*’ refers to the land around the Blaenavon World Heritage Site (“WHS”), South Wales, which was transformed by the industrial development of the area in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Although heavy industry now plays a diminished role in the Welsh economy, the landscapes are littered with reminders of the industrial past: *the Forgotten Landscapes*. With time nature has re-colonised and a fascinating landscape has developed, rich in both history and wildlife.

The Forgotten Landscapes Project (“FLP”) highlights Blaenavon as one of the best surviving examples in the world of a highly productive, but also destructive, working landscape formed over many centuries through the combined efforts of nature and man and although many other countries have sites that resemble or echo some aspects of it, there are no direct comparisons in the world.

The area around Blaenavon was one of the major centres in the Industrial Revolution in Britain and for a while led the world in technology and industrial innovation (closely associated with the work of Sidney Gilchrist Thomas and developments in iron and steel making practice). While the landscapes demonstrate semi-natural habitats, ancient landscapes, the irrevocable changes to the natural environment and a formative period of social and cultural history as well as industrial history, they also evidence recovery. The origins, development and achievements of the Forgotten Landscapes are an evocation of human invention and endeavour and a graphic example of an ongoing process of landscape evolution.

In recognition of its importance the area was designated as a World Heritage cultural landscape in November 2000 after ICOMOS' (International Council on Monuments and Sites) insistence that, despite its industrial nature, it was truly a cultural landscape (Fowler 2004 p. 91). The idea of adding cultural landscape to the type of site which could qualify for World Heritage status represented a coming together of many minds from around the world as did those who defined what a cultural landscape was for World Heritage purposes (Fowler 2004 p.32). The Forgotten Landscapes legacy, despite a long period of decline and even neglect, is now stabilised and presented to a worldwide audience.

2. SUSTAINABLE TOURISM FOR QUALITATIVE GROWTH

Although there has been much thought, investment and progress across the WHS since 2000, the future plans seek to help create a sustainable visitor destination that can withstand the growing competition within the day visitor and short break tourism market while offering inclusive strategies involving the community towards developing and sustaining its own conservation plans through the FLP. The heritage sector is often the underrepresented component of the tourist industry, not always recognising the value of the heritage and cultural characteristics of the destination and the importance it bears on the visitor experience. In order to keep it distinctive there is a need to invest in this vital sector. As Muller (1997 p. 30) clearly states, the objective of environmentally and socially compatible tourism has a lot to do with the frequently quoted and already much-abused development strategy of “qualitative growth”, an idea which includes social and environmental costs as opposed to the concept of pure quantitative growth used by economists.

Issues of access to, and funding of, and consequently qualifications in Higher Education generally means that a large majority of those working in the heritage sector do not have “equality of opportunity”. Strengthening, unifying and deepening the heritage experience for this project and specifically for the local community through education is possible due to funding awarded to the Project by the Heritage Lottery Fund with support from a number of other funders, including the Welsh Assembly Government (“WAG”).

In contemporary political thinking the concepts of social, community, environmental and sustainability have become “politically” significant: becoming increasingly the focus of government policy in the UK. The Welsh Assembly Government's (2009) vision of a sustainable Wales and the priority they attach to sustainable development was set out in *One Wales: One Planet* and was in response to the economic and environmental challenges it then faced, identifying that it is the only approach that will secure a long term sustainable future for future generations. Sustainable development is both a legal duty and a central organising principle of WAG requiring all organisations in Wales to actively commit to it.

3. THE FORGOTTEN LANDSCAPES PROJECT: ADDING AN EDUCATIONAL INPUT

FLP is diverse consisting of over thirty individual projects with ideas generated by local people and groups through a series of consultations. The educational facet of the FLP involves school visits and lifelong learning opportunities, allowing the local community (and visitors) to discover more about the landscape and both its natural and industrial history. Lifelong learning and skills development, which are integral to cultural enrichment, community development, wealth creation and personal fulfilment (Welsh Assembly Government 2001) consist of two elements under the FLP.

The Community Landscapes Project (“CLP”) is proposed as one of the two main platforms for the delivery of opportunities for adult education and lifelong learning within the local community through the University of Wales Newport (“UWN”) via the Centre for Community and Lifelong Learning (“CCLL”) working in conjunction with Gwent and Glamorgan Archaeological Trust (“GGAT”). GGAT is one of four Welsh archaeological Trusts working to help protect, record and interpret all aspects of the historic environment for the whole of Wales.

The CLP facet of the Project offers inspired ways of integrating the everyday environment into everyday teaching. The first hand, direct experience is crucial to learning and creativity and also enriches the LLP curriculum, offering a unique learning environment, and possibly spark lifelong interests. Focusing on actual landscapes enables students to develop an understanding of the practical demands of maintaining and conserving sites of special interest. Research and ideas from CLP are able to be fed back to the FLP to implement or adopt through marketing strategies and event management: seeing the importance of heritage in the bigger picture of tourism.

The second platform is a programme of adult education and lifelong learning opportunities that provide the context for and add value to the CLP above known as Learning Landscapes Project (“LLP”). The main aim of the LLP is to provide a wide range of audiences from the community with opportunities to learn about the Landscapes and what they have to offer.

The focus is on “learning”, rather than “education” where, again, the local community is able to learn about the landscape on their doors step and through curriculum innovation, gain new skills and qualifications and be encouraged to become actively involved in conservation and heritage management. The aim is for a strong legacy to be left after the Heritage Lottery funded scheme has been completed. France (1997) believes that local feelings about heritage are often forged out of quite different spaces from those held by professional encoders whose practice is orientated towards the capturing of a visitor market. Indeed, to the local community, the value of the environment here possibly outweighs its value as a tourism asset but tourism should nonetheless be recognised as a positive activity with the potential to benefit the community and the place as well as the visitor.

The WAG paper *The Learning Country: vision into Action* (WAG 2001) provided a clear statement on lifelong learning, seeing it as essential for the new economic and global challenges that Wales faces in the years to come. The agenda remains relevant and current, attempting to provide access to lifelong learning through a credit based qualification system with flexible and transferable frameworks across and between educational institutions and types of qualifications. The agenda also promotes a distinctive approach to education and training for all age groups in Wales focusing upon collaboration, communities and citizens. Community learning plays a very important role in lifelong learning bringing people into learning and helping to sustain and develop communities.

4. THE GUARDIANS OF TOMORROW

Undoubtedly, the delivery plan of the FLP provides an opportunity to bring together a wide range of people from within the community and especially some of the under-represented audiences (including teenagers and young people). It was both logical and practical, therefore, to consider engaging 16-19 year olds as well as “adults” in the FLP curriculum. The writer of this paper considers that the concept of learning at a young age is one of the keys to community engagement in the FLP now and in the future and the necessary basis on which to build more complex ideas and initiatives. While the Project is inclusive, aiming to engage a wide range of people from the community, the focus of this paper is on the young people (16-19 year olds) as the “*guardians of tomorrow*”. WAG in the 2005 strategy document

Words Talk, Numbers Count (Welsh Assembly Government 2007) make the point that in order to think about and target lifelong learning, important preparatory work stills needs to be done to with young learners to ensure that by the time they are adults they have the skills to engage with a flexible learning culture.

UWN is a leading provider and proponent of Widening Access and Lifelong Learning opportunities in Wales and across the UK more generally via CCLL. CCLL has established a strong reputation as a highly successful provider of courses, programmes and projects that target underrepresented groups, delivers lifelong learning opportunities for workforce development, offers flexible and responsive progression routes into and through Higher Education and contributes substantially to the community engagement and regeneration agendas of both the University and the Welsh Assembly Government.

In addition, CCLL has been responsible for providing curriculum choices at level 4 to post 16 learners over the past two years and has drawn from the expertise and experience of staff from the Academic Schools within the institution and utilised the facilities of a modern university to provide and offer teaching and learning to students in school 6th forms, Further Education colleges, training and from work based learning providers. The intention is to help learners become more aspirational and provide them with a wider choice when determining the next stage of their learning journey.

CCLL's history working with and alongside young people has a highly successful track record and continues to further develop the approach by linking it to other Widening Access and progression initiatives to help remove the move traditional barriers to learning. Indeed, *One Wales* (WAG 2009) commented that Higher Education Institutions are expected to put in place strong outreach activities to widen access and include the most disadvantaged and hence the least likely to attend HE. While existing transition and progression education routes for this age group remain disjointed and restrictive, the FLP does in many ways offer opportunities to connect some of the missing links and bridge the gap between what educational opportunities are needed and what are currently available.

The FLP offers all 16-19 year old from the community the opportunity to engage in both CLP and LLP through accredited and non-accredited courses, meeting the needs of both the traditional learners and the young people currently falling through the educational/employability skills "net". The educational sector needs to be defined less by institutions than by networks of opportunities (such as the FLP) which help to widen access, strengthen research and increase the sectors contribution to the economic, cultural and civic life of Wales.

5. THE ENVISAGED CURRICULUM

CCLL's curriculum of lifelong learning opportunities (delivered at level 4 through 10 Higher Education credit modules) for the FLP was officially launched on 2nd April 2011 at the World Heritage Centre in Blaenavon. The event consisted of talks from both ecologists and archaeologists (and landscape visits from both perspectives), sustainability workshops and a "learning lounge". The learning lounge (the opportunity to speak to tutors from CCLL about the curriculum) was facilitated in a relaxed non-invasive manner in the museum at the Centre. Whilst museums started as places for the storage, protection and display of artefacts (Antoniou and Lepouras 2008), it could be argued that today museums are learning institutions in their own right, a change that has no doubt emerged with the increasing need for lifelong learning itself. Information gathered by the tutors from the learning lounge (the "needs") will be analysed and will help inform the design of the training and support provided particularly in respect of the CLP. The analysis of "wants" will impact phase two of the delivery of the curriculum under LLP.

Preceding the launch event the CLP and LLP was presented to local 6th forms in both schools and Further Education colleges. The imaginative proactive approach complemented the efforts made to promote the lifelong learning aspect of the FLP through mailshots, press releases and general marketing. The presentation provided the young target group (16-19 year old students) with the opportunity of meeting university staff first hand, hearing about the FLP and in turn enquiring about the specific and exciting opportunities open to them. All presentations were well received by both students and teaching staff.

Phase one of the delivery of the FLP curriculum will be launched in early May 2011 initially offering modules at the World Heritage Centre in Blaenavon such as heritage, archaeology, culture, history, ecology and sustainability.

Landscape means something to everyone and every individual who values it for what he or she perceives to be its particular character. Indeed, Fowler (2004) believes that the concept of cultural landscapes as World Heritage Sites embraces ideas of belonging, outstanding, significance, locality, meaning, value, as well as singularity of place. Phase one of the FLP curriculum has therefore been developed over and above the more obvious subject choices to consider the aspect of local social history and history through material culture. In respect of the latter, unlike the process of distilling and regurgitating information from books, research into local history can be in the community, looking at the physical environment and providing the opportunity to handle different types of sources. Studying local communities and linking the past to the present is at the heart of appreciating Welsh heritage. Subjects such as art landscapes and its links with natural history and film making also provide rich learning resources for historical enquiry. CCLL modules in art landscapes and film making can be used to inspire students to explore the past and develop their skills of interpretation. For the FLP “film” is an opportunity to reconnect with the history of the World Heritage site in Blaenavon, using creativity and film form as a distinct language developed by students.

While the curriculum for the second phase of the delivery in September 2011 will be expanded specifically and selectively to meet the FLP objectives (while maintaining some flexibility and attractiveness), it will also incorporate the product of the “needs and wants” analysis carried out at the launch on 2nd April. This creative curriculum will be delivered in wider community venues in and around the Forgotten Landscapes area (including schools and colleges): again, an innovative and flexible way of inspiring young learners through a curriculum which puts their needs first. As Aronsson (2000 p.15) states “the concept of sustainability, interpreted in its broadest sense, has economic social and cultural, political, geographical and ecological aspects”. From a university perspective, where better to deliver this interdisciplinary approach than in an environment that is saturated with all these themes and resources.

While focusing on offering cross-curricular opportunities both in teaching and learning through the rich subject of landscapes, the LLP curriculum is also designed to develop young people’s skills in critical thinking and an understanding of their past and present whilst alerting them to how their future changing environment will shape and influence their place in the global world in the 21st century.

A key advance in the field of Education and Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship has been the preparation of an all Wales Strategy which recognises the fundamental role that such issues are increasingly playing in education and lifelong learning and the fact that Wales is widely regarded as being in the vanguard within the UK. By getting young people involved in learning about subjects such as history and archaeology internationally, as well as locally, they can, in the words of Picton

(2008 p.15), explore the interconnectivity of our world on a much deeper level and make connections that would not be possible with just a local field trip.

CCLL will have an indispensable role in support of citizenship by, in the words of Graham (2002 p.123), keeping alive the tradition of untrammelled critical enquiry and the maintenance of a kind of protected forum where unpopular, unfashionable and neglected ideas can be systematically explored...more specifically, universities exert a form of “cultural custodianship” in maintaining and continuously revitalising cultural inheritances. As Annette and McLaughlin (2005) state, the contribution of HEI to citizenship is much broader than that to the making of citizens.

6. EDUCATIONAL CURRICULUM AND EMPLOYMENT: THE BALANCE

WAG continue to recognise and promote the value of learning for learning sake (personal development and enjoyment) but also believe that “employability” must be a sustained key theme. The present generation of young people face very different challenges when they enter the world of work (Welsh Assembly Government 2009). Young people need options and opportunities to develop wide-ranging and sophisticated knowledge and skills for the changes in life and work in the 21st century. To achieve this it is essential that all young people are able to participate in education and training, take advantage of opportunities for employment, and participate effectively and responsibly in their communities including through the growth of Foundation Degrees (Welsh Assembly Government 2009).

The FLP curriculum has been devised and developed to include the level 4 ten credit modules that will also be included in a proposed new Cultural Heritage Foundation Degree. The intention is to provide a progression route onto the Cultural Heritage Foundation Degree for students engaging in the FLP curriculum and exemption from the same modules on the Degree. The Foundation Degree is available to people who are already working and people who are outside the labour market, the resources for which are made available by WAG under its One Wales objective of widening participation in Higher Education (WAG 2009) and it is hoped that the initiative will lead a drive to transform the performance and prospects of the area.

All young adults should have an entitlement to citizenship education based on learning through participation as well as through learning of a more formal kind and that these students should have the opportunity to have their achievement academically recognised.

The challenges of offering lifelong learning through the FLP to the community, and young people in particular, are immense but so are the opportunities. The FLP offers innovative teaching resources through the vehicle of historic cultural landscapes, landscapes that have been shaped and influenced over hundreds of years leaving heritage rich and varied. Whilst young people in this Welsh community might initially struggle to understand the relevance of an historic cultural landscape to their lives in the 21st century, they may well understand and be proud of what it represents and have the opportunity to make an impact on the Project, the community, their life chances and their heritage and leave behind their legacy for future generations: the guardians of tomorrow ...and the day after.

7. CONCLUSION

The Blaenavon World Heritage Site, in South Wales, was transformed by the industrial development of the area in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As a result the area constitutes a relevant example

of a highly productive, but also environmentally destructive, working landscape formed over centuries through the efforts of nature and man.

The FLP seeks to help create a sustainable visitor destination that can withstand the growing competition within the day visitor and short break tourism market while offering inclusive strategies involving the community towards developing and sustaining its own conservation, which aims to achieve “qualitative growth” rather than purely economic growth.

The educational facet of the FLP involves school visits and lifelong learning opportunities, allowing the local community to discover the landscape and its history, through “active learning”, rather than through “pure education”. Although this approach targets a wide range of people, this project offers all 16-19 year olds from the community the opportunity to engage in both formal and informal learning, meeting the needs of both the traditional learners and the young people currently falling through the educational/employability skills “net”. Lifelong learning can act as a tool to introduce the necessary skills to engage with a flexible learning culture.

The delivery of FLP started with an ‘open event’ and continued in two phases, during May and September 2011. The Project is intended to provide options and opportunities to develop wide-ranging and sophisticated knowledge and skills for the changes in life and work in the 21st century.

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