

Assessing the tourism potential of an Australian industrial icon

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In 2015, the remote mining community of Broken Hill became the first Australian city to be inscribed on the National Heritage List. The City Council's strategic plans reflect an expectation that the inscription will lead to an increase in tourism. A better understanding of the core dimensions of a successful and sustainable cultural heritage tourism product would enhance the effectiveness of this planning process. There are, however, few instruments designed to assess the tourism potential of complex and extensive industrial heritage landscapes like Broken Hill. Building on previous work by McKercher and Ho (2006), this paper identifies five core value dimensions for such an instrument – cultural, physical, product, experience and sustainability. The instrument is then tested on Broken Hill and three comparable industrial World Heritage sites. While Broken Hill's cultural, physical and sustainability dimensions rate strongly, the product and experience dimensions rate poorly effectively precluding the city from functioning as a viable attraction in its current state. The city's remoteness and isolation from other attractions, the complexity and deterioration of mining infrastructure, and the lack of a major mining-related tourist attraction exacerbate the weaknesses.

Key words: heritage management; tourism development; assessment tools; National Heritage

Introduction

In 2015, ten years after the initial nomination, the remote mining community of Broken Hill became the first Australian city to be inscribed on the National Heritage List. Along with other industrial areas in Europe and North America, Broken Hill has experienced a steady decrease in population and employment since the 1970s. The city sits in a remote and arid location (Figure 1), and does not conform to the stereotypical image of an aesthetically pleasing heritage landscape (Figure 2). Despite this, the Council's strategic plans reflect an optimistic, post-mining expectation that

inscription will be followed by an increase in tourism and the stabilisation of what has been a forty-year decline in prosperity. Such a strategy presupposes, of course, that tourists will be attracted in increasing numbers to the iconic characteristics of a city promoted through the heritage listing process. Questions arise, however, about what those iconic characteristics are, how they might be enhanced and whether they will be enough to drive tourism sustainably.



Figure 1. A map of Australia locating Broken Hill 510 km from Adelaide to the southwest and 1,150 km from Sydney to the east. (Map data ©2014 GBRMPA, Google)



Figure 2. An aerial view of Broken Hill showing the surface mine workings that bisect the city, 2013. (Photograph by Author)

The purpose of this paper is, therefore, to identify the iconic characteristics of industrial heritage sites such as Broken Hill. Then, based on this understanding, to develop and apply a conceptual audit instrument to assess the viability of such sites as sustainable tourism attractions. To date, academic studies have shown the impact of industrial heritage promotion on economic regeneration to be largely and assumed one (Hospers, 2000; Jones & Munday, 2001). Previous studies of governance (Wang & Bramwell, 2012; Wilson & Boyle, 2006), stakeholder participation (Aas et al., 2005; Jamal & Stronza, 2009), strategic planning (Currie & Wesley, 2010; Fonseca & Ramos, 2012; Lo Piccolo et al., 2012) and tourism development (Buckley, 2004; Chhabra, 2009; Fullerton et al., 2010; Pomeroy et al., 2011; Vargas-Sánchez et al., 2013) have also shown significant challenges for heritage sites looking to enhance their sustainable management practices. Chief amongst these challenges are the institutional factors governing how heritage is managed (Darlow et al., 2012) and the tension between heritage conservation and commercial viability (Hughes & Carlsen, 2010). Although this literature exploring the management of heritage sites is extensive, studies that specifically consider what makes heritage sites attractive to tourists are limited.

This paper reports on the development of a conceptual assessment instrument to address the problem. Firstly, the iconic characteristics unique to industrial heritage are defined in terms of their impact on tourism potential. Drawing on this understanding and previous exploratory development and empirical work by du Cros (2001) and McKercher and Ho (2006), a five-dimensional instrument for the assessment of industrial heritage sites as sustainable tourist attractions is presented. The paper concludes with a conceptual application of the instrument to the Australian mining city of Broken Hill and three comparable industrial World Heritage Sites in the United Kingdom: Blaenavon Industrial Landscape; Cornwall and West Devon Mining Landscape; and Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site.

The iconic character of Broken Hill is largely assumed in this paper based on the city's inclusion on the Australian National Heritage List. To be inscribed on the National Heritage List, a place must meet at least one of nine thematic criteria and be deemed to be of outstanding significance to the Australian community in comparison to other similar sites (Freestone et al., 2009). Broken Hill was inscribed in 2015 as having met eight of the nine criteria. These relate specifically to the scale and longevity of the ore body, contributions to mineralogical science and mining technology, developments in the Australian labour movement, the physical characteristics of the city, and the resilience of community in a remote location.

Identifying the iconic characteristics of industrial heritage

Arguing for the cultural significance of industrial heritage has presented a unique problem for those who recognise the role that industrial culture has played, and continues to play, in the shaping of national identities and economic development. The currency of the memory associated with the industrial past, reinforced through art, literature and physical remains, is one of a variety of factors that have contributed to the problem of a more universal recognition (Lowenthal, 1998). Other factors include the relative ordinariness of industrial heritage, the wealth of evidence still in existence, and the lack of a strong, theoretically supported research agenda (Blockley, 1999; Palmer & Neaverson, 1998). A further exacerbating factor has been the persistence of conservative local management practices and narrow definitions of heritage (Smith, 2006). Taken together, these

factors have meant slow recognition of the industrial past as a legitimate form of heritage. The questions of relevance to this paper are, however, how is industrial heritage defined and what characteristics determine its significance and establish the iconic status of an industrial site.

A systematic review of the World Heritage List was conducted between 2010 and 2013 to isolate those sites that could be classified as industrial. A definition of industrial heritage was derived from the literature as consisting of those tangible and intangible aspects of culturally significant human systems that have evolved for the intense exploitation of natural resources or production of goods or services, and are considered significant for their aesthetic, economic, historic, political, social and technological values. Further examination of the nomination and evaluation documents for those sites revealed several distinguishing or iconic characteristics unique to industrial heritage sites.

In terms of tangible characteristics, sites tended to be a complex mix of disused or underutilised industrial structures and extensive man-made landscapes. Boundaries blur into the surrounding landscape typically including worker housing and community infrastructure. Many sites are in remote locations and contain hazardous physical features such as disused mine shafts and contaminated waste. The intangible characteristics of industrial heritage include layers of technological innovation and expansion, as well as links to broader regional and international socio-economic and political networks. These networks extend the diversity of stakeholder interest in any given site. Further intangible characteristics include the utilitarian aesthetic of industrial heritage and associations with periods of rapid social change and deprivation (Table 1).

Table 1. The iconic characteristics of industrial heritage

Heritage values	Defining characteristics
Tangible values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extensive infrastructure and/or extensive human-made landscapes Interlinked industrial, residential and community functions Indistinct site boundaries Geographically or perceptually remote locations Limited economic and functional options for adaptive re-use
Intangible values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Innovative technological, socio-economic and organisation systems Layers of technical innovation and industrial processes Links to broader economic, environmental and social networks Links to multiple and diverse stakeholder groups A utilitarian aesthetic perceived to of limited value

Source: Author

A detailed content analysis was then conducted on the management plans for six industrial World Heritage Sites in the United Kingdom. The plans revealed that the more immediate effect of these iconic characteristics on tourism related to the cost and complexity of conservation and maintenance work, and the provision of safe visitor access and adequate interpretation. A less obvious impact came from the extensive and varied interest groups who complicated the stakeholder engagement process while the utilitarian aesthetic influenced perceptions of value with a public used to a more visually pleasing heritage. With these characteristics and their effects in mind, of primary concern of the management plans was the ability of such industrial sites,

particularly in remote locations, to generate sufficient income from tourist visitation and other commercial uses such as adaptive re-use to operate sustainably.

Methodology: Developing a sustainable tourism assessment instrument

The study involved three stages undertaken between 2010 and 2013. World Heritage sites were selected as the basis for comparative analysis with Broken Hill because they represent the pinnacle of international heritage significance based on criteria that are universally agreed and have evolved steadily over a thirty-five year period (Landorf, 2009). The assessment of significance at the World Heritage level is also subject to independent evaluation by recognised bodies of experts. Best international practice is, therefore, assumed to inform the management of these sites, including the strategies employed to sustain heritage value and develop tourism.

Stage one commenced with a review of the World Heritage List to establish a representative sample of industrial sites that were comparable to Broken Hill in terms of their scale, complexity and governance arrangements. The selected sites were Blaenavon Industrial Landscape inscribed in 2000, Cornwall and West Devon Mining Landscape inscribed in 2006, and Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site inscribed in 1986, and all located in the United Kingdom. Documents related to the history and management frameworks at each location were analysed to provide an appreciation of the key features of each site. The documentary evidence, particularly the management plans for each World Heritage site, and City Council strategic plans for Broken Hill, were also used to inform an understanding of the key tourism management and sustainability issues associated with each site.

Stage two involved visits to each site. Visual surveys were used primarily to audit key features and develop a deeper familiarity with the issues identified in the management plans for each site. While subject to a degree of selectivity, the surveys supported a more comprehensive view of each setting than relying on secondary sources alone. The surveys were used to identify the extent of each site, and the nature and condition of the physical fabric and features associated with each site. The surveys were also used to corroborate the key management and sustainability issues identified in stage one. Promotional material, guidebooks, driving and walking tours were sourced at each site and used to conduct self-guided explorations. Photographs recorded significant features and any strategic issues identified in stage one, such as land instability and interpretation. Some experiences were closed for seasonal or maintenance reasons. However, the major visitor experiences promoted at each site were trialled. Each site visit lasted between two and three days.

The final stage used theoretical thematic analysis to evaluate the visual survey data and triangulate the findings against the key issues identified earlier. A previous study by du Cros (2001) had designed a tourism assessment model based on market appeal and cultural heritage asset robustness. This two dimensional quantitative model was developed by McKercher and Ho (2006) into a four dimensional qualitative tool for assessing the potential of cultural heritage assets to be developed into viable tourism attractions. The four dimensions were cultural, physical, product and experiential values. While the tool was theoretically robust, it had been designed for use on smaller heritage attractions and tested in Hong Kong, a densely populated location. The original instrument, therefore, required modification for complex industrial heritage sites.

The original tool used between five and six qualitative criteria in the form of questions to assess each dimension. To increase reliability and illustrate relationships more decisively, these criteria were simplified to two direct questions per dimension. As the aim of this study was to assess the potential of industrial heritage for sustainable tourism, a fifth sustainable development dimension was derived from the literature and added to the instrument (Landorf, 2011) (Table 2). To enable a relative ordering of holistic data, the original tool used an ordinal scale marking system rather than absolute measures based on five categories – ‘low’, ‘low/moderate’, ‘moderate’, ‘moderate/high’ and ‘high’. A similar qualitative framework was also adopted in this study.

Table 2. Industrial heritage assessment dimensions and criteria

Dimensions	Criteria
Cultural values	How current are stakeholder associations with the site (are they within or beyond living memory)? What is the level of heritage significance at the site (is the site of international, national or local significance)?
Physical values	What is the level of visitor access and interpretation at the site? How authentic and intact are the site’s significant attributes?
Product values	How close is the site to other compatible tourist attractions? What is the level of heritage tourism appeal?
Experience values	What is the level of technological sophistication and educational/cognitive design of the site? How involved are visitors in the creation of experiences at the site?
Sustainability values	How extensive is stakeholder participation in the site (is the site managed by a partnership or through a democratic process)? What is the level of strategic planning at the site (how rigorous is the process and is it integrated into national goals)?

Source: Author

The *cultural values dimension* of the modified instrument considered the extent of stakeholder associations with a site and the level of site recognition based on international, national or local significance. This dimension assessed the depth of emotional engagement based on personal associations with a site, and the breadth of recognition amongst potential tourists. The *physical values dimension* evaluated the level of visitor access and quality of interpretation at each site, and the extent of historical authenticity and integrity. This dimension needed to determine the accessibility and physical quality of a site in terms of interpretation, intactness and state of repair. The *product values dimension* assessed the extent of compatible tourism experiences in close proximity to each site, and the market appeal of the experiences offered. This dimension ascertained each site’s relationship to other tourism nodes and its capacity to attract and retain visitors. The *experience values dimension* measured the technological sophistication and educational design of tourist experiences at each site, and the extent of visitor participation in and co-creation of those experiences. This dimension needed to establish the depth of cognitive engagement at each site and whether the available breadth of engagement experiences would lead to lengthy or multiple visits.

The fifth and final *sustainable development dimension* examined the use of a long term and holistic approach to tourism planning, and the extent of stakeholder participation in that planning process. Strategic planning and stakeholder participation were identified in the literature as contributing to sustainable development. A formal planning process promotes a circular model of future oriented causality while multiple stakeholder participation in the process enhances accountability and commitment to sustainable outcomes. Finally, the visual survey descriptions were synthesised into categories of heritage visitor experiences and used to inform the assessment of physical, product and experience values dimensions.

Results: Applying a sustainable tourism assessment instrument

Visual survey results

Ironbridge Gorge offered the most comprehensive collection of interpretive information together with a coordinated passport system of entry to the ten museums at the site. Blaenavon offered a well-coordinated graphic style and comprehensive collection of brochures for the site's various heritage assets. A series of walking trails had been developed and included in a suite of interpretive materials. As the newest and most extensive site, interpretive information at Cornwall and West Devon was fragmented and lacked graphical coordination. Broken Hill offered a series of clearly signposted and informative walking and driving trails but published material lacked the graphic sophistication and coordination found at Ironbridge Gorge and Blaenavon. In terms of more elaborate visitor experiences, a phenomenological definition of 'experience' as an event that has some personal relevance, novelty, surprise, learning, and engagement, was adopted as a framework for the categorisation of experience types (Poulsson & Kale, 2004). Six different experiences were defined on the basis of increasing levels of visitor interaction and technological support (Table 3).

Table 3. Categorisation of heritage visitor experiences

Type of experience	Definition
Self-guided tours	Self-guided walk or drive tours supported by maps, signage and interpretive information
Static interpretation	Static interpretive representations of historic information and traditional practices using costumed dummies and reproduction and/or original props
Costumed interpretation	Interactive interpretive representations of historic information and traditional practices using live costumed staff and reproduction and/or original props
Multi-media interpretation	Non-interactive interpretive representations of historic information and traditional practices using live actors recorded in visual or audio performances
Interactive physical experience	Interactive interpretive representations of historic information and traditional practices that physically engage the visitor in a directed learning experience
Interactive multi-media immersion	Interactive interpretive representations of historic information and traditional practices that physically engage the visitor in a self-directed multi-media learning experience

Source: Author

The visual surveys revealed that visitors at all four sites could access at least one type of experience on a permanent basis. The extent of the experiences varied from self-guided tours and interpretive signage at all sites, through static interpretive representations, to major interactive physical and multi-media visitor experiences. Ironbridge Gorge and Blaenavon offered the most extensive range of experiences (Table 4).

Table 4. Visitor experiences offered at each site

Type of experience	Industrial Heritage Site			
	Blaenavon	Cornwall and West Devon	Ironbridge Gorge	Broken Hill
Self-guided tours	✓	✓	✓	✓
Static interpretation	✓	✓	✓	✓
Costumed interpretation	✓	✓	✓	
Multi-media interpretation	✓		✓	✓
Interactive physical experience	✓	✓	✓	
Interactive multi-media immersion	✓			

Source: Author

In addition, Ironbridge Gorge utilised historic buildings as retail facilities, commercial premises and accommodation. While not actively interpreting heritage significance, the physical character of the buildings added to the experience at the site. Some sites also supported periodic events such as Blaenavon's Walking Festival, the Brass Band Festival at Ironbridge Gorge and World Heritage Day celebrations at all three World Heritage sites. Broken Hill is associated with a particular school of artists known as 'The Brushman of the Bush' and the annual St Patricks racing carnival, but there are no specific cultural festivals or events that regularly draw tourists to the city.

Applying the assessment instrument

Following the visual survey, the five dimensional assessment instrument was applied at a conceptual level to each site to reveal a range of strategic or 'fatal' flaws in the tourist offerings, particularly at Broken Hill. The *cultural values dimension* considered the stakeholder associations and heritage significance. As World Heritage sites, Blaenavon, Cornwall and West Devon, and Ironbridge Gorge all rated more strongly on the heritage significance criteria than Broken Hill. However, due to the currency of its working heritage value and contributions to economic development and labour relations in Australia, Broken Hill rated more strongly in terms of stakeholder associations.

The *physical values dimension* evaluated the level access and interpretation and the authenticity and integrity. With a high level of mining infrastructure remaining in place and some still operational, Broken Hill rated more strongly in terms of the authenticity and integrity of the built environment (Figure 3). The three World Heritage sites rated more strongly in terms of site access and interpretation with Ironbridge Gorge rating highly while the fragmented nature of Cornwall and West Devon resulted in a low/moderate rating.



Figure 3. Historic Broken Hill mining infrastructure and civic buildings, 2010. L to R: Civic buildings along Argent Street. Browne's Shaft and Headframe. (Photographs by Author)

The *product values dimension* assessed market appeal and proximity to compatible attractions. The three World Heritage sites rated more highly than Broken Hill on both values. Ironbridge Gorge is closer than Blaenavon and Cornwall West Devon to major population centres and has a variety of other tourist attractions in close proximity. Blaenavon is a compact and well-presented site but with fewer active attractions and accommodation options. The market appeal of Cornwall and West Devon is affected by the site's complexity. While there are few active experiences in close proximity, the Cornwall and West Devon area is a recognised holiday destination for reasons other than heritage tourism. Broken Hill is 510km from Adelaide, the nearest major city. Although appealing as an outback destination, the complexity of the site means maintenance and presentation are problematic. More significantly, there are no major interactive physical or multi-media immersion experiences currently in operation at Broken Hill. Ironbridge Gorge, by comparison, includes ten major museums offering varying visitor experiences. The Big Pit National Coal Museum in Blaenavon and Geevor Tin Mine in Cornwall and West Devon both offer authentic and unique underground and surface works tours.

The *experience value dimension* established the technological sophistication and educational design of visitor experiences, and the degree of experience co-creation at each site. The three World Heritage sites rated more strongly on both dimensions than Broken Hill. Ironbridge Gorge operates a number of technologically sophisticated interactive experiences that utilise a wide variety of interpretation and presentation techniques. Blaenavon and Cornwall and West Devon include fewer interactive experiences but both offer unique interactive attractions in the Big Pit National Museum

and Geevor Tin Mine. As previously mentioned, there is currently no major interactive visitor experience at Broken Hill (Figure 4).



Figure 4. A view of the Broken Hill surface mine workings toward the former Zinc Corporation mine, 2010. (Photographs by Author)

The final *sustainability value dimension* examined the planning process at each site and the extent of stakeholder participation in that process. All four sites utilised a strong strategic planning process. However, Broken Hill rated more highly on both dimensions. The primary managing organisation for the city of Broken Hill is the democratically elected local council. Local councils are subject to state environmental legislation and integrated into national governance and sustainability frameworks. As elected bodies, local councils are also subject to public standards of accountability, legitimacy and effectiveness. While local governments have a significant involvement at the World Heritage Sites, all three utilise partnership structures of varying sizes and complexities.

The conceptual application of the assessment instrument reveals Broken Hill to have relatively high ratings for its cultural, physical and sustainability values. There are, however, deficiencies along the product and experience value dimensions. While Broken Hill offers a unique and holistic experience, the city's remoteness from major population centres and transportation routes, and isolation from other compatible tourist attractions are significant flaws. The scale and complexity of the site and deteriorating heritage infrastructure suggests that, even with the addition of a major mining-related interactive tourist attraction, there is insufficient market appeal and associative value to overcome these locational weaknesses (Table 5).

Table 5. Assessment of tourism potential at each site

Dimensions of heritage tourism	Industrial Heritage Site			
	Blaenavon	CornwallW est Devon	Ironbridge Gorge	Broken Hill
Cultural values:				
• heritage significance	high	high	high	moderate
• stakeholder association	moderate	moderate	low/mod	mod/high
Physical values:				
• authenticity and integrity	mod/high	mod/high	moderate	high
• access and interpretation	mod/high	low/mod	high	low
Product values:				
• market appeal	mod/high	moderate	high	low/mod
• compatible proximity	low/mod	moderate	high	low
Experience values:				
• experience co-creation	mod/high	moderate	high	low
• technology and education	mod/high	moderate	high	low
Sustainability values:				
• strategic planning	mod/high	mod/high	mod/high	high
• stakeholder participation	moderate	low/mod	moderate	high

Source: Author

Conclusion

The current *Broken Hill Strategic Tourism Plan* refers to the city's National Heritage List nomination as something that will 'position Broken Hill as the only Australian City to be awarded National Heritage Listing and, therefore, recognition (sic) as a significant heritage tourism destination within Australia' (Wray, 2010). This sentiment is echoed in the City Council's *Management Plan 2009/2014* where tourism is linked to the listing of the city and both heritage listing and tourism are noted as major factors influencing the achievement of social and economic objectives (BHCC, 2009). Interrogating these two documents reveals that the nomination process has led to a more targeted approach to the management, development and marketing of Broken Hill as a tourist destination. However, the effects of heritage listing on tourism remain ambiguous due to the complex bundle of interdependent factors that make up any given heritage attraction.

Like other complex industrial sites, Broken Hill anticipates that inscription will have a positive impact on the city's economy. While the cultural values associated with Broken Hill are more contemporary the breadth of recognition is weaker in comparison to the World Heritage sites. On its own, this could be addressed with targeted marketing strategies. Likewise, as the more recently operational of the four sites, Broken Hill rates more highly in terms of authenticity and integrity but this is weighted against poorer access and interpretation across the site. This could also be addressed with more targeted site development and management strategies. In terms of sustainability, Broken Hill rates highly by comparison based on the long-term, holistic and participatory governance arrangements currently in place for the site.

However, unlike Blaenavon, Cornwall and West Devon, Broken Hill does not currently have a significant mining related interactive visitor attraction and, unlike Ironbridge Gorge, it does not offer a variety of complimentary experiences. The closure of an underground tourist operation at Delprat's Mine in 2007 is noted in the BHCC Tourism Plan as having 'left a significant gap in the visitor experience' (Wray, 2010). This practical but strategic issue could also be addressed with targeted development. However, together with the city's remote location, isolation from other complementary tourist attractions, and fragile and extensive mining infrastructure, this suggests a strategic flaw in the longer-term sustainability of heritage tourism for the city, even with inscription on the National Heritage List.

The instrument developed and tested in this study builds a sustainable development dimension into a previously tested model. This ties the feasibility of a tourism asset into the longer-term, holistic and participatory planning process necessary for sustainable development. The multi-dimensional nature of the instrument, along cultural, physical, product, experience and sustainability value dimensions, provides a balanced perspective allowing a more focussed targeting of critical weaknesses. Finally, the comparative and qualitative nature of the instrument allows it to be deployed with relative ease by non-experts as part of a consensus decision-making process, a key contributor to sustainable development.

As the conceptual application of the five-dimensional framework suggested in this study has shown, iconic status is the product of a variety of characteristics unique to a given historic site. While inscription on a National Heritage List might establish the iconic value of a place such as Broken Hill, a closer reading of the unique characteristics of the site exposes several strategic flaws that will be difficult to address from a sustainable management and tourism development perspective.

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