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Rediscovering cultural tourism: Cultural regeneration in seaside towns

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Abstract   British seaside towns have been subject to numerous attempts at regeneration and rebranding since the collapse of traditional seaside tourism began in the late 1970s. This paper reviews contemporary approaches to seaside regeneration and demonstrates that cultural regeneration strategies are becoming increasingly prevalent in this area. The validity of transferring city-based models of cultural development to these smaller urban areas is critiqued. The history of cultural investment in seaside towns is highlighted to show how current approaches to cultural regeneration, while presented as novel, are in fact a resumption of earlier strategies of cultural tourism development. This heritage of cultural development provides a resource for seaside cultural regeneration which may allow development of this type to avoid the negative social impacts often associated with cultural regeneration in cities.

Keywords: seaside, cultural regeneration, cultural tourism, regeneration

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INTRODUCTION

Beatty and Fothergill refer to seaside towns as the 'least understood of Britain's "problem" areas'[1] and, despite the strong public awareness of the decline of the British seaside resort, there has been little academic research into the contemporary problems facing these formerly busy destinations that can usefully be applied in their future development.[2–4] Generally, coastal resorts have been under-researched, despite being the 'main tourism destination for many holidaymakers';[5] most research that has taken place has a regional focus or is limited to narrow economic and/or historical perspectives. Seaside towns contribute significantly to the visitor economy in the UK: Shaw and Coles demonstrate that domestic tourists take 25.5 million seaside holidays in the UK, spending around £4.7bn, and 270 million day trips generating £3.1bn spend.[6]

The tourism industry in Britain's seaside towns has been in decline since the mid-1970s when increasing competition from newly developed holiday destinations and changes in the dynamics of the tourism market made the traditional week-long seaside family holiday obsolete. As in other one-industry towns, this period of global economic restructuring left, in many seaside destinations, a legacy of unemployment, social problems, outdated infrastructure and redundant urban spaces. The regeneration response to the effects of this decline over the last twenty years has involved attempts to reposition these towns within the tourism marketplace through a process of rebranding and product development. A combination of

geography, heritage and economic structures has left most seaside towns with no realistic alternative to tourism development as a strategy for revitalisation but, as yet, and with some notable exceptions, no successful new models for tourism have been produced for towns that were at the forefront of the development of modern tourism. Pre-eminent among contemporary approaches to seaside regeneration has been the strategy of cultural regeneration, and this paper provides a critical overview of this phenomenon, concentrating on the differences between impacts of cultural regeneration in large urban centres and the smaller urban areas of seaside towns.

DEFINING SEASIDE TOWNS

Walton's historical study of British seaside towns rejects the notion that there can be one definition of its subject: 'We are dealing with a recognisable and distinctive kind of town, but with as many variations as a hawkweed or burnet-moth.'[7] Walton also asserts that, despite the diversity of towns and experiences that make up the seaside, 'the British seaside resort retains a robust identity, which in turn reinforces its importance as a subject for investigation and analysis'.[8] The seaside town emerged through a defined historical process, and the specific spatial, economic and cultural characteristics of the towns as one finds them today can be explained through their emergence, along with the industrialisation of England, the emergence of an affluent middle class and the way in which these factors combined to allow for the construction of the seaside resort as a cultural phenomenon in the 19th century.

Beatty and Fothergill's[9] study into the economies of seaside towns points out that a list of every town with some claim to seaside resort status would include 120 towns, some of which are more accurately described as ports, industrial towns or residential areas. Beatty and Fothergill

apply three criteria in their study in order to identify 'seaside towns', which

1. are seaside resorts, rather than just all developed areas by the sea — this excludes towns whose main function is as a port or industrial centre
2. are significant urban areas in their own right, rather than suburbs of larger settlements or sections of a settlement that happen to be by the sea
3. had a population of over 8,000 in 1971, the starting point for their own research and a way of concentrating their research in large seaside towns.

This is the definition of 'seaside towns' that has been used in this study. The term 'seaside towns' is used in this paper in preference to 'coastal towns', 'seaside resorts' or 'coastal resorts' to emphasise the specific cultural factors at play in the construction of the British urban seaside environment, as a peculiar construction of the 'tourist gaze'.[10]

THE DECLINE OF SEASIDE TOWNS IN BRITAIN

Although Walton claims that the 'death of the British seaside had been prematurely anticipated and greatly exaggerated',[11] sources generally agree that, from the mid-1970s, British seaside resorts have been in a period of decline. As Urry points out, in Britain, tourism has become a hugely important industry but, paradoxically, seaside towns have not shared in this contemporary growth. Urry points to mainly cultural factors in explaining this discrepancy, locating expressions of cultural change in:

— de-industrialisation of cities and towns, stimulating less of a need for escape to the seaside;
— growth of city/urban tourism as a competitor to traditional 'resort-based' tourism;

— proliferation of urban leisure centres and sports facilities, replicating and improving upon seaside leisure functions;

— recolonisation of the seaside by the upper classes as a means of distinction, re-establishing pre-industrial tourism patterns in seaside destinations.[12]

These cultural shifts were not the result of one single change, but of a matrix of change whose effects were seen in many industrial sectors and which brought together specific industrial failures and macro-economic shifts, tied to the restructuring of global capitalism as technological and political changes came together in contemporary globalisation. In 1974, the world experienced the first international oil crisis, following which domestic tourism fell and remained depressed until the late 1980s, part of a general economic slump in Britain and in western economies more generally. This was compounded in the case of tourism by the emergence of overseas resorts 'where tourists could find a mixture of the familiar and the exotic, an echo on a grander scale of what the English seaside was like for holiday makers in the 19th century'.[13] Like the domestic ship-building, automobile manufacturing and coal mining industries, seaside tourism in the UK did not adapt quickly to the new globalised reality.

SEASIDE REGENERATION

Regeneration is an approach to development that seeks to respond to urban decline through a variety of techniques, all of which have the aim of arresting decline and promoting sustainable, long-term, positive change within a specific area. Most authors agree that regeneration has emerged as a policy/practical construct in response to the restructuring of the global economy in the last thirty years and the negative consequences of the attendant de-industrialisation and socio-economic change

in western nations, which has been felt most keenly in urban areas.[14–19] Roberts defines regeneration as 'comprehensive and integrated vision and action which leads to the resolution of urban problems and which seeks to bring about a lasting improvement in the economic, physical, social and environmental condition of an area that has been subject to change'.[20]

Strategies of regeneration have been explicitly employed through the UK and Europe since the Second World War, when the need for physical reconstruction provided an opportunity for the reconsideration of urban form in response to changed economic and social conditions. In the UK, successive governments have produced regeneration and development frameworks which have given priorities to different economic sectors, institutional actors and policy outcomes. Recently, a number of non-governmental organisations such as English Heritage,[21] the British Urban Regeneration Association[22] and some local authorities (eg Shepway Council[23] and Worthing Borough Council[24]) in the UK have started to consider the future of a specifically seaside form of regeneration, but much of this work is local and specific, lacking conceptual frameworks or a strategic overview of the issues involved.

Central government has 'consistently failed'[25] to involve itself in the regeneration of seaside towns, leaving it to quasi-NGOs and local authorities, which compares poorly with other European governments, especially France and Spain. Local government, however, has displayed a significant commitment to seaside regeneration, which makes sense, as seaside tourism is mainly local-resource based. The response to decline in seaside towns has been variously described as 'rejuvenation' where it relates to the re-establishment of tourism function or 'regeneration' where a more holistic approach to recovery is considered. Although the majority of

northern European and some Mediterranean resorts have been responding to decline since the 1980s, there are only a 'handful' of studies into this,[26] showing that efforts focus primarily on product reorganisation and product transformation.

Despite much being done recently to reposition British seaside resorts within the tourism market, little has changed, suggesting that attempting to manage the supply and demand for seaside tourism through marketing initiatives and product development cannot be the sole solution to the decline of seaside towns.[27,28] Despite this, the mono-industrial character of seaside resorts means that decline in the tourism industry is simply not an option for the majority of seaside destinations.[29] Because of this, new forms of tourism have been explored in seaside destinations, including conference/business tourism, educational tourism and, most recently, cultural tourism development strategies. A content analysis methodology has been employed to analyse the foci of regional

and local approaches to regeneration in seaside towns in Britain, with the results of this given in Tables 1 and 2. First, the approach to seaside regeneration being taken in each region of the UK was analysed, and then a purposive sample of seaside towns in each region was chosen. No towns from Wales, Northern Ireland or Scotland were chosen, owing to the lack of specific seaside forms of regeneration at this time.

As shown in Tables 1 and 2, many seaside towns are undergoing regeneration schemes that can be described as cultural, or which have specific cultural components.

Carter[54] argues that British seaside resorts are turning to the creative industries for regeneration, and one can see that creative development[55] is becoming the dominant theme in contemporary British seaside regeneration. The Department for Culture Media and Sport has announced a £45m funding programme called 'Sea Change' to support cultural investments in seaside regeneration. The first £12m tranche of funding was awarded to Blackpool, Torbay

Table 1: Contemporary approaches to seaside regeneration at the regional level

Region/Nation	Dominant approach	RDA/responsible body
South West	Mainly economic,[a] some physical[b] and social[c]	SWRDA
East Midlands	Social and economic	EMDA
Yorkshire and the Humber	Physical emphasis, some economic and social	
East of England	Diverse set of programmes in place with no core focus to seaside regeneration	EEDA
North East	No overarching strategic framework for seaside regeneration	One North East
North West	Mainly economic	NWRDA
South East	Cultural,[d] economic	SEEDA
Wales	Economic and physical	Welsh Assembly
Scotland	No overarching strategic framework for seaside regeneration	Scottish Assembly
N. Ireland	No overarching strategic framework for seaside regeneration	Northern Ireland Assembly

[a] Economic regeneration strategies focus on re-establishing the conditions for successful capital accumulation in an area and tend to emphasise enterprise support and innovation funding.
[b] Physical regeneration concentrates on the quality of the built environment and infrastructure projects.
[c] Social regeneration has also been described in the literature as community regeneration, and is used here to refer to an approach to regeneration that emphasises the role of the voluntary and community sector and in building grassroots participation in the regeneration process.
[d] See section on cultural regeneration, below, for an explanation of this term.
Sources: Refs. 30–34.

Table 2: Contemporary approaches to seaside regeneration at the local level

Town	Region	Approach to regeneration
Morecambe	North West	Mixed, with an emphasis on social and housing
Blackpool	North West	Economic, with a culture and entertainment focus
Southport	North West	Economic and social
Bridlington	Yorkshire and the Humber	Economic
Scarborough	Yorkshire and the Humber	Economic and social
Cleethorpes	Yorkshire and the Humber	Mixed, with an emphasis on physical and economic
Whitley Bay	North East	Economic at the sub-regional level, cultural focus to Whitley Bay regeneration
Skegness	East of England	Economic
Southend	East of England	Mixed: economic, physical and cultural
Great Yarmouth	East of England	Economic and housing
Hastings and Bexhill	South East	Economic and social
Folkestone	South East	Cultural
Margate	South East	Cultural
Whitstable	South East	Cultural
Torbay	South West	Economic
Falmouth	South West	Cultural and physical
Weston-super-Mare	South West	Economic and physical

Sources: Refs. 35–53.

and Dover in 2008. In the most recent funding round, a further £12m has been awarded:

— *Southport*: £4m to link an arts centre, library and gallery and to develop a theatre, museum and popular music venue;
— *Bridlington*: £3m for improvements to the area around the refurbished Royal Hall and Spa theatre, as well as developing Pembroke Gardens as an outdoor performance space;
— *Great Yarmouth*: £3m to regenerate the historic quarter, including conversion of a grade 1 listed chapel into an arts centre;
— *Hastings*: £2m for an artist designed piazza, performance space and community centre.[56]

The most significant cultural investment in seaside towns, however, is taking place in the south-east of England, where the aspiration is for seaside towns to become 'year-round cultural destinations'.[57] Brighton in Sussex has rebranded itself successfully as a creative tourism destination with a vibrant creative industries sector:

'We are now much more about culture than candyfloss.'[58] Whitstable on the North Kent coast has been transformed from a small fishing village to 'an arty, foody, fashion hub',[59] in the main due to an influx of artists and creative industries over the last fifteen years, an organic, gentrifying change on which local entrepreneurs and the local authority have capitalised to develop the town as a cultural tourism destination. It is estimated that around £900,000 of public funds has been invested in regenerating Whitstable since 1990, attracting an additional £4.5m in partnership funding. This has led to the restoration of over 350 buildings in the town.[60] Margate, in the Thanet sub-region, is receiving £25m of public funding for the construction of a contemporary art centre, which is planned to be the centrepiece of the cultural regeneration of the most important of the Kentish seaside resorts. In Folkestone, a charitable trust is driving the creative regeneration of the town, investing £20m in the development of a cultural quarter, as well as supporting the programming of cultural events such as a new international art biennial and investing significantly in education and business

development in the town.[61] In Bexhill on the south coast, £6m has been invested in the refurbishment of the De La Warr Pavilion, a 1930s modernist construction which has now been re-imagined as a leading contemporary arts space with the aim of serving 'as a catalyst towards the wider ambitions for Bexhill, as the town becomes an important centre for cultural tourism and a focus for sustainable economic tourism'.[62]

One can identify a contemporary trend for seaside towns in the UK, all of whom are grappling with issues of regeneration and tourism development, to turn to investment in culture as the driver for their regeneration strategy.

CULTURAL REGENERATION

While government motivations for regeneration in general and culture-led regeneration in particular are sometimes difficult to discern, what is clear is that these projects are increasing in both scope and frequency. As Evans notes

> 'the creation of cultural flagships, architectural masterpieces and their (re)location in industrial districts, waterfronts and depopulated downtown areas has not been paralleled since the Victorian civic building and celebrations ... cities have again embraced these politically and economically high-risk ventures.'[63]

Other writers have added to this with observations that increased government spending on culture is predicated on the belief that this will have impacts in other policy areas such as crime and unemployment.[64] Landry provides another avenue for governments keen to revive areas that have suffered from the decline in heavy industry and traditional patterns of employment in 'The creative city', when he describes regeneration processes in one such area: 'The town saw that it had only one resource — its people: their intelligence, ingenuity, aspirations,

motivations, imagination and creativity. If these could be tapped, renewal and regeneration would follow.'[65]

In the context of urban regeneration, culture is defined broadly, but can involve elements or combinations of:

— architecture;
— heritage buildings and attractions;
— visual and performing arts;
— festivals and events;
— tourism development;
— entertainment and leisure complexes;
— 'culture as a way of life'.[66]

Cultural regeneration and its associated benefits, such as creative industries development and cultural tourism are now a core part of urban redevelopment and competitiveness strategies,[67–69] but this only serves to reinforce the already central role of culture in the development and image of urban areas. As Zukin points out, 'For several hundred years, visual representations of cities have "sold" urban growth. Images, from early maps to picture postcards, have not simply reflected real city spaces; instead they have been imaginative reconstructions — from specific points of view — of a city's monumentality.'[70]

Evans highlights the potential for cultural development as a mode of action within the policy arena as one of the few available strategies that can engage with globalisation and 'capture the twin goals of competitive advantage and quality of life',[71] helping to explain its current popularity. Cultural regeneration offers policy makers a strategy for integrating new visions of urban competitiveness and lifestyle indices of class and diversity and their relationship to urban vitality, such as those advanced by Landry and Florida. Florida's work is primarily concerned with growth economics and inter-city competitiveness and suggests that the key to the revival or development of cities is their ability to attract what he calls the 'Creative Class',

defined broadly as an economic group who 'add economic value through their creativity'.[72] This class includes knowledge workers, artists, symbolic analysts, those with high-tech skill sets and all those working in the creative economy. The individuals grouped together in this class are seen as both producers and consumers of 'the vibrancy of street life, café culture, cultural and creative activities'[73] which, along with qualities of openness and diversity and the combination of the natural and built environment, provide the key quality of place indicators for attracting the 'creative class' and their high value employment and lifestyles to an area. Grodach and Loukaitou-Sideris[74] reinforce this perspective, highlighting how cities pursue cultural development strategies to catalyse inward business investment, increase consumption by residents and tourists, improve city image and enhance local quality of life. This coming together of the strategies and tactics of cultural regeneration with a post-ideological, managerial, political outlook, as it has developed in the western economies and those of the global north in the last twenty years, helps to explain why strategies of cultural regeneration that have only been seen as viable in major urban centres are increasingly being used by smaller urban areas. These are as diverse as Huddersfield[75] and Folkestone[76] in the UK, Bergslagen in Sweden[77] and North Adams, Massachusetts, in the US.[78] Some, however, have questioned the utility of cultural regeneration outside the major metropolitan centres at a functional level:

> 'How do places that have lived with notoriously negative images, anachronistic economies and numerous sites of industrial decline, come to believe that at least a part of their economic recovery depends on something as elusive (or material) as the arts?'[79]

Historically, state spending on cultural development has been primarily concerned with ideas such as self-expression, creativity and empowerment. Economic development is more concerned with the politics of growth and capital accumulation. There is not necessarily a link between these two policy modes and, although recent policy discourse makes creativity more central in economic and social concerns, high-profile spending on culture may mask political issues of power and access to resources in the interest of economic restructuring and gentrification;[80] indeed, Florida notes that socio-economic inequality is highest in the very creative epicentres of the US that he thinks should be emulated elsewhere.

Criticisms have been made that culture-led initiatives have not produced the economic benefits that they promised and that the 'trickle-down' effect of these projects has failed to materialise.[81] Cultural regeneration strategies claim to diversify economies and also to rebrand cities and regions to make them more attractive to tourists and businesses. While there is no doubt that diversifying economies is one measurable outcome of cultural regeneration, concerns exist as to whether this is to the benefit of local communities or whether they only benefit 'high-spending visitors'.[82] In deprived areas, local people may not have the economic or cultural capital necessary to engage with cultural interventions, which often take the form of 'cultural quarters', which can be exclusive in both conception and price if not developed with local communities in mind.

The rhetoric of using creative development to make urban spaces available to all groups may be undermined by historical symbolic functions of sites as markers of social divisions, knowledge that contemporary planners and consultants find it hard to access.[83] This may be of particular concern in the regeneration of areas where economic restructuring has left redundant former places of employment and leisure. In addition to this, the public

spaces created through these strategies often develop 'small places within the city as sites of visual delectation ... urban oases where everyone appears to be middle class',[84] making local patterns of inequality invisible, especially to tourists. On the whole, the social impacts of cultural regeneration are under-researched and poorly understood.[85]

SEASIDE CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

The above discussions give context to the contemporary trend for cultural regeneration in seaside towns. There is a turn to culture taking place across British seaside destinations, where established models of cultural development from large urban centres are being transplanted into these smaller urban areas in an attempt to revive local tourism industries. The modes of cultural regeneration outlined above have been critiqued according to patterns of development in cities, and very little research has been carried out to demonstrate the validity of these frameworks in non-city settings. For this reason, it is unclear whether the same impacts can be expected and whether the criticisms of cultural regeneration strategies will hold in seaside contexts.

To explore the role of cultural regeneration in seaside towns, it is necessary to investigate the cultural context in which contemporary regeneration is taking place. Contemporary rhetoric paints these projects as new and innovative, when they are in fact a resumption of previous strategies of growth through cultural tourism.

Specific forms of seaside culture developed in the 19th century as seaside resorts experienced their most dramatic period of growth, establishing themselves alongside already popular cultural activities such as theatre and dances. These included: Pierrots, white-faced clowns performing songs and sketches on beaches and promenades; the practice of 'promenading';

Punch and Judy shows and specific forms of cuisine such as rock, oysters and fish and chips. In addition to this many religious and political groups would hold meetings in seaside towns, taking advantage of the captive audience and a presumed permissive attitude to stage events that might not have been possible in more regulated urban areas.[86]

The huge social and cultural changes that followed the First World War were expressed in an 'explosion of leisure',[87] leading to a period of sustained growth in seaside towns as the holiday markets opened up to new entrants and resorts diversified to attract differentiated market segments, both inter- and intra-resort. An increase in public and private transport options increased consumer choice and, therefore, destination rivalry, accelerating this diversification. Although working-class visitors often returned year after year to the same resort and stayed in the same accommodation, a broadening middle class was exercising greater concern over service quality and leisure options. This growth continued into the 1930s, a decade which saw seaside leisure sector growth of 39 per cent, exceeding all other UK industrial sectors.[88]

In 1921, the 'Health and Pleasure Resorts Act' was passed, allowing local authorities to fund resort advertising and developments through the hire of deck chairs, beach tents, bathing machines and charges for attractions, providing a revenue stream from cultural investment to fund resort growth investment in the holiday industry which continued between the wars, with an average annual investment of £3–4m during the 1930s.[89] Alongside investment in accommodation, the majority of this investment was going into the development of new and improved leisure and cultural facilities.

In this inter-war period, many new leisure facilities were built, including cinemas, amusement arcades, swimming

pools and pavilions, to cater for an increase in visitor numbers. Walton[90] identifies a disinvestment in leisure facilities during the 1950s, however, recording that the proceeds of growth were not being reinvested to ensure the sustainable development of seaside resorts. This was to prove damaging in the long term, when seaside towns began to face competition from overseas and domestic leisure destinations. In the 1960s, three key aspects of destination management with relevance to the theme of cultural development contributed to the later decline of the seaside resort in Britain:

— lack of re-investment of the profits of growth;
— decline in facilities and infrastructure;
— standards not improving or keeping pace with broader leisure standards, including those overseas.[91]

Low investment and poor planning in seaside resorts continued through the 1970s and 1980s. Morgan and Pritchard cite the examples of the small resort of Mumbles, near Swansea, which closed down the world's first passenger railway, losing a potential tourist attraction, and of other resorts which closed their own leisure facilities and built on these sites without planning for their replacement or future market needs.[92] The seaside industry responded to the crises of the 1980s by turning to 'new' forms of tourism such as activity holidays, conferences, language schools and the overseas market, but was limited by the shortage of quality accommodation, size of hotel stock and ability to provide competitive conference facilities.

One sees, then, a process of significant and sustained investment in culture in seaside towns from the 19th century through the First World War, when most resorts were fortified and their tourism function was negligible. Investment then increased dramatically until the Second World War when, again, seaside towns became part of the 'frontline'. Ten years on from the Second World War, investment in cultural development began to slide during a period of rising profits and tourism growth. This pattern continued through the 1960s and early 1970s, when external economic shocks began to have an impact on the seaside tourism market in Britain, and a period of recession and economic restructuring followed, as described above. The lack of investment in culture and leisure facilities in the preceding period left seaside destinations poorly placed to compete with new urban and overseas competitors, and a negative feedback process then gathered pace, as perceptions of poor quality led to a fall in consumer demand, which in turn reduced capital investment, deepening problems of quality and capacity. From the 1960s to the late 1990s, there was a hiatus in traditional patterns of cultural investment in seaside towns, but the contemporary approach of cultural regeneration, while appearing novel, began again the concept of cultural and leisure investment as a driver for tourism and urban development in these destinations.

Taking into account this tradition of cultural development in seaside towns, one might expect that examining the impacts of cultural regeneration in this context would provide a new perspective on the impacts of cultural regeneration. Specifically, the negative impacts discussed above, which identify a dissonance between 'new' and 'old' uses of space and the exclusivity of cultural development, can be challenged from within the context of seaside cultural regeneration, where contemporary developments build on a tradition of local entrepreneurship and a tourism sector structured around small, medium and micro-enterprises. In order to explore this further, a case study of Margate in Kent is presented showing how public opinion on

and engagement with a high-profile seaside cultural regeneration scheme has developed.

CULTURAL REGENERATION IN MARGATE

Margate in Kent is certainly one of the first three, and possibly the first, of England's seaside resorts.[93] It was first served by coaches and then steamers which came up the river Thames from London to this destination on the North Kent coast. Later, the opening of the Margate Sands railway station made this one of the most popular seaside resorts of the 19th and 20th centuries. In 1830, Margate was receiving more than 100,000 visitors a year by sea and, by the 1960s, annual visitor numbers had risen to 32 million.[94]

The period of growth in Margate saw high levels of investment in cultural projects in the town, especially at the start of the 20th century, when a large 'winter gardens' was built to host year-round concerts, along with two large cinemas and a scenic railway. Leisure facilities also grew in this period, with the addition of lidos, bathing pools and pavilions.[95] At its height, Margate was a cultural jewel of the south-east of England, catering to both middle-class and working-class visitors and innovating in the provision of cultural and leisure attractions.

The decline of the seaside tourism market from the 1970s was felt particularly keenly in Margate, where the economy was overwhelmingly dependent on tourism income, and its geographical separation from other urban or industrial centres left it with few opportunities to pursue to maintain its economic sustainability. The legacy of this period of decline has been high unemployment, a declining

Figure 1: Margate seafront

Figure 2: Margate shopping arcade

population with an ageing demographic, benefit dependence and numerous redundant sites and buildings (Figures 1 and 2). By the 1990s, the economy had failed to diversify and was still heavily dependent on a shrinking tourism market. In contemporary popular culture, Margate had become a byword for the faded seaside town, featured in films and TV to evoke the feeling of decline and decay. Thanet, the local government district of which Margate is the most significant area, is the 60th most deprived of 354 local government areas in England, and Margate itself contains some of the most deprived council wards in the south-east.[96]

In the late 1990s, local government and funding agencies took the decision to seek new forms of economic activity to stimulate the visitor economy and revive the town. This decision led to the development of local regeneration plans, including the promotion of a cultural quarter in the 'old' town area of Margate, and also incorporated the vision for a major new international art museum to be built on the seafront. From this point it became clear that a strategy of cultural regeneration was being followed in Margate, with the stimulation of cultural tourism its primary aim. It was hoped that the economic impacts of this form of tourism, through direct benefits and secondary spending in the local economy, would drive the regeneration of the town. In 2003, an international competition chose the architects who would design the new museum. Initially, this was costed at £7m, which had risen to £25m by 2005, with predictions of a possible 100 per cent overrun in costs. At this stage, faced with significant public opposition and continued

concerns over costs and design issues, regional government withdrew its funding from the scheme, and it was put on hold.

The early rhetoric employed to justify this cultural regeneration scheme made frequent references to Tate Modern in London and the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao as high-profile examples of the impact of cultural flagship developments in a regeneration context, showing the influence of city-paradigms in cultural regeneration, even in smaller urban areas. The transplantation of this model of regeneration produced critical reactions, as expected from the cultural regeneration literature cited above. The new developments faced a hostile reaction from local media outlets, as well as numerous community and residents groups. These concerns were expressed in terms of the exclusivity of the cultural regeneration concept, dissatisfaction with the design, the lack of community involvement in the decision-making process and the costs of the project.[97]

In 2006, the Margate Renewal Partnership was constituted as a body to oversee the town's regeneration,[98] and more holistic plans for the town's regeneration were developed. The role of the Turner Contemporary project was re-examined and a new museum planned, in a process involving extensive consultation. In addition to this, extensive audience development work continues to take place around the new development. The Turner Contemporary project itself is located in a redundant shopping space in the town centre and receives high numbers of visitors from the local community. The old town area will be the cultural quarter, with support given to local cultural producers and businesses to help them to take advantage of the opportunities that this brings. Importantly, key local heritage sites such as the former amusement park, which was once a landmark feature of the town and a significant employer, have been

integrated into the future development plans for the town.[99] Originally, the site of the former 'Dreamland' theme park was the source of serious conflict between planners and residents. This attraction occupied a position of symbolic importance in the collective consciousness of the town, having been a feature of the seafront for two generations (Figure 3). A pressure group, the 'Save Dreamland Campaign' was set up in 2003 to campaign for, first, the preservation of the site for use as a visitor attraction in the face of significant developer pressures to realise the value of the land and, second, to place the site at the centre of the regeneration plans of the town. Over a number of years, this pressure group campaigned actively, building up local support and generating media attention for their cause. Eventually, the new plans for the town brought the Dreamland site into their ambit, and the pressure group became institutionalised as the Dreamland Trust. This charitable trust is now an important third-sector stakeholder in local regeneration planning and was instrumental in the central government award of £3.7m for the redevelopment of the theme park site as a heritage attraction celebrating seaside culture, which has made a £12.4m development project viable on the site. This is an instance of a concern highlighted by Miles[100] in an analysis of cultural regeneration and social exclusion in former industrial cities, that cultural regeneration strategies often make use of sites of former local symbolic and economic importance, which can make their re-use problematic, but also offers an example of how these difficulties can be overcome through partnership.

New plans to refurbish the cultural attractions of the previous era demonstrate the way in which contemporary regeneration is building on a tradition of local cultural tourism development. The high-profile nature of this cultural regeneration project has begun to draw

Figure 3: Dreamland Tower

cultural tourists to the town, and the benefits of secondary spending have helped to engage local businesses in the accommodation and catering sectors in the redevelopments. This approach to regeneration, which is building on local cultural heritage and the still-existing tourism industry, rather than focusing on

the needs of high-spending visitors, has led to a more favourable climate of public opinion and an increase in public engagement with the cultural aspects of regeneration and the processes of consultation, and to a more supportive local media reaction. Although the final impacts of this scheme remain to be seen, one can see in the case of Margate how recognising the specific local, historical synergies of cultural development, economic growth and tourism can lead to a more inclusive form of cultural regeneration in contrast to the imposition of top-down regeneration schemes with the negative local impacts described in the regeneration literature.

INCLUSIVE SEASIDE REGENERATION?

Both recent regeneration policy rhetoric and research agree that regeneration outcomes are improved with the participation and engagement of communities.[101,102] This can hamper the progress of cultural regeneration, where the focus is often on high-profile flagship developments or cultural mega events such as the Olympic Games. In cases such as these, the research literature points out serious deficits in community engagement and social outcomes. Previous research into cultural regeneration in another Kentish seaside town has indicated that, owing to the lack of an explicit strategy of community engagement, the development appeared to be generating negative social impacts in the local community.[103] Rhetoric that foregrounds the success of city-based cultural regeneration schemes may not be helpful in planning for the future of seaside regeneration, but it is also clear that the contemporary prevalence of cultural regeneration on Britain's coastline will be generating new models of this type of regeneration strategy that will offer fresh ideas and methods to policy makers and

regeneration practitioners working across the full range of urban typologies.

The example of Margate shows how, by making use of their unique cultural heritage, seaside towns may be able to plan for the positive economic impacts of cultural regeneration and limit the negative social impacts that a reliance on culture can bring to a regeneration scheme. The specific case of cultural regeneration in seaside towns provides a perspective from which to critique the more common practices of this method in cities, and suggests that cultural regeneration which builds on local cultural heritage, even if that involves recognising and incorporating aspects of decline, may help policy makers and practitioners to avoid potential pitfalls and help to deliver successful outcomes. In particular, Margate demonstrates that the former industrial sites of the tourism industry play a significant role in the likelihood of public approval for regeneration plans and that, as in the former 'heavy' industrial cities of northern England, their sympathetic inclusion in developments can promote successful regeneration outcomes.

For seaside towns, this suggests that, where other strategies of seaside regeneration have not failed to reduce social exclusion or lead to lasting improvements in tourism, cultural regeneration can offer a good way forward. Sustained longitudinal research will be needed into the impacts of this approach, however, as it is too soon to judge these schemes on anything other than perceptions and early indicators, as important as these are.

This model of development may point the way to a more inclusive model of cultural regeneration that can be seen as a renaissance of cultural heritage and local entrepreneurship, in opposition to the top-down cultural regeneration schemes in these areas, which can exclude locals at the expense of high-value cultural tourists.

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