

**Sustainable Tourism in Bristol: local opportunities
Ways in which tourism can be used
to deliver local cultural and economic benefits**

As submitted and then published in *City and Culture: Cultural Processes and Urban Sustainability*

Nystrom, L and Fudge, C., 1999

Stockholm: Boverket

pp 415-429

Marcus Grant

of Environmental Stewardship

with **Angela Mawle**

of Bristol City Council

May 1998

Environmental Stewardship is a consultancy which specialises in assisting projects involving research, policy development, design or implementation of sustainable tourism. It has a track record of success in both rural and urban contexts and is able to draw upon a wide range of environmental, planning and participatory techniques and methods for its solutions.



Sustainable Tourism in Bristol: Local opportunities

Ways in which tourism can be used to deliver local cultural and economic benefits.

SUMMARY

Bristol City Council is keen to develop its potential for tourism. In 1997, the Council commissioned a study to define a city based vision for tourism which could deliver local cultural and economic benefits directly to communities in the city. This paper presents some of the findings of that study. It outlines the theoretical basis and a practical framework for tourism to contribute to urban sustainability.

Bristol is city in the West of England, with a vibrant living culture which attracts tourists to its popular attractions. Well designed neighbourhood tourism initiatives could provide a new cultural dimension and benefit both residents and visitors.

With its associated hinterland, Bristol is a unique and increasingly popular destination for visitors. New attractions being developed as part of the Bristol's Harbourside initiative will further increase visitor numbers. The local authority is looking for a model of tourism which will enable local communities to benefit. There have been a wealth of studies and projects concerned with sustainable tourism in the rural economy, in fragile environments and at historic sites. However, the essentially non-heritage, urban environment has received little consideration.

Types of urban tourism project

Using tourism as context, links have been made between different elements of the sustainability agenda. Examples of the implementation of urban sustainable tourism are few and far between.

Nevertheless, two types of project can be discerned. The 'flagship' project is able to pull in a lot of both funding and tourists, provides regeneration on site, but is not effective in spreading its benefits and in the delivery of local economic, environmental and cultural goods. The 'local' project is smaller in scale and can deliver local cultural, economic and environmental goods but is not high enough in profile to exert much marketing pull. Bristol has a unique opportunity to harness the benefits of both approaches.

A web framework with the concept of 'neighbourhood' as the pivotal package is proposed. Other packages being 'mainstream' attractions and 'hidden gems'. The neighbourhood is a comprehensive entity that can package the disparate cultural elements it contains. It can position and interpret these individual elements using place, culture and local distinctiveness. Attractions within neighbourhoods can also be cross-referenced by themes to provide a web of such tourism products linked across the city.

Agenda 21

A process involving self-assessment and interpretation of local culture is envisaged by communities in the neighbourhoods. Cultural and economic community development is the aim, this will benefit resident and tourist alike. The use of the Agenda 21 as a core process in developing neighbourhood initiatives is crucial.

*Marcus Grant
Environmental Stewardship
33 Cornwall Road
Bristol BS7 8LJ*

*Telephone: 0117 924 1124
E-mail: mgrant@gn.apc.org*

Sustainable Tourism in Bristol: local opportunities

Ways in which tourism can be used to deliver local cultural and economic benefits

Marcus Grant with Angela Mawle

‘Tourists themselves should be the harbingers of sustainability,
rather than merely consumers of a sustainable product¹.’

Bristol City Council is keen to develop its potential for tourism. In 1997, the Council commissioned a study to define a city-based vision for tourism which could deliver local cultural and economic benefits directly to communities in the city. The study set out to evaluate what sustainability might mean to the policies and practices of urban tourism and defined the nature of tourism products required. As part of the outcome, the study suggested a framework for developing neighbourhood tourism initiatives. This paper presents some of the findings of the study and illustrates how a city authority could transform existing tourism initiatives and develop new ones in order to deliver benefits of tourism more directly to its residents.

Bristol is south-west England’s largest city. In the 18th century the city grew as a thriving inland port on the River Avon. Prosperity was based on shipping and trade in tobacco, sugar, cocoa and manufactured goods as part of the triangular slave trade with the New World and Africa. The 19th century left Bristol with a legacy of architecture, railway and harbour engineering which still gives the city’s heart a unique character. Today, with strong manufacturing, educational and financial sectors, Bristol is undergoing a cultural renaissance, particularly in the jazz and club music scenes.

Developing an urban sustainable tourism

The definition of tourism has widened considerably in the past two decades, it now includes most aspects of leisure and recreation and touches on significant elements of shopping, business travel and educational activities. This redefinition can be useful. It means that virtually all activity by ‘visitors’ to an area can be analysed and addressed by a single set of policies. Even the activity patterns of the permanent residents have a part to play in tourism.

The World Tourist Organisation boasts that the tourism industry is rapidly becoming the world’s largest employer. It states that tourism is the world’s most important economic activity, accounting for an expenditure equal to 12% of the global GDP. Tourism has seen rapid and continuing growth over the past four decades. As tourism grows, it becomes increasingly part of all our lives. Visiting relatives for the weekend in another city is tourism, a day trip to a rural forest or to a national exhibition is tourism, attendance at a residential conference is tourism and a shopping trip to the next town can now be considered tourism.

In Bristol it has been estimated that 63% of all tourists stay with the resident population², in most cases they will be visiting friends or relatives. For these tourists, Bristol residents act as gatekeepers to the City. Bristol residents show these tourists the places they themselves enjoy, the parts of Bristol they feel proud of, the areas they like exploring. Moreover, all tourists are attracted to those parts of cities which have a vibrant cultural life. So in order make tourism work harder for the city, tourism promotional activity has to be targeted at advancing residents’ perceptions, attitudes, pride and knowledge of their own home city. It is as if tourism has come full circle.

¹ J. House, Re-defining sustainability, 1996, College of St. Mark & ST. John, Plymouth

² Bristol City Council; Tourism Marketing and Information Centre, 1997

Sustainable development and tourism

All projects concerned with sustainability in tourism must apply the concept of sustainable development to fit the specific circumstances. In a joint document the World Tourism Organisation, World Travel & Tourism Council and the Earth Council³, placed an emphasis on the local benefits to be derived from tourism. A critical statement for tourism in the context of Bristol and its hinterland has been developed for this study as:

‘Sustainable tourism in Bristol involves the development and promotion of a variety of tourism related policies and products, of interest to tourist and resident alike, which benefit the local social economy, local heritage and culture; and support the emergence of a sustainable city’

Sustainable development also has its own self-referring agenda, an educative role, in helping broaden awareness of our place in the environment and so lead to a change in ethics⁴. In other words, the values implicit in sustainable development need to be communicated within any such project itself⁵. This was also felt to be an important consideration for the Bristol work.

Ultimately, sustainability is about adopting lifestyles that consume less of the earth’s finite resources. There are still big gaps between the general aspiration, the technical understanding of what sustainable development means on the ground and the acceptance of individual and corporate responsibility for action⁶.

Tourism research has proposed that for success in pursuing a sustainable approach, tourism development should:

- focus on small-scale, environmentally sensitive development⁷,
- be integrated into the wider concerns of sustainable development⁸,
- involve and empower the local community⁹.

Failures of traditional tourism policy

National tourism policies have always sought to use tourism to benefit the domestic economy. Over the last twenty years we have seen a period with year on year increases in tourist numbers leading to a dramatic growth in the industry, which is now amongst the world’s largest. The problems which occur wherever tourism meets a fragile environment, a delicate culture or a vulnerable local economy, are now well documented.

Urban tourism required a different set of values need to be debated. Here the concern over the failures of tourism should centre less on problems created and more on the failure of tourism to deliver local benefits. Unfortunately, the aims of urban tourism policies have often mimicked national ones in seeking benefits only in terms of stimulating the city centre economy and providing city centre jobs. These traditional tourism policies are coming under increasing scrutiny as they often fail to deliver distributed benefits for local residents and the local economy. The most significant reasons for these failures are outlined below.

Leakage

Daily tourism spend is often used as an indicator of financial benefits. Although figures for daily tourism spend may often look high, particularly in the hotel sector, often very little of this money stays in the local economy. Money leaving the local economy is termed leakage, and leakage levels are high in certain sectors of the tourism industry. Factors increasing leakage include tourists consuming large amounts of food and drink imported to the area, buying gifts and souvenirs not made locally and spending money at

³ World Travel & Tourism Council, Agenda 21 for the travel & tourism industry

⁴G. Hughes, Cultural construction of tourism, *Tourism management*, 16, 1, pp49-59,1995

⁵IUCN, Monitoring and assessing progress towards sustainability project, 1995

⁶ M. Grant et al, *Tourism, sustainability & agenda 21*, Tourism intelligence papers, Insights, BTA/ETB, 1996

⁷S. Burr, Sustainable tourism development and use, US Dept. of agriculture, INT-GTR-323, 1995

⁸J. Hunter, The need to re-conceptualise sustainable tourism, *J of sustainable tourism*, 3, 3 1995

⁹S. Burr, Sustainable tourism development and use, US Dept. of agriculture, INT-GTR-323, 1995

attractions or venues which are not locally owned (e.g. part of large international chains). Conversely, the more tourists spend their money at local shops, use locally owned facilities and buy local produce, the smaller the leakage.

Poor quality jobs

Concerns have been raised over the quality of employment typically created through tourism. Much employment is likely to be poorly paid, seasonal and afford low status to those taking it up. Although this is partly the nature of the tourism industry, specific policies and action can be aimed at reducing this tendency. Local city tourism initiatives could be more successful if they were to address the quality of jobs created and not just the numbers.

Concentration

Tourism activity is often very concentrated both in terms of season and location. In a city this concentration of tourism activity, particularly into a few central areas, greatly limits the scope for spreading the benefits of tourism. A few streets or a small area can reap the benefits, leaving neighbouring areas coping with usual inner city problems of stagnant economy, poor investment, failing businesses and lack of a vibrant urban street life. Urban tourism policy should therefore be formulated from a city-wide perspective.

Tourism policy as a positive urban force

Traditionally the problems outlined above have been tackled in isolation (if at all). However, by casting tourism policy with the framework of sustainable development, a co-ordinated policy response can tackle these issues in an integrated fashion. An urban tourism policy constructed in this way can also address policy areas either outside or marginal to the scope of a traditional tourism strategy. Such a policy aims to use tourism as a provider within the range of social, economic and environmental urban policy objectives.

Equity and fairness in terms of access to wealth-generating resources and the distribution of the benefits (and costs) of development are central to this approach¹⁰. As such, community participation and public-private partnerships must both be a part of a new approach to urban tourism strategy. This new approach to tourism can be found emerging in a number of cities e.g. in the City of Toronto, with an 'urban green tourism initiative'¹¹ and in Calgary, with their future visioning¹².

In such a strategy, centre stage must be given to the residents of the city. Tourism policy can be used to promote, and tourism income to support, those aspects of Bristol that are most valued by Bristolians. Urban tourism can be developed in ways that positively sustain local economic and environmental systems and celebrate local culture and heritage.

Bristol City Council measures its success in tourism, as do all local authorities in the UK, through using measures of visitor nights and visitor spend. These are too crude to be of use in gauging benefits to the local social or third sector economy. In order to monitor the effects of a sustainable tourism policy, measure progress and gauge success, specifically designed indicators will be required. These should be drawn-up by stakeholder partnerships in line with the parameters used for other sustainability indicators¹³.

Current state of sustainable tourism in Bristol

In the Bristol study, the concept of a 'jigsaw of sustainability' was used as a basis on which to scope and evaluate the current state of the sustainable tourism in Bristol¹⁴. A host of separate sites, initiatives, attractions and trends were found and their tourism potential assessed. All these elements, and many which are not tourism related will contribute to sustainable development in Bristol. Figure 1 indicates the main pieces which tourism can help add to complete the picture.

Many tourism products will provide support to more than one jigsaw piece. For instance, attendance at a local theatrical event has economic and cultural significance, whilst hire of a bike from a co-op may have environmental and economic importance. The jigsaw illustrates the issues from the standpoint of

¹⁰ B. Bramwell, Event tourism in Sheffield: A sustainable approach to urban development?, In sustainable tourism management, Bramwell et al. (Eds.), 1996

¹¹ Marion Joppe, pers comm., 1998, mjoppe@acs.ryerson.ca

¹² J.R. Brent Ritchie, Crafting a destination vision, *Tourism Management*, 14, 5, 379-389, 1993

¹³ NEF & WWF, Signals of success; a users' guide to indicators, 1997

¹⁴ Grant, M, Sustainable tourism in Bristol; Local opportunities, draft report to Bristol City Council, Dec. 97

sustainability and is useful in gauging how products fit into the whole picture. Using this concept a review of current tourism products in Bristol was undertaken.

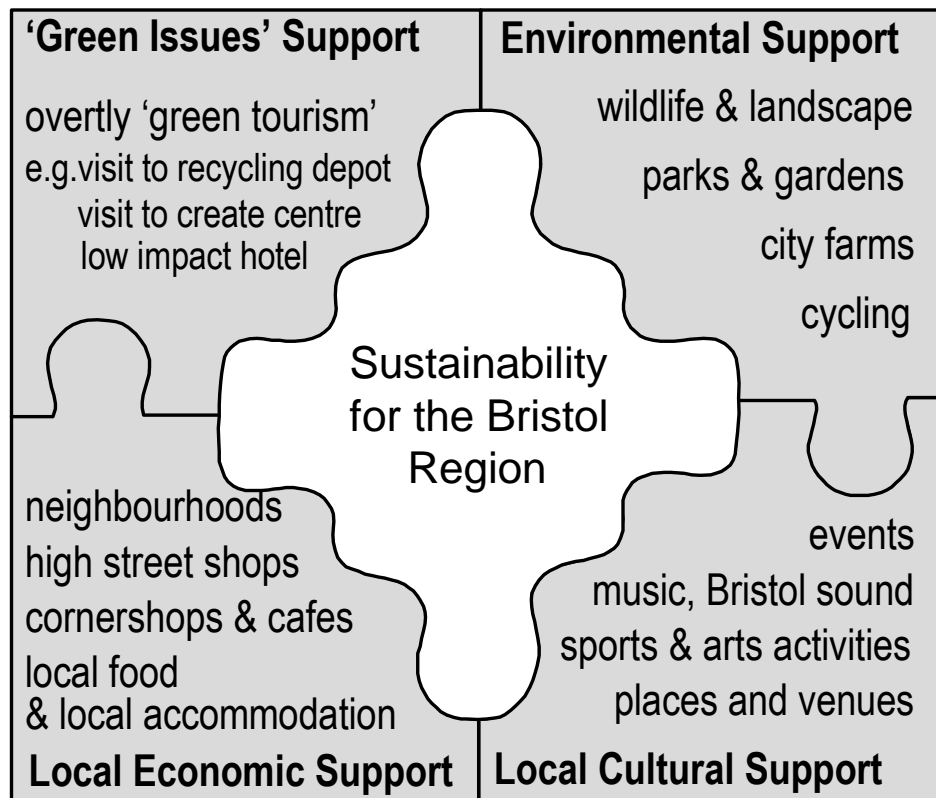


Figure 1 The Jigsaw of Sustainability and Tourism

Integrated urban tourism

Integrated urban tourism projects are the closest existing initiatives to sustainable urban tourism. Many have endeavoured to use tourism to provide benefits across a range of council policy objectives. Some have even stated that sustainable development is part of their ambition. These initiatives fall into two broad categories, flagship and local initiatives:

- **Flagship** Large projects with national/international significance
Often linked to a single point in time or event
Often involved construction of internationally important buildings
Attract high levels of funding, private and public
Aim to stimulate large numbers of visitors
Usually linked to regional regeneration strategies

- **Local** Small in scale, may be focused on a single neighbourhood
Tend to be ongoing projects
Always linked to local cultural uniqueness
May be supported by one or two years of outside funding
Aim to raise the tourism profile of undervalued resource
Designed to yield benefits for relatively deprived areas

Both of these categories of project are likely to have aims and defined objectives in many policy areas including, employment, town centre, transport, environment, economy, tourism, infrastructure and civic pride. Besides an obvious difference in scale, there is also a difference in 'depth'. Depth is a qualitative assessment of the ability of the project to extend into the everyday lives of residents and of small businesses and effect change. The local projects are more effective at delivering 'depth'.

Large scale projects tend to be involved with corporate infrastructure, corporate employment and corporate pride. This may lead to a sense of alienation in local residents, as if these initiatives are only for

the visitor, the tourist, for civic show. In Bristol, this type of reaction surfaced recently in connection with the Festival of the Sea. Smaller projects often involve a partnership of local agencies and are focused on the solution of specific local problems. They have the ability to mobilise local interest and lead to lasting change with local benefits. They may also often be linked into a wider strategic and regional goals.

Bristol has a unique opportunity to harness the benefits from both approaches. It already has a flagship project - the harbourside development This is a mixed use city centre regeneration scheme incorporating a Centre for the Performing Arts, new public open spaces and avenues, a hands-on science museum and electronic zoo. The initiatives and projects surrounding this development will see an increase in city centre tourism. The civic focus of this project can be linked to and complemented by a city-wide tourism strategy which is delivered through local tourism initiatives. This city-wide strategy should seek to:

- spread the benefits, by promoting selected non-city centre neighbourhoods,
- deepen the benefits, by using partnerships in these areas to achieve local objectives,
- increase the benefits, by helping extend the length of stay and encourage repeat visits.

Assisting city council policies

The idea of tourism being a provider across a range of council policies was tested by looking at Bristol City Council's current policies. Policies objectives in the following areas could be assisted through this new approach to tourism; economic development, local agenda 21, city centre strategies, parks and heritage estates strategies, community development.

For example, a new relationship between sustainable development and economic development is currently being considered by Bristol City Council¹⁵. Three principles for sustainable economic development are being looked at: the local economy; the third sector (or social) economy, and the greening of business. Urban tourism could be developed in such a way as to explicitly assist these principles.

Another example is the way in which a fresh approach to tourism could help with community development. In particular, Bristol City Council's stated objectives of empowering local communities, their anti poverty strategy and their local investment framework. Local tourism initiatives aimed at encouraging tourist spend in neighbourhoods through interpretation of local history could be catalysts for action.

A framework for sustainable tourism in Bristol

The evaluation of existing tourism in Bristol, found a host of separate sites, initiatives, attractions and trends that could be part of a new integrated approach. A framework was devised to link these disparate projects, venues and attractions. Criteria for the framework was that it should:

- be able of capturing the imagination of planners, the community, tourism businesses and tourists,
- be capable of encompassing both current and future, as yet unknown, projects,
- assist with the development of a clear plan of implementation,
- promote sustainability.

A framework having such a basis would also assist with integrated sustainable development across the city, provide a strong basis for the funding of projects and help to frame a communication strategy for tourists. A web framework with the 'neighbourhood' as the pivotal package was proposed, other packages being 'mainstream' attractions and 'hidden gems'. These packages are linked together to form a web. Three types of link are envisaged, neighbourhood links, thematic links and accessibility links (figure 2).

The three types of package

Neighbourhood: The neighbourhood is a comprehensive entity which can package the disparate elements it contains. It can position and interpret these individual attractions using place, culture and local distinctiveness. The attractions within neighbourhoods can also be cross-referenced by theme in two ways to provide linked tourism products across the City.

¹⁵J. Mellor & R. Schofield, Making economic development sustainable, BCC, 25th Nov. 1997

A survey of neighbourhoods suitable for inclusion within the framework was carried out. Neighbourhoods were selected as follows:

- i) areas with strong identity and some sense of boundary,
- ii) areas which were not at present used as a tourism resource,
- iii) areas experiencing some forms of deprivation which could benefit from additional patronage,
- iv) areas with a wealth of cultural and historical interest which could be the basis for interpretation,
- v) areas with good tourist accessibility.

The areas most eligible were found to be the inner city ring of areas which lie just outside the neighbourhoods defined in the City centre strategy.

In all areas looked at there was a wealth of local history, anecdote, cultural connections and special sites which appeared just under the surface. From Asian weddings and local dances, tales of amazing historical facts and details of street parties to community festivals, local heroes and heroines and secret places. The promotion of London's EastEnd, funded by Bethnal Green City Challenge and the Discover Islington project are examples of the neighbourhood approach. Already across the city there are both organised groups (e.g. the Women's History Group, Victorian Society's, schools locality projects) and individuals with pools of local knowledge. In an analogue to parish mapping, this information can be used by the community to make their own story of place. This could lead to the training and designation of certain individuals as community guides and story tellers.

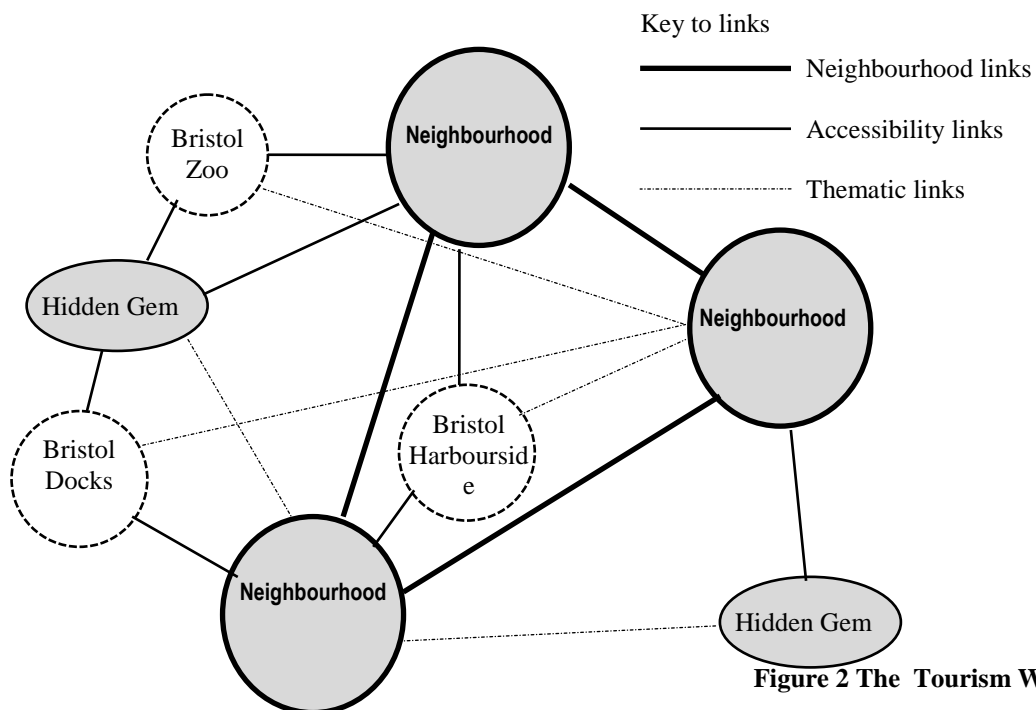


Figure 2 The Tourism Web

Mainstream attraction: Mainstream attractions in Bristol such as the Exploratory, Bristol Zoo and Bristol 2000 attract thousands of visitors. These visitors have diverse interests and needs. It is partly to these visitors that the promotion of other areas and attractions in Bristol must be made.

Hidden gem: Inevitably some attractions which are important to promote will not fall within the selected neighbourhoods. It is suggested that where appropriate they are brought into the framework as 'hidden gems'. The criteria for inclusion should be developed. All places should be able to provide a minimum of, say two hours interest and opportunity for refreshments.

The three types of link

The linkage serves as a cross referencing mechanism. The themes themselves providing an additional packaging mechanism to neighbourhoods.

Neighbourhood links: Neighbourhoods should be linked to each other by stressing their contrasts and individuality.

Thematic links: Thematic links are based on themes set out in 'The identity of Bristol' and as developed from these by Bristol Tourism, the Council's tourism section. These are: the green city, beyond Bristol, the harbour and the sea, engineering and science, cityscapes and culture and fun.

Accessibility links: These are links based on proximity and transport links i.e. ease of movement between attractions.

Implementation

As with other elements of sustainable development, sustainable tourism can not be achieved using traditional methods of centralised policy formulation, consultation and implementation. In order to achieve success new ways of working are needed. It was recognised at the Earth Summit in Rio that there are two key tenets for these new working methods:

- Holistic planning
- Strategy making

A brief description of each of these is found below. These tenets underpin the approach to policy development and implementation which will be required in Bristol.

Holistic planning

This refers to the need to plan, together with all partners, across sectors and integrating all scales. Thus it incorporates the ideas of:

- i) partnership - between residents, business, voluntary sector and government.
- ii) cross-sectoral working - linking interested parties in the disparate sectors of culture, economy, social affairs and environment.
- iii) appropriate locality and scale - starting with the local and building up, from neighbourhood, through district to city-wide and regional as appropriate.

Strategy making

The task of planning for sustainability requires a long-term vision to guide day to day decisions. The nearest local government comes to long term planning is found in the development plan process. To reach a more sustainable city, 'long-termism' is paramount, since sustainability talks to inter-generational effects. No three, five or even eight-year plan is ever able to address these crucial issues. Yet it is very rare to find a tourism policy linked to any long-term vision of the future.

Sustainability criteria

Since the overall objective of this new approach to tourism is sustainable development, implementation should make this explicit and support local partners in understanding and developing their own responses. Instead of entry criteria, an open access policy is envisaged. The process being designed to progress all partners along a sustainability agenda from whatever starting position they have. Social and environmental auditing may have a role to play in helping partners monitor their progress. Social economic instruments such as credit unions and LETS schemes may be appropriate vehicles for assisting local enterprises in making the best of the opportunities offered¹⁶. The identification and support of social entrepreneurs may also have an important function in the success of these kind of neighbourhood initiatives¹⁷.

Tourism and Agenda 21

International, national and local agencies are calling for sustainable development in tourism and all tourism trade bodies, companies, local government sections and individuals have a responsibility to

¹⁶ E. Mayo, Community banking, New Economics Foundation, undated

¹⁷ Thake, S, Practical people noble causes, New Economics Foundation, 1997

contribute toward achieving the these objectives¹⁸. The Earth Summit at Rio considered the means of achieving a sustainable future. The main product of this was a comprehensive programme of action, adopted by 182 governments including the UK. It is called Agenda 21 - an agenda for the 21st century.

Agenda 21 is a document that sets out a process for holistic planning and strategy making for sustainable development. Local authorities are charged with producing Local Agenda 21 strategies through a participatory process. This usually involves several self-selecting subject groups, e.g. improving inner city employment and economy, transport and access, minimising waste and energy use. Many of these groups will have subject areas within which there are elements relating to tourism.

Overall the Agenda 21 process has been poorly developed so far by most local authorities and very few have linked Local Agenda 21 and tourism. In a recent survey in Britain, of the 138 local authorities who responded, 26 were in some way involved in Local Agenda 21 tourism initiatives¹⁹.

Progress within Bristol City Council

The concept of sustainable tourism is sometimes difficult for policy makers and urban planners to grasp and develop. In Bristol's case there exists a widespread feeling for the appropriateness and worthiness of 'greening' its highly successful tourist industry but only a vague understanding of the benefits of incorporating sustainability.

A strong will and policy drive exists for the stimulation and development of the social economy and for generally promoting low impact tourism. This, together with a barely acknowledged pride in Bristol's status as the 'alternative' culture capital of the West of England, its heritage of strong local traditions and diverse and colourful cultures and the beauty and variety of its natural and built environment are the crucial strands waiting to be weaved together in the development of an exciting new tourism strategy.

The City Council has made genuine efforts to resource and develop the Local Agenda 21 process and it is within this framework that the current tourism initiative has grown and developed. The cross boundary working and community 'outreach' culture which are axiomatic to the implementation of Local Agenda 21 has promoted and fostered the partnerships and understanding which are the natural pre-cursors to holistic and inclusive planning and policy development.

Using the approach outlined above it can be seen that tourism touches on many policy areas including the economy, transport, city image, quality of life, community development, parks and town centre policy, voluntary organisations and cultural life. As such, it can be a component in an integrated approach to development in many policy areas.

Bristol City Council's role is as a stakeholder, motivator, enabler and facilitator in the realisation of a new vision for tourism in Bristol. The questions being asked are:

Where do we want to be in 10 or 20 years time; what is our vision for Bristol, the state of the environment in Bristol and tourism in Bristol?

How can tourism demand and tourists be used creatively by Bristol City Council to achieve development targets in urban regeneration, transport, community self-reliance, arts, culture and leisure, the environment and the economy?

How can tourism demand and tourists be used creatively to fulfil broad policy ambitions for the residents and businesses of Bristol?

¹⁸M. Grant et al, Tourism, sustainability & agenda 21, Tourism intelligence papers, Insights, BTA/ETB, 1996

¹⁹D. Leslie & F. Muir, Local agenda 21, local authorities and tourism, Glasgow Caledonian Univ. 1996