

A Framework For Policy Research

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Introduction

The UK Historic Environment Research Group (UKHERG) brings together organisations from England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales involved in commissioning socio-economic policy research in the heritage, which focuses on the historic and natural environment.

The aim of the group is to co-ordinate research across the sector and to share knowledge and practice. In 2004, the group agreed to produce a common policy research framework.

The need for a joint research agenda has been given further impetus through the launch of English Heritage's complementary research strategy on 27 October 2005, *Discovering the Past, Shaping the Future*. This strategy establishes broader themes and priorities for future research for the historic environment in England. English Heritage also proposes the establishment of a UK-wide research agenda for the historic environment and its sustainable management into which the UKHERG socio-economic policy work will fit.

The UKHERG framework fits well with the English Heritage strategy and the suggested plan for a larger initiative across the UK. The UKHERG framework is broad, already covering the whole of the UK, yet narrower in that it focuses on social and economic research to inform policy.

The organisations committed to the UKHERG framework are co-ordinating their research activity, sharing expertise and the results of their work, as well as exploring opportunities for joint working.

Scope

Social and economic research is the process of systematically gathering, analysing and interpreting information about the behaviour, knowledge, beliefs, attitudes and values of human populations. It contributes to and draws from the broader social science and economic knowledge base. It can help to:

- a. evaluate existing policy; and
- b. develop new policy.

Policy research can be defined as research which helps heritage organisations to deliver their strategic goals, create an evidence base for their policies and demonstrate the benefits of their funding. It does not cover technical research (eg into repair techniques or materials), tactical research (eg archaeological field survey) or subject and period specific historical research (eg landscape history or the process of Romanisation) although it may draw upon the high-level results of such work.

Heritage is defined broadly as that which we value from the past and wish to hand on to future generations; it encompasses land and countryside, biodiversity, buildings, monuments, archaeology and collections. In practice, the group has a core focus on the **historic environment**. The historic environment is the physical remains of the past around us, including landscapes, buildings, monuments, archaeology and seascapes.

The research covered by the group sits within wider research agendas, including those relating to the built environment and to places, to the natural environment and sustainable development, to land and countryside and to collections and archives.

In terms of the Frascati research definitions, the work of the group has strong affinities with **social sciences** research as applied to the **arts and humanities**.

Context

In England, the Historic Environment Review Executive Committee (HEREC) is taking forward a series of five priorities emerging from the white paper on the historic environment, *A Force for our Future*. One of those is research into heritage needs and benefits. Rather than setting up a separate group to prioritise research strategy, it was decided to use UKHERG as a catalyst for this.

English Heritage is required under its funding agreement with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) to help deliver a UK-wide research strategy by March 2007. UKHERG acts as a consultation group for those elements of English Heritage's own strategy that relate to social and economic research as applied to the heritage. The annual Heritage Counts publication provides a useful overview of research in this field, and also reports on the state of England's historic environment through a series of indicators.

Evidence-based policy remains a high priority for the Treasury and DCMS who have welcomed the recent evidence provided by National Museums Directors' Conference (NMDC) in relation to the Comprehensive Spending Review. There are lessons to be learnt from this experience. The UK Biodiversity Action Plan process is another model for evidence-based policy where again, there are lessons for other heritage sectors.

Evidence-based policy making is also a high priority for the Scottish Executive. Scottish Ministers have commissioned Historic Scotland to establish an audit of the historic environment. Historic Scotland also carries out a wider range of research work in support of its Corporate Plan objectives.

The Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) is seeking to respond to the government agenda for evidence-based policy making by strengthening links between higher education and practice. Policy research is one way of connecting the work of heritage organisations with academic research.

The heritage sector recognises the need to work together on a co-ordinated research agenda in order to present the case for heritage more effectively to government and to other audiences.

The Office of Science and Technology Science Review of the DCMS recommended the establishment of 'fora/networks for its policy divisions, NDPBs and OGDs on areas of common interest, bringing in external expertise as appropriate, on cross-cutting subjects', and also that the DCMS should 'take note of its NDPBs' horizon scanning and research

reviewing activities'. The review advised that DCMS's NDPBs should have 'appropriate/proportionate processes in place, eg for the establishment of a research strategy, commissioning, management, monitoring, quality assurance and evaluation and the dissemination of their science, using peer review or other external assessment'. In addition, the Department was asked 'to ensure that significant research findings are debated in fora that are sufficiently knowledgeable to recognise the full implications of those findings, eg bringing in external expertise.'

Issues

There is a lack of awareness about the nature, value and relevance of heritage to wider government debates at local, regional and national levels – especially those on health, education, culture, community cohesion, social capital, sustainability and the environment. There is also a lack of convincing and accessible evidence to remedy this. Better research and evidence gathering can be a tool for overcoming these.

The belief that conservation and access are mutually exclusive goals is another myth. The heritage community has moved from an agenda focused primarily on assets (eg species, habitats, buildings, artefacts, collections) to one that acknowledges that stewardship depends on people and that a well-informed community is more protective of its heritage assets. Capturing and communicating this shift, its impact and benefits, is still a challenge for the sector.

Other similar myths prevail; for example the perception that conservation and development cannot be reconciled, or that heritage has little role in sustainable development.

Some members of the UKHERG have a lot of experience of policy research; others have fewer resources or less experience. A common research agenda can help everyone to learn from previous experience and take the agenda forward.

DCMS Public Service Agreement targets remain largely focussed on participation in culture, but heritage has the potential to contribute to numerous other targets, as well as cross-departmental issues, such as community wellbeing and sustainability.

Recent essays on valuing culture published by the Secretary of State, DEMOS and others provide an interesting challenge for the sector in that they ask how the value of heritage can best be captured. The heritage sector has already been engaged in discussions of the concept of heritage 'value', for example in relation to the extent to which economic models can be deployed to measure the non-market value of historic assets.

Research Aims

Much of the current policy research is underpinned by a common broad aim: **to establish how the policies and practices of heritage organisations and others can best enhance the meaning, value, impact and role of heritage in society.**

Research questions

This overall aim is supported by four groups of questions:

A Heritage and society

Research can help to understand the wider role of heritage in society today, including:

- a. What is heritage? What is it that people understand by the term heritage?
- b. Perceptions of heritage: how does the public view heritage? What matters and why? How much does it matter? Are there differences between the popular and the 'expert' view?
- c. What are the relationships between heritage and identity?
- d. Who participates in heritage? What are the benefits of participating in heritage? Do those benefits have a lasting impact? How do people participate?
- e. What are the social benefits that heritage provides?
- f. What role can heritage play in wider learning?
- g. How do we reconcile conservation and access effectively?
- h. How do we reconcile conservation and development?
- i. Does investing public money in the heritage make a difference to peoples' lives and perceptions?
- j. How can the heritage contribute to the delivery of national, regional and local social priorities?

B Heritage and the economy

- a. How can market success and failure be demonstrated in heritage?
- b. Is public funding necessary for heritage? Is it possible to achieve the public goods represented by heritage through the private sector and the operation of commercial markets? What difference does public funding make?
- c. Can fiscal measures be used to deliver heritage benefits? Which are the most effective?
- d. Is heritage a component of tourism? How do we measure its contribution?
- e. What contribution can heritage make to regeneration, employment, housing and inward investment?
- f. What scope is there for better use of valuation studies?
- g. What are economic benefits of conservation?
- h. Can we make better use of research reviews?
- i. What is the social and spatial geography of how heritage impacts on the economy? Where does it have an impact and on whom?
- j. How can heritage contribute to delivering national, regional and local economic priorities?

C Heritage in its own right

- a. Why does heritage need special care?
- b. What is happening to heritage assets? What measures or indicators can be used to document the condition of heritage?
- c. Are we looking after the heritage effectively? What criteria should we use to assess effectiveness?
- d. How can we manage change intelligently?
- e. What skills are needed to care for heritage and by whom?
- f. What role can heritage play generally in delivering national, regional and local government priorities?

D Capturing and measuring value

- a. What are the most effective research methods for capturing the value and benefits of heritage?
- b. What language and concepts can best articulate the value and benefits of heritage?
- c. How can the language and concepts of economics or social research be integrated with heritage thinking on value and significance?
- d. What values should heritage organisations adopt? What are their responsibilities to their stakeholders? How should they be accountable?

Next Steps

UKHERG will:

- continue to act as a focus group for policy research in heritage, dealing with research issues as they arise;
- liaise with English Heritage over the development of policy research elements of a UK-wide research agenda;
- work with HLF to update the current evidence for need;
- continue to share research agendas and abstracts;
- identify areas of common working or reporting through research co-ordination meetings;
- explore the need for a mapping exercise to create a digest of all current and recent research in the policy field; and
- seek to develop good relationships with the UK research councils.

Members of UKHERG

Arts and Humanities Research Board

www.ahrb.ac.uk

British Waterways

www.britishwaterways.co.uk

CABE

www.cabe.org.uk

Countryside Agency

www.countryside.gov.uk

Department for Culture Media and Sport

www.culture.gov.uk

Department of the Environment in Northern Ireland (DOE)

www.doeni.gov.uk

English Heritage

www.english-heritage.org.uk

English Nature

www.english-nature.org.uk

Heritage Futures Network at Glasgow Caledonian University

www.heritagefutures.net

Heritage Lottery Fund

www.hlf.org.uk

Heritage Link

www.heritagelink.org.uk

Historic Scotland

www.historic-scotland.gov.uk

National Trust

www.nationaltrust.org.uk

National Trust for Scotland

www.nts.org.uk

The Arts Council

www.artscouncil.org.uk

SAVE

www.savebritainsheritage.org

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