The Future of Heritage Open Days
A sketch of emerging trends

heritage open days

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This document tentatively sets out six trends that could be significant in shaping the context for Heritage Open Days through to 2020.

TREND 1: An event won't be an event, unless it's a "happening"

- The expectations of novelty and newness will remain important for some segments of the population.
- On the back of urban "event inflation", such as the ever more dizzying grand shows of the leading National Museums, we may see a shift to lower cost ways to wow and immerse audiences. We are likely to see more mixing of media, or playful use of idioms that visitors to heritage sites have come to know and love (e.g. an alternative take on the "tour" and the "tour guide"; or the "curator" and the "curated"; a "knowing" take on exhibiting places and spaces).
- Organisations within the heritage sector are likely to become more savvy in using the tools of audience segmentation and branding to better signal "here's something you'll love" to specific audiences.

TREND 2: The map of heritage funding will be re-drawn over the coming decade

- On the back of dwindling local and central government budgets, there may be an expectation for more alternative forms of funding to be developed.
- Certainly there may be new opportunities for corporate sponsorships, although this may well expect increasing "alignment" between the event, the organiser and a partner's corporate goals. And corporates may start offering alternative forms of support rather than just a "bag of sponsorship cash", e.g. joint marketing initiatives, staff involvement and support etc.
- Beyond this the new business models of the 'internet' will suggest new ways to make things pay. The idea of new models such as "freemium", "app-driven", "crowd-funded" etc. will start to become important ways to support events or to make things happen.
- The idea of the "philanthropist" may strengthen, as those with more in their pockets turn to giving in visible ways which demonstrate their role as "responsible citizens" – a response perhaps to growing social sensitivity about the source and use of wealth, greater transparency, and awareness of inequalities in society.

TREND 3: Although constrained, citizen expectations of leisure and entertainment will remain high

- The impact of the recession will stretch for at least as long as the middle of the decade. Whilst not all consumers or citizens will be hard up, we are likely to see an ethic of value-seeking and the upping of the game by brands who will work harder to loosen purse-strings. This may create a strange dynamic of low cost/high expectation. For some it will be simply about finding ways that help families and individuals avoid being "victimized" by the state of the economy. Organisations and events that are on the side of the consumer in helping them sustain quality of life – and where possible access to the extraordinary – could flourish in this context.

TREND 4: The notion of "local" and "community" will strengthen as a sentiment, although activating this will remain as challenging as ever

- Whilst we may see a trend towards warmth towards civic engagement (driven in some communities by concern about the loss of public services), in practice the actions will continue to lag behind the words.
- However, activating the special interests of segments of the community around the places, icons and stories of their heritage may become a route to re-activating the sense of place and locale.

TREND 5: The public idea of "heritage" will remain strong but may increasingly be crowded with the idea of living nostalgia and a stronger need for storytelling and emotion

- One response to the economic downturn has been a "flight to nostalgia". In some ways in hard times the timeline of life compresses, with people turning to the rose tinted memories of their lived experiences. This won't remove a fascination with the past of places – indeed the richness of storytelling will become more important. But overlain by this might be a simple appeal of excursions into the past through the lens of one's own heritage, where the tangible elements of places, and the intangible elements of story, become more centred around the individual. In all the presentation is likely to become more artistic, theatrical or cinematic in desire.

TREND 6: Consumers will live increasingly on/off lives

- Having discovered the joys of "online everything", we may find that real escape and access to authenticity may be an asset in short supply. Consumers may be more split in their choice making and desires about when they want to be "online" and when they want to be "offline". Successful brands and organisations will negotiate this boundary well.
- The patterns of media consumption will change in many ways. Reaching people will require an appreciation of how these new channels work, and who they reach. Although at a community level, traditional networks will remain important.
- The trend towards "infotainment" – geographically relevant and delivered *in situ* – will grow in significance with the rise of the spatial web and augmented reality (which weaves the real world and the digital together).

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