

Best practice 19: Developing Databases for Historic Tours, English Heritage, United Kingdom.

Scale: National

Stage of tourism development: Relevant to all stages

Main objective: Tourism quality management (through good information)

Categories of effects:

Effects on urban governance

- Integrated urban planning
- Destination management

Effects on quality of life

- Built heritage diversity
- Cultural practices and representations
- Social life, local values and traditions

Good information is essential for effective management in any area of life. 'Good information' means information that is reliable, comprehensive, consistent and readily and quickly accessible. English Heritage (the state agency responsible for the historic environment in England) has devoted much effort and finance in recent years to making sure that good information is available on the historic environment of England's numerous historic towns and cities. This is done in close co-operation with the local authorities, who both compile the necessary information, and hold it in their own databases. This information is then available locally to inform decisions about new development, restoration schemes and so on. The work has two aims in particular. The first concerns the large amounts of information gained from archaeological excavations in English towns since about 1950. This information is very scattered, and some of it is unpublished. Under the English Heritage programme, basic information about archaeological excavation and observation is recorded in a database, and the location, extent and main findings of each piece of work are mapped in a Geographical Information System (GIS). This allows an overview of the archaeology of each town to be obtained. The second aim is concerned with trying to understand the character and evolution of the entire urban landscape, rather than just looking at particular monuments, buildings and spaces which are thought to be of special individual interest. Because this 'characterisation' approach looks at the whole town, and at its ordinary elements as well as its special ones, it is a good tool for managing the town in an integrated way. Historic maps are a key source for this and, again, GIS is central to this work. The emphasis on mapping and the use of GIS systems means that historical and archaeological information about the town is provided in a form which is easily understood by spatial planners, town managers, politicians and others. The mapped information can be integrated with the GIS used for town planning, so the information is immediately available from the very earliest stages of any planning or development project.

Sources: English Heritage web-page on historic town and city surveys; English Heritage on-line access to urban survey reports; Roger M. Thomas (forthcoming 2006) 'Mapping the Towns: English Heritage's urban survey and characterisation programme', *Landscapes* [contains a summary of the programme, with case studies].

Links:

<http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/server/show/nav.1294>

<http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/catalogue/projArch/EUS/>