

REPORT ON BERWICK-UPON-TWEED'S REPRESENTATION AT THE EUROPEAN WALLED TOWNS SYMPOSIUM IN GMUND SEPTEMBER 19TH -22ND.

AREAS OF COMMON INTEREST.

Unfortunately the town of Woudrichem could not be present at the Symposium as its Mayor, Frank Petter, (who is also the EWT Treasurer) could not attend at the last minute because of "political unrest with one of his Councillors" So it was not possible to discuss with him how the town has made the progress in recent years. However the host town of Gmund had some interesting and exciting projects to show the delegates.

The medieval town of Gmund population 3,000, markets itself as 'offering holiday solutions for the whole family' by linking the town with its immediate natural environment of the National Parks. It describes itself as being the 'cultural centre for the region'. The incentives for revitalizing the town revolved around:-

- Its remote location with no major cities or universities close by
- Its rural environment
- The low income levels
- The high level of unemployment
- The young, trained people leaving the town
- Little industry and few large enterprises and therefore the lack of local sponsorship.

The desire to set up 'cultural tourism' as 'Art in Ancient Walls' was acknowledged by both local and regional politicians.

It was accepted that this revitalization should be:-

- completed incrementally and
- That it would improve the quality of life for the town's inhabitants.
- That it would require the creation of a brand
- that there would be a diversity of offer and
- That the offer would be of a consistently high standard.
- Specific and specialized marketing would be required.

It was acknowledged that success may be limited by the fact that:-

- Empty houses would need to be brought back to usefulness
- Historic buildings are difficult to heat
- Many historic structures are not suitable for disabled access.
- No 4* Hotel in Gmund.

The majority of 'cultural activity' at present seems to be confined to between May to September/October.

It would seem that Berwick has a wealth of opportunity to develop its cultural identity with input from existing artists, book illustrators, photographers, gallery owners. Also the artist heritage of Lowry and Turner could be further exploited. There are a number of heritage buildings that are

already being used, the Granary, the Maltings, the new gallery at The Watch Tower to mention a few. However, as far as we are aware we do not have the facility at present where accommodation is given free for up to a three month period for an aspiring artist to come and develop his or her work as an 'Artist in Residence'. Although I believe that the Film Festival has funding for such a placement for 2013.

An idea from Gmund, which may need to be approached with caution, but appears to be effective, is that any gallery, or area of specific interest has a red ball hung outside to alert tourists to the fact that something of interest lies beyond.

Gmund town does fund the post of 'General Manager for the Cultural Initiative of Gmund' who is extremely approachable and speaks good English.

We have been led to believe that the Film Festival Coordinator is a paid employee-perhaps this role could be developed to include other 'Cultural Initiatives'.

The Symposium for 2013 is to be held in Derry/Londonderry.

We were approached fairly early on in the meeting by a representative of Derry, who works for City Walls Heritage Project, and later by a prominent Councillor and also the Cultural and Tourism Officer to see whether we would collaborate with Derry in some way. Perhaps initially by making a presentation at the AGM in October as Derry is, of course, also a Border town that has been subjected to conflict.

After a brief discussion we thought a title such as 'Conflict and Reconciliation' may be appropriate.

While there are distinct differences between the two towns- Derry having a population of 110,000 and a young population as against our much smaller numbers and an aging population these should not be seen as a hindrance as its history should compare and contrast well with Berwick's.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING AND TEACHING.

A lecture "**Lower Austrian Walled Towns-an example of success through cooperation**" – regeneration of villages, towns and city centres was given by Hubert Trauner Executive Director – Provincial Government of Lower Austria.

He indicated that nine towns had cooperated without formal contracts, but with partnership agreement to ensure common qualities and common identity. Meetings are held four times a year to coordinate joint activities and to evaluate the initiatives. Each town maintains its identity and independence but benefits from joint promotions.

Common qualities include ensuring similar standards of accessibility of what is available to all categories of visitors. The highest of standards are expected for all that is on offer to the tourist.

An agreed guiding system has been introduced using the common logo on information signs and displayed on advertising banners. All of the City Guides are trained to an agreed standard and obtain the appropriate qualification. Guides who participate in interpreting of Municipal buildings are also trained to a common standard. Training has recently been introduced for catering staff in preparing food with a heritage bias.

Common identity includes a corporate designed logo, a common leaflet format, and agreed topics for inclusion on the web-site.

Competitions are arranged to raise awareness of the network of Lower Austria towns through this publicity and the winners are awarded holidays in one of the towns.

Postcards of the network of towns are available in each participating town.

Future plans include common chocolates and stamps and joint tours of participating towns.

FRIESACH-Population 7000.

This town is developing a 30-40 year project to build a Castle as it would have been built in medieval times. They have three full-time employees-a project coordinator, a blacksmith and a carpenter. Casual labour is provided during the spring to autumn by the equivalent of our 'Job Centres'. During the summer months added attractions for the tourist and for benefit of the local economy are supplied by stall holders who sell their wares and by the specialist traders who would have frequented the area in medieval times such as an apothecary.

The uniqueness of this project has attracted funding but an interesting fact for us is that every separate aspect has been considered as available as a separate sponsorship by local and national Austrian businesses and full publicity has been given to this.

The mayor of Friesach speaks little English and had an interpreter who comes from County Durham. An elderly lady who immediately made herself known to us and enthusiastically chatted about Berwick. She has already made email contact with us since our return and I'm sure that she would assist us in seeking out further information about Friesach's activities should this be required.

RADSTADT population 5000.

Radstadt is another town on an historical trade route from which it originally made it prosperous. Now it relies on tourism to boost its economy.

Two less usual features which made an impact were the equivalent of our 'red telephone boxes' in shape and size that are used for two purposes. One has shelving and is used as a book exchange for people to take and leave books at will and others were used for exhibiting articles made in the area-pottery, jewellery etc.

Another feature was that near the book exchange the equivalent of 'three piece suites' in durable and waterproof materials have been set out to encourage people to pause, rest and read.

We think that consideration to the book/display boxes ideas could be developed in certain areas of Berwick.

VALLETTA –MALTA. Population 13.000

The town of Valletta, which has taken over the Presidency and the Secretariat of the EWT, seems to be able to access European funding for differing projects. The town has received European Funding to change a derelict area into a public garden known as the Peacock Garden.

They participated in a European Funded programme, 'Youth in Action' which enabled young people to visit two other European towns (not EWT towns) to take part in activities around the theme of Democracy. It was suggested that participation in this programme was to address the isolation of Maltese youth.

As Malta is a country where the majority of inhabitants speak a good level of English it would seem an ideal location to develop an exchange programme between our schools. Longridge Towers School has already arranged a sports tour this autumn.

Also, through a person who lives in Chatton we have links with Malta University as he is an external examiner who makes very regular visits to the capital and I'm sure that he would be prepared to assist where possible.

Another project funded by the URBACT programme has the acronym HERO. This is a partnership between a number of EU countries fostering exchange of ideas and information on 'Cultural Heritage Integrated Management Plans' (CHIMPS). The aim is to facilitate the correct balance between the preservation of the built heritage and the sustainable, future socio-economic development of historic towns in order to strengthen their attractiveness and competitiveness.

It is not known the timescale of this funded project or whether participation could be extended to include Berwick but involvement in such a scheme would seem to be beneficial .

GENERAL COMMENTS.

A plea from one of the delegates related to sustainable tourism, in this case the reduction of excessive transport usage, was to encourage the three day weekend.

It occurred to us that Berwick already has this concept, perhaps in its infancy, with the weekend in September which includes the Heritage Open Days, The Food Festival and the Antiques Fair.

Based on the outcomes of the Visitor Survey joint promotion may be appropriate over a larger geographical area.

All areas we visited seemed to be clean and well cared for with residents taking a pride in their town.

Perhaps using the 'Berwick Deserve Better' site locals can be encouraged to take pride in their own immediate area and encourage others to do likewise.

Other aspects in which Berwick must take part:-

- *is to publicise our events on the EWT website and*
- *To write an article for the quarterly newsletter.*

It has been acknowledged by the new Secretariat that the present EWT website is not easy to negotiate and this is to be addressed.

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES. In addition to the above.

A consortium of towns with financial support from the EWT Executive to the tune of 3,500 euros requested European Funding from URBACT for a joint project known as CREW-'Coordinated

Revitalisation of the Economy in Walled Towns'. This application was unsuccessful and had involved the partnership towns in some expense-both their contribution to 'working up' the application and travelling to partner towns to get face to face understanding/agreement.

(No video conferencing apparently.)

An application that was successful for three EWT towns in the Netherlands in 2011 was ENCLOSE- Energy efficiency in City Logistics Services- basically logistical plans for sustainable freight transport in walled towns. (Name of European Fund possibly 'Intelligent Energy Europe').

However, serious problems arose because the EWT as an unincorporated body as written into the constitution under English Law is not recognised in Europe. To avoid losing the grant EWT stood aside and one of the partner Town Councils became the lead body.

This major stumbling block should have been removed when amendments to the constitution were agreed at the AGM in Gmund.

There was no opportunity to enquire how successful or otherwise this project has been but may be worth pursuing.

A suggestion for an application for future funding was "Learning from the past to tackle future challenges" but this was not followed up at this stage.

Similarly linked with sustainable tourism the request for future funding to research how to encourage people to stay in the 'between places'.

I.e. People travelling from York to Edinburgh be encouraged to stop in Berwick.

An alternative interpretation of 'sustainability' relating to tourism is to sustain the interest of people to return again and again to a given location.

Perhaps the visitor survey will give an indication as to whether or not Berwick is making a contribution to this concept.

Mention was also made of developing a network of towns to pursue the theme 'Science in the City.'

HOSTING A FUTURE CONFERENCE

The frequency of meetings is as follows:-

A meeting held in the late Spring/early Summer known as an Executive Meeting

A Symposium, which is an Executive Meeting followed by an AGM, held in late Summer/early Autumn.

Symposiums apparently carry more kudos, are better attended and are a day longer. Towns who host Symposiums are given a recognition plaque apparently.

Dates and locations of future meetings:-

Executive meeting -May 16th-18th inclusive 2013 CAPDEPERA, population 3,000, MAJORCA

Symposium	October 22 nd -25 th inclusive 2013	DERRY/LONDONDERRY pop 107,000-N.IRELAND
Executive meeting	Dates to be finalised 2014	NARVA-population 66,700, ESTONIA
Symposium	Dates to be finalised 2014	CHICHESTER-population 25,000- ENGLAND
Executive	No dates or location 2015	
Symposium	Dates to be finalised	ALMEIDA- population 2,000-PORTUGAL

We may be making an assumption but it was suggested that Berwick would be unlikely to be selected to host either an Executive or a Symposium until 2016 at the earliest as recent meetings have been held in the UK.

There appears to be a differing protocol for Executive Meetings and Symposia.

EXECUTIVE MEETINGS. Delegates pay own travel, including reaching the venue, and all accommodation costs but no further costs.

SYMPOSIA. Delegates pay own travel and then a fixed fee to cover accommodation, travel from airport/rail station to host town and all other meeting expenses. These costs are kept to the minimum by the host town who obtains sponsorship for meals etc where possible.

CRITERIA used by the Advisory Committee to determine the location of both Executive meetings and the Annual Symposium.

- Attractive to (future) members
- Within reach by: plane, train/bus, and car.
- Average cost of accommodation
- Average cost of transport
- Experience in organising symposia
- Attendance at previous EWT Executive meetings and Symposia
- Support of (regional) government
- Political changes not imminent (upcoming elections/possible change of government)Expertise available for exchange of knowledge and experience
- Experience in European projects and networks.
- Active in the development of their Walls.
- Is able to finance the programme.

(Seems to us an outline of the content of the programme should also be of significance but this is not asked for at this preliminary stage.)

FURTHER INFORMATION

NARVA, ESTONIA -population 66,700

We have accepted an invitation to take a presentation to Narva, also a border town, about Berwick-upon-Tweed and we have chosen the title 'Walls, Castle and Bridges'. This is from November 16-18th. The goals of the conference are to examine, analyse and discuss how castles, walls and museums can

introduce and popularise the history of towns, cities and regions through services and products they provide.

We have a copy of the power point presentation which Gmund explain how they achieved their aim of becoming 'The Artists' Town'

Margaret and Bernard Shaw 26/9/2012.