

The Golden Pipeline project, Western Australia

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In a recent lecture to representatives and guests of the National Trust of Australia (NSW), Australian author David Malouf highlighted the fact that a community group will often give a special value to objects that they think are peculiarly their own or buildings that in some way express the group's identity. He refers to objects such as Ned Kelly's mask or Sir Donald Bradman's cricket bat or buildings like the Sydney Opera House as being distinctly Australian.

He also mentions that sometimes places that are not necessarily special icons still need to be conserved for the good of the community, something that deepens the community's sense of where they have come from and where they are now. In simple terms he highlighted that conservation is sometimes necessary for the health and spirit of the present community.

The conservation and interpretation of the Coolgardie Goldfields Water Supply Scheme of 1898 – 1903 is one of Australia's largest industrial heritage projects. Known as the Golden Pipeline, it reflects what David Malouf stated. It is a special place with special values and its conservation and interpretation is important for the health and spirit of the present and future generations.

Conserving and interpreting this 'place' and its 'objects' does in fact recognise its cultural significance both nationally and locally, however it is as much about the present and the future as the past. It is a project that will provide new support for the hundred year old agricultural and industrial lifeline commonly known as the C.Y. O'Connor pipeline and along its path through regional Western Australia. It is anticipated that extensive economic and social benefits will flow throughout the region and perhaps the State.

Project History

In the late 1990s the Water Corporation of Western Australia was approached by several people including representatives from the Institute of Engineers and Curtin University with concerns about the deteriorating condition of the century-old Goldfields Water Supply Scheme under its care. Their concerns were not about the Corporation's management of those aspects of the scheme still in operation (such as the actual pipeline) but rather on those structures not in use and their fear that unless action was instigated, the heritage values of these places would be irreversibly lost.

The Corporation responded by inviting the National Trust to work together with it and the community to meet its corporate responsibilities to conserve and interpret one of this nation's greatest industrial heritage places, thus creating the Golden Pipeline project.

For most people other than West Australians, the C.Y. O'Connor pipeline would have little significance, however in Western Australia, both the pipeline scheme and the engineer for whom the pipeline is named have almost legendary status. It is what

David Malouf highlighted as a place that a community group gives a special value to a place that is distinctly Western Australian.

It is quite tempting to spend some time outlining the history of the events that led up to the construction of this pipeline and the incredible benefits it brought (and continues to bring) to the State but time will simply not allow it. There are numerous publications about the man, (C.Y. O'Connor) and about the people associated with the project and the region, both pre- and post-Federation.

There will also be a range of opportunities to learn more about this part of Australia's heritage with the completion of the Golden Pipeline. In fact, even if people never visit the place, they will be able to become familiar with its cultural significance. The primary purposes of this presentation are to highlight the challenges of the project and introduce for discussion and debate, the methodologies for addressing those challenges with respect to the theme of the conference, 'Making Tracks'.

The Sub-Themes

The two key sub-themes of the conference are 'why are cultural routes important to our understanding of culture?' and 'how do we recognise, interpret, care for and manage cultural routes?'. I need to focus on these sub-themes.

The first question, 'why are cultural routes important to our understanding of our culture?', can easily be answered. I would suggest one looks at the preamble of the Burra Charter:

- places of cultural significance enrich people's lives often providing a deep and inspirational sense of connection to community and landscape,
- places of cultural significance reflect the diversity of Australian communities,
- places of cultural significance are in fact historical records – tangible expressions of Australian identity and experience.

However, there are many other reasons which indirectly lead to an understanding of our culture. These include social and economic benefits in the areas of recreation, tourism and education. Again time limitations prevent a detailed analysis but there are volumes of reports worldwide highlighting the values of such projects.

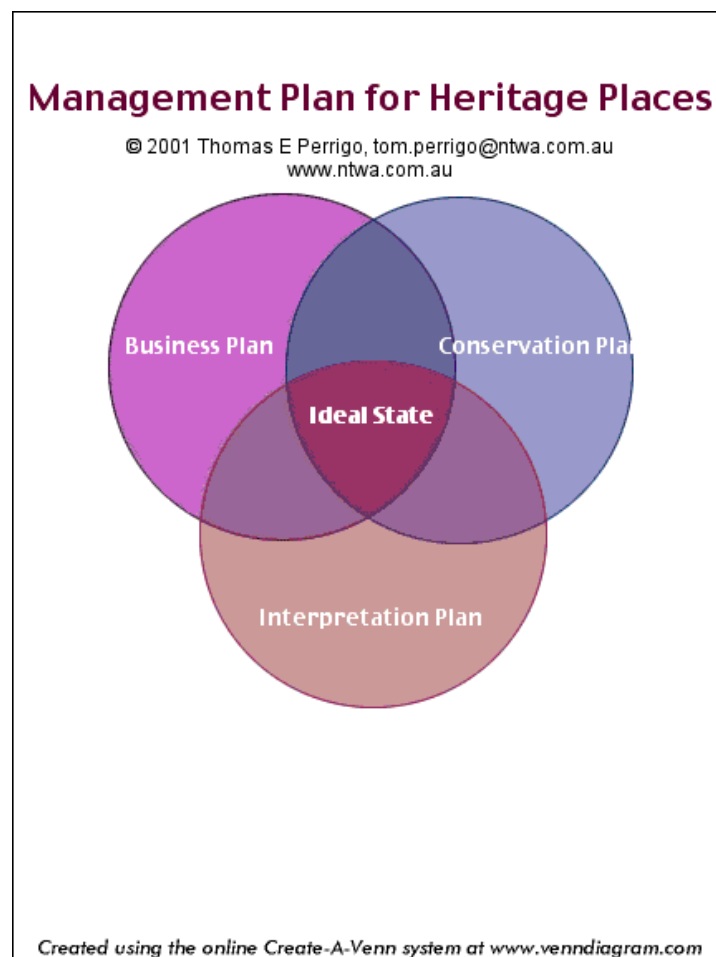
It is the second sub-theme that I want to explore further. This is the 'fun part' – how do we recognise, interpret, care for and manage cultural routes?

The National Trust faced three initial major challenges with the Golden Pipeline Project:

Firstly, the problem of convincing others of the importance of conserving and interpreting the surviving elements of the original Goldfields Water Supply Scheme. Although it appears there is a growing recognition of the importance of industrial heritage in Australia, it was a large challenge to convince others to conserve a major Weir area in the hills outside of Perth, a 557-km steel pipeline, eight steam pumping stations, two electric pumping stations, a major reservoir area in Kalgoorlie and a

number of associated structures and natural places, including some amazing granite rock catchment areas, in this unique part of Australia.

Another challenge was the fact that there was almost no money or resources to commence the work. Fortunately for the Trust, the Water Corporation committed an initial sum of 1.3 million dollars to the project on the condition that the Trust acquired other resources. Despite the fact that the State Government actively lobbied against the project, the Federal Government committed 1 million dollars from the Federation Fund and the project commenced. The Trust estimated the costs to be in the order of 10 to 15 million dollars and the timeline to complete the capital works project to be between five and ten years. Although we had made a good start to have some initial funds, it was necessary to take several other steps. These included the commencement of a detailed planning strategy, consisting of conservation, interpretation and business plans. The National Trust of Australia (WA) has developed a simple but effective management model for heritage places consisting of the three parts as illustrated below:



Success is measured by the shaded area whereby the place is conserved, interpreted and is financially self-sufficient. To date, the Trust has over 30 volumes of conservation plans, a solid interpretation framework and has recently commissioned a detailed business plan with comprehensive feasibility and trails development (motorised and non-motorised) plans. Urgent conservation works have commenced and there are already huge flow-on benefits with regional development opportunities.

Another challenge was to recognise the need for the community to 'own' the project. As a 'Trust' we recognise we work for others not for 'ourselves'. However, it was also essential to note that the project needed to be managed with volunteers but not by volunteers. In simple terms, the Trust had to engage a team of professionals and the community along the pipeline to manage the project. This was achieved in the following ways:

- The formation of a Golden Pipeline Council to advise on policies, plans and to promote the project. This is a group of prominent West Australians, representative of the greater pipeline community and independent of the National Trust Council with the Chairman of the Trust on this Council.
- A core management team consisting of a manager with a project leader for each of the conservation, interpretation and business sections and a small administrative team reporting directly to the CEO of the Trust.
- A written agreement (memorandum of understanding) between the National Trust and the 12 local governments along the pipeline.
- A regional working (advisory) committee consisting of the local government, key government stakeholders eg Main Roads Department, Department of Conservation and Land Management, Tourism Commission, Regional Development and general community groups eg local historical societies and tourist bureaus. The Trust felt it was essential to have this group chaired by an independent agency (the Wheatbelt Development Commission) to give greater ownership to the community.
- Smaller planning committees associated with specific sites (again chaired by someone other than the Trust).
- Various National Trust specialist committees including Finance and Audit, Interpretation, Conservation and Business committees.

The challenges of convincing others of the importance of the project and securing the necessary resources were immense but the Trust has been successful. These are ongoing challenges that require continuous and careful attention. It is also directly related to the Trust's ability to raise and expend resources across the spectrum of the regional community. To date, the Trust has managed to attract over 12 million dollars to the project and believes it has the capacity to raise another 8 million dollars to complete the capital works.

The next challenges are to:

- Design and implement a management framework that ensures the ownership (and responsibility) for the project rests with the community.
- Implement the programs of the business, conservation and interpretation plans. This in effect means addressing in terms of priorities and available resources, urgent necessary and desirable works.
- Design and implement a program that built upon the capital works program with particular emphasis on tourism and education.
- Continuously evaluate the programs and change as appropriate.

- Continuously invest in training and seek other resources to build upon this framework similar to what happened a century ago when water first reached the area.
- Carefully plan and commit to a detailed maintenance plan to protect the investment allowing a greater percentage of future income to be more widely dispersed throughout the community.

The National Trust of Australia (WA) has established this 20 million dollar project as a separate program under an independent cost centre. In effect, we have accepted a permanent commitment to work in partnership with the community to manage this unique cultural route.

This project is one of the most significant opportunities for the region since water was first introduced over a century ago. However, it will also bring changes, some social and others economic. The outcome of these changes will depend upon the level of knowledge, awareness, understanding and commitment to this project by the entire community. It is therefore vital the community 'owns the project'.

The National Trust, together with 12 local governments and various state agencies, must empower the community to maintain intellectual freedom to develop new products and improve existing ones. We must overcome the constraints of parochialism, poor infrastructure, population loss and other characteristics of a community under stress.

We need to strategically market the opportunities for both new and existing visitors and utilise the wonderful cultural heritage opportunity to mend the damaged social fabric and renew the spirit of a unique region of Western Australia. In simple terms, we need to put as much effort into improving the social and economic values of the Goldfields Water Supply Scheme as we do for conserving and interpreting it.

Conclusion

Europe has been a leader in integrating culture as a critical component of economic development. There are thousands of examples whereby investment in cultural assets gives enormous returns. For example, every full-time job in the National Trust in the United Kingdom supports 9.5 full-time jobs in the economy.

Conserving and interpreting Australia's cultural routes could provide a major economic springboard for change – one that would highlight the importance of linking the past and the present through increased rural rejuvenation.

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