Practices of literary tourism: An Australian case study

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Susan Carson, Queensland University of Technology (Email: sj.carson@qut.edu.au)

Contact: Creative Industries Faculty, QUT, z6-410, Musk Avenue, Kelvin Grove, QLD, Australia 4039,

011+61+07 31388115.

Lesley Hawkes, Affiliation: Queensland University of Technology (Email: l.hawkes@qut.edu.au)

Contact: Creative Industries Faculty, QUT, Level 3, K Block, Kelvin Grove, QLD, Australia 4039,

011+61+07 31388227.

Kari Gislason, Queensland University of Technology (Email: k.gislason@qut.edu.au)

Contact: Creative Industries Faculty, QUT, Level 3, K Block, Kelvin Grove, QLD, Australia 4039,

011+61+07 31386466.

Samuel Martin, Affiliation: Queensland University of Technology (Email: sj.martin@qut.edu.au)

Contact: Creative Industries Faculty, QUT, Level 3, K Block, Kelvin Grove, QLD, Australia 4039,

011+61+07 31339662.

ABSTRACT

Purpose: To present the results of tests for the development of literary trails for domestic visitors and tourists in Brisbane, Queensland, and to situate these findings in the context of recent state government policy changes in relation to culture, community engagement and the environment.

Design: Broadly cultural studies: the article analyses changes in international and national cultural tourism and Queensland based issues before presenting the research findings.

Findings: a gap in tourist and cultural development models exists for the implementation of a network of sustainable literary trails in Brisbane--this model can be extended to regions around the state to meet the demands of the new tourist.

Limitations: Queensland weather and Australian distance which will require a regional approach that networks with transport and community hubs.

Practical implications: the research has produced new software for the use of self-guided walks; the locations for two specific area trails; and the involvement of the State Library of Queensland as a "hub" for the trails. Substantial support exists for further development in advanced locative media and gaming.

Social implications: the research demonstrates the importance of developing a sense of place that relates to culture, literary history and community for tourists, as well as the potential for community engagement.

Originality/value: Currently no paper-based or new media literary trail exists in Brisbane. The proliferation of online delivered, self-guided trails in other parts of the world reflects a demand for this type of cultural and environmental experience.

Category: Case Study

Keywords: Tourism; Walking; Literary Trails; Australia; Brisbane; Community.

1. Introduction

In September 2009, Premier Anna Bligh launched a program to foster reading and writing across Queensland. Called "A State of Writing", the program will "pool the talents of the Queensland Writers Centre; Book Links; Queensland Poetry Festival and the Children's Book Council of Australia" to form a "writing hub" at the State Library of Queensland." The program follows the State Government's $400,000 investment in relocating the Queensland Writers Centre to the State Library of Queensland building at South Bank's Cultural Centre which will be completed in 2010.

"State of Writing" marks an interesting moment in the history of cultural politics at state level. Whereas reading and writing are unlikely to ever displace sun and sport as a priority for most Queenslanders, Bligh's announcement signals recognition of two key changes to the cultural climate. First, the need to invest in diverse community and environmentally-conscious activities for locals. Second, that "tourists," whether domestic or international, are looking for new ways of engaging with the city or state.

One way of meeting these aims in a way that reflects the specific objectives of "State of Writing" is to develop walking trails that introduce residents and visitors to the state's literary history and current literary culture. The timing for this kind of innovation could not be better. Literary trails can now be organised and delivered via phone and GPS applications that are easily accessible and that can be provided at low cost. Digital-based literary trails can be set up in ways that provide maps and, through the delivery of text and other media, encourage walkers to engage with the community and urban space around them.

The early testing of this technology also suggests that literary tourism of this kind is very well placed to meet broader goals set by all levels of government relating to environmentally sustainable development that encourages people to conceive of their local environments in new and sustainable ways.

2. Literary Tourism

Traditionally, "literary tourism" is located within the broader framework of cultural tourism, itself placed within the area of cultural studies. Raymond Williams defines culture as "ordinary: that is the first fact. Every human society has its own shape, its own purposes, and its own meanings. Every society expresses these, in institutions, and in arts and learning" (Williams, 1958, p.4). Williams' observation of culture as "ordinary" is important: it indicates that culture is not simply a term used to describe the educated or artistic, but rather one which encompasses the "lives and interests of ordinary people, both urban and rural dwellers, indigenous and immigrant communities, artists and artisans" (Smith, 2003, p.10). Literary tourism, then, can be considered as the process of experiencing these cultures in a way that focuses attention on places "celebrated for associations with books or authors" (Squire, 1994, p.104).

3. The "new tourist"

Erve Chambers identifies the "new tourist" as a professional and comparatively well-educated traveler. S/he is likely to demand individualized experiences that reject mass in favour of self-education and is characterized by an aspiration to actively engage with a wider range of people and places. The new tourist is diverse. S/he may be in search of a health service, a study abroad experience, volunteer work, or the opportunity to explore inaccessible places.

Chambers (2009, p.353) paints a picture of a dramatically different global tourist market with more tourists from economically emerging nations; a growing number of retirees travelling; and a growing number of well-educated trendsetter elites who are interested in heritage preservation, as well as environmental sustainability, and cultural diversity. Importantly, these tourists are as likely to be domestic travelers as international visitors. Chambers comments: "[m]uch as fusion restaurants have begun to blend culturally distinct foods and tastes into unique servings, so might future tourism participate in the blending of cultural attributes into the serving of new realms of experience and insight" (*ibid,* p.354). These trends represent a shift to tourism that focuses on the diverse life of the city rather than an over-concentration on one type of experience.

In this sense, the term "new tourist" can be thought of as a post-structuralist notion that is useful in describing the often awkward balance of local and visitor interests. In Munich, for example, many visitors are looking to read the city in terms of a Nazi past that local authorities have been active to ignore or hide (Wolfel, 2008, p.66, 72). In this context of clashing visitor and official interests, the visitor experience occurs on a number of levels: the visitor is motivated to look beyond the intended cultural performance of the city to its hidden layers.

Thus, post-structural approaches have come to bring with them increasing acceptance of a subtle, less focussed tourist discourse—"far from tourism being simply a one-way process as suggested by the phrase "the tourist gaze," something far more nuanced happens" (Knudsen *et al.,* 2008, p.5). In some cases, for example, the experience becomes uncertain or difficult to define, consisting of a "multiplicity of insider and outsider meanings" (Knudsen *et al*., 2008, p. 1) that can also be very hard to predict. Importantly, being part of a tourist site is not necessarily a passive process, but rather a shared one that permits people to engage with tourist activities in different ways.

As McWatters (2008, p.16) notes, "place experience is a channel of illumination through which people articulate greater ideas about their social and individual identities, as well as a frame through which the researcher may understand his subjects' perceptions of and values for themselves and their surrounding world". For McWatters, understanding place is linked to understanding landscape, which in turn is often processed through art: "the cultural association between landscape and art, a relationship bridged by aesthetics, in fact points to a fourth layer of meaning: a *representational* layer in which landscape is interpreted and represented through cultural texts, such as paintings, films, novels, photographs, and the like" (*ibid*, p.24). Modern day tourists, says McWatters, citing Urry's work on the tourist gaze, practice the commodification of landscapes with new technology, collecting new signs and images (*ibid,* p.36).

4. Brisbane in context

Currently, exciting possibilities exist for Brisbane to take part in a growing field of literary tourism. "State of Writing" signals the state government's interest in building infrastructure that promotes literary life in the state. Examples from other cities suggest that trails are an effective way of developing the literary side of new tourism. Further, the online environment provides an innovative way of creating literary trails, and for the new tourist an economical and effective mode of engaging with the city.

4a. Melbourne

In August 2008 Melbourne was named a UNESCO literary city. Two other cities have been awarded this title, Edinburgh and Iowa (Dublin has made a current bid). The title is awarded to cities that have "an urban environment in which literature, drama and/or poetry play an integral role" and cities that have "experience in hosting literary events and festivals aiming at promoting literature" (Taylor 2009). The UNESCO Cities of Literature is part of UNESCO's Creative Cities Network (CCN) and the aim is

to develop creative global interaction between cities. Figures suggest that Edinburgh's UNESCO literary title has generated $3.3 million in revenue for the city and another $3.1 million in revenue for Scotland (Taylor 2009).

The desire for Melbourne to become a UNESCO city reportedly grew from the legendary rivalry between Melbourne and Sydney. While Melbourne has long seen itself as the cultural capital of Australia, it was the Sydney Writers Festival that was drawing bigger crowds and greater coverage. The support for the UNESCO bid was far-reaching, from the grass roots level through to the media and government officials, since reflected in substantial increases in funding for the city's literary life. *The Age* and *Herald Sun* followed the bid from start to finish, and the bid was accompanied by very strong community interest.

One of the successes of Melbourne's bid was its formalizing of the city's dual obsessions with sports and the arts. While other cities concentrate on sports tourism, leisure tourism, or specific cultural events, Melbourne has been able to connect these activities, in part through the success of the city's logo which spells "Melbourne" across book pages. For example, in the marketing of the Australian Open, the Melbourne city logo was prominently featured on the back of centre court, reinforcing in the viewers' minds the connection between cultural and sporting life in Melbourne.

In its UNESCO bid Melbourne was able to draw on a wide range of cultural markers, from the city's self-identification as a cultural capital to its distinguished record in book publishing, including the international success of the *Lonely Planet* guides. The bid claimed that the city has more bookshops per head of population than any other city in the world, and that more people borrow books from public libraries than anywhere else in Australia. The State Library of Victoria is the oldest free library in Australia and over 1.1 million people visit the library every year. Melbourne, it seems, also has the

longest running reading circle in Australia, with the Ivanhoe reading circle that began in the 1920s. In addition, some of Australia's best known authors began their careers in Melbourne: C.J. Dennis, Miles Franklin, Marcus Clarke, Rolf Boldrewood, Dorothy Porter and Peter Carey. Melbourne has a specialised centre for Youth Literature where it develops and encourages reading by youth, and the writing of youth literature.

Arts Victoria, the Victorian State Government, and the State Library of Victoria are currently working on ways to incorporate the UNESCO title with other tourist activities, including through a literary trail. Melbourne has a great advantage in being a grid city and very walkable. Since 1837 Melbourne has followed the grid plan of Richard Hoddle (known as the Hoddle grid) where every major street is thirty metres wide with perpendicular side streets one third of that width. This grid plan makes it easy to plot out travelling times and places onto maps.

4b. England

Australia's recent involvement in literary tourism follows European developments, some of which are well-established while others have appeared more recently. Unsurprisingly, literary walks and trails have proved a great economic success in parts of England. A new Coleridge Way Walk combines literature and the environment to draw people to the Somerset region, and the Lake District profits each year from the hordes of Wordsworth readers ready to follow in the poet's footsteps. The Coleridge Way was designed after the devastating foot and mouth epidemic of 2001 almost stopped any form of tourism in the Somerset region.

Meanwhile, London's status as a centre of practices of literary tourism remains. The city has long been one of the most significant sites of literary production in the world, and so contains all the elements of interest to literary tourists: it is a setting for creative works, a home to authors, a global centre of

publishing, while also playing host to numerous other creative industries. Local publications reflect this richness. David Tucker's *London Stories: London Walks*, for example, is a narrative-driven examination and exploration of some of London's literary heritage. The book is published by Random House imprint Virgin, an important difference from other print formats promoting and directing literary tourism.

Many publications regarding sites of literary interest are produced through self-publishing or community-based initiatives. One example is *Literary Walks in Romantic Lakeland*, a booklet produced by The Wordsworth Trust for tourists wanting to take literary walks in the Lakes District. This small booklet is funded by Rural Regeneration Cumbria and the European Regional Development Fund, and is available at tourist centres in Lakes District villages.

While traditional print-form guides have dominated in literary tourism, possibilities for innovation now exist through online platforms that have the potential to combine knowledge from local enthusiasts, experts, and commercial publishers. Online platforms can also enable greater dialogue between visitors and locals.

4c. Online platforms

Online delivery of literary tourism sites allows for greater access to information for a wider audience of people, while mobile technology means this information is both portable and current. Literary tourism websites are varied in standard, and comprise a variety of different media. The "London Walks" website is a blog-style site, with the capacity to display short segments of video footage. Other sites, such as the "West Sussex Literary Trail", are set up as companions to print guidebooks, and include extra and at times interactive material not in the print version. "Dublin iWalks", produced by Dublin Tourism, is an example of a podcast-based literary trail. It provides a variety of free downloadable mp.3 files for self-

guided walking tours. This format allows tourists to interact with the literary city without needing to hire a tour guide, and without needing to carry a map.

The online map is perhaps the most popular online format of delivering literary tourism content. The rise of Google Maps as a ubiquitous mapping tool has led to the creation of numerous literary maps. These maps have been created by a mixture of literary stakeholders: private companies, tourism boards, community organisations, media, and individuals. In the United States, the "Literary Map of Maine" is produced and run by a state newspaper and a number of libraries and humanities groups. It plots the homes of authors and sites referred to in local stories. The site features a "how to get here" function in order to make it easier for tourists to come to the region and explore its literary heritage. The *New York Times* runs an interactive "Literary Map of Manhattan" that focuses on fiction set in New York City.

4d. Implications for Brisbane

While cities like Melbourne and London have strong reputations for literary tourism, it is important to remember that Brisbane has a rich literary history, even if it is often overlooked. The Brisbane Writers Festival continues to grow year by year and the redevelopment of the State Library of Queensland in 2006 has created a vibrant hub of cultural activity around texts and writing. This goes some way to matching the Melbourne methodology. Melbourne as a city has always been confident in its ability as a cultural centre. The public, the government, the writers, and the media all firmly believe in the city's ability to produce and support great literature. Literature is incorporated into everyday life, and this helps relate developments in literary life to the city's growth more generally.

Part of the challenge for Brisbane is to overcome a historical perception of it as a culturally impoverished and unattractive city. For example, G. Marzano, E. Laws and N. Scott (2009,p.247) state that it was not until 1987 that the Brisbane River was seen as a tourist resource and even then no

consensus was reached. The River was seen by some as an "eyesore" (*ibid,* p.248). Marzano *et al.* reveal a patchy approach to marketing Brisbane in the past, but note that this trend has been somewhat reversed with efforts since 2007. Recent campaigns give more attention to the city, challenging the dominance of the established areas of the Gold Coast and the Sunshine Coast. Tourism in Brisbane contributes 3.8% as a share of gross regional product, which is important but well below the contribution of the Gold Coast (14.5%) and the Sunshine Coast (16.0%). Yet tourism-related employment is nearly the reverse: in 2007 Brisbane had 30,200 full time equivalents, the Gold Coast 27,700, and the Sunshine Coast 14,500.

The heightened focus on Brisbane was advocated as far back as 1992 (Tourism Queensland). In addition to the expected calls for better transport infrastructure, the survey showed that the largest proportion of visitors to Brisbane's tourist attractions were in fact Brisbane residents (*ibid,* p. 168). In general tourists criticized the "lack of things to do" (*ibid*, 168), and the lack of cheap or free tourist activities (*ibid*, p.120). Suggestions were made to promote heritage trails in the city and outlying areas such as Ipswich (*ibid*, p.150).

Brisbane, as the third largest city in Australia, has an opportunity to develop long-neglected aspects of cultural history to meet the complex demands of the new tourist, in particular through the greater highlighting of Brisbane's literary life. The following section outlines how that might be achieved.

5. Literary Trails

This study includes two trials of online literary trails. These literary trails have the potential to meet the demands of new tourists and the strategic goals of state government relating to environmentally sustainable development.

5a. Literary trails and the new tourist

The new tourist (incorporating visitors and locals) is difficult to categorize. She or he has interests in a range of activities, and does not want to be confined to a particular schedule. Literary tourism offers flexibility, convenience, as well as different possible levels of engagement: while some will want to visit literary sites out of historical curiosity, others will seek to challenge and expand the way they conceive of Brisbane's literature.

5b. literary trails and sustainable communities

In order for literary trails to represent sustainable development, leisure walking must relate in a meaningful and inspiring way to everyday walking, and a literary tourism that does not speak to locals about the way they move around their immediate surroundings will, in environmental terms, be a lost opportunity. That is, an increase in the amount of leisure walking from literary tourism activities should not come at the expense of other walking but rather at the expense of car use. This poses a major challenge for the design of individual literary trails within Brisbane, but one must be addressed. A first step is to design routes that take in both literary sites and key points in suburban transport, commuter, retail, and employment networks as a way of joining the touristic and the everyday.

Leisure walking or walking for health reasons are commonplace, but research suggests that it is difficult to convert leisure walking into everyday walking, for example, to and from work or to shops and recreational activities. In Brisbane, as in other large cities, suburban spread is a major factor: people live too far from their workplaces to be able to walk. No doubt, prevailing notions of commuter comfort and the Brisbane summer heat are others.

Giving genuine consideration to the environmental concerns that frame literary tourism within Brisbane opens up a range of questions about the nature of tourism more generally, particularly matters around the relative agency of its various participants. In tourism studies, participants are often divided

into three types—visitors, locals, and intermediaries—and in attempting to understand their relation, the field has seen an expansive debate around the theoretical concepts of "gaze", "performance", and "reading", terms which reflect the impact of post-structuralist studies that were mentioned earlier.

The best literary works tend to interrogate and add complexity to our understanding of everyday life, and in doing so encourage a diversity of views of the local landscape and its meaning. For a project that seeks to operate within a sustainable framework, this is of great benefit: the best possible outcome of literary tourism would be that it encourages a dialogue among local and non-local walkers about the meaning of the Brisbane landscape, while at the same time providing an opportunity for the re-imagining of how to exist, at an everyday level, within that landscape.

5. c. Brisbane trial 1: Kelvin Grove

In May 2009 a Kelvin Grove trail was designed to follow the events of a short story written specifically for the test by a QUT Creative Writing student. An integrated iPhone application was developed to enable the concept. This consisted of a server to store data for different locations on the walk. For each location, a chapter and a GPS position were specified. The integrated GPS ensured that when the reader reached a key geographical marker, the relevant section of the story was released to them.

The narrative was set in Brisbane during World War II, when the site was a busy military base for Australian forces. The story explores tensions between Australian civilians and troops and American forces based in Brisbane during this period. Divided into four chapters, the narrative centres on four different locations in Kelvin Grove. The story follows a young Brisbane woman who becomes pregnant to an American serviceman. Realising her predicament, an Australian soldier asks her to marry him so

that she might avoid social disgrace. "Shotgum Wedding" (sic), a descriptive account of the realities of wartime life for young women in Brisbane's suburb of Kelvin Grove.

After the trial, participants were asked to take a survey that focussed on the relationship of the narrative to place. Participants answered questions addressing their prior knowledge of the Kelvin Grove area, and their post-survey understanding of the site. They were also asked to discuss the role of place and landscape in the narrative, and whether they felt immersed in the story as their walk progressed. At the end of the survey were questions focussed on prior knowledge of electronic reading devices and participants' familiarity with mobile phone technology.

Participants reported that they enjoyed feeling part of the story, one stating that, "Being at the place where the action takes place was an enhancing and exciting feature of reading the story." Another felt the aspects of "place" could have been strengthened. Participants enjoyed reading the story on the iPhone because they could easily scroll down, although they said this was only enjoyable in reasonably short periods of time. In general, feeling that they were part of the story was important, for example, "I was in the story world." One interesting aspect of the reported experience was the cross-over between fictional and material worlds. Participants noted a tendency to move in and out of "current" time. One respondent said it was remarkable that just as she was reading the chapter in which the protagonist tells the soldier that she is pregnant she overhead a similar conversation between two young women seated nearby. This movement in-and-out of fiction appears to fascinate some readers, who enjoy the "secret" aspect of the knowledge conveyed in the reading and walking experience. Some respondents would have liked more references to local sites, but all reported a sensation of being "immersed" in the story, one stating "I don't think the outside world, the traffic, came in on you or anything. No, I got immersed, because I do in a book or story."

5d. Brisbane trial 2: West End

In June 2009 a second trial was conducted in West End. The trial took place in a triangle formed by Boundary, Vulture, Franklin and Edmonstone Streets. Whereas the Kelvin Grove trial had asked participants to follow, and respond to, a purposely-written narrative, the West End trial was designed for those interested in published literature, as well as to test interest in a trail which incorporated local business and entertainment landmarks, such as bookshops and well-known clubs. In this way, the second trial expanded on the first.

As with the Kelvin Grove trial, the project was enabled by the development of an iPhone application and server to store GPS co-ordinates and a range of texts. In this trial, if the reader wanted to read a text associated with a location, s/he sent a request, including current position, to the server. The server compared the reader's position with the specified location, and returned the text if the reader was within range of the site.

The walk covered seven locations: bookstores, a park, a pool, an author's house, and several places mentioned in noteworthy Brisbane writing. Care was taken to include a diverse range of writing (extracts from David Malouf's *Johnno*, Indigenous poetry, Estelle Pinney's house at 21 Franklin Street). The trail began at Avid Reader and included Bent Books. Participants were asked to respond to questions about the bookshops as well as to the literary texts relating to landmarks. The authors walked the route prior to asking for participants and noted the location of street crossings, shade, and restaurants. The authors felt that a one-hour walk was sufficient for an early trial.

The survey data show that the majority of participants enjoyed reading the story on mobile phones as a new, easy and comfortable way of reading. However, this enjoyment is for short segments of texts only. The following comment is one of the most interesting responses, "Not only did I get literature

from it, but also I got an idea of West End better. I haven't been here for years". Favourite locations were Estelle Pinney's house and the Greek Club. Although the latter has changed significantly since its appearance in Malouf's *Johnno*, participants seemed to find a site interesting even if the site no longer resembled its fictional representation. One walker said "I especially like any part that does have a bit of story, like the story in Musgrave Park." An important comment for the purposes of cultural tourism is the statement that "It really does make you stop and think like a tourist in your home town." In general, the survey seemed to generate a sense of excitement and enquiry about West End and the associated literary sites, as well as a desire to find out more about an area that had not been visited for a long time, or visited frequently without thinking about issues of place and literature.

7. Concluding remarks

The research and trials contained in this contained indicate to us that there is strong potential for a network of literary trails in Brisbane. While this article has focused on Brisbane, there is also potential for the regionalization of programs such as this one. Literary trails have the capacity to support local and non-local tourist activities in a sustainable way and in ways that meet the demands of the new tourist.

Harnessing government and industry support for the project is the next step. The Melbourne experience demonstrates that co-operation at all levels of community and government is helpful. Literary tourism works best if the community has a sense of ownership of the trails and the texts they explore.

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