



Case study 6: Medway Pilot Project – led by Historic Dockyard Chatham

Raising culture's profile through heritage

The Historic Dockyard Chatham is a unique heritage site and visitor attraction that preserves and celebrates the role of the dockyard and its people in British naval history through its museum, exhibitions and events. It aims to be the world's most complete dockyard of the age of sail, attracting both domestic and international visitors.

The aim of this Culture Kent Pilot Project was to create links between heritage and culture in order to cross-fertilise audiences and develop lasting relationships and partnership across the heritage and arts/cultural sectors. The central focus of this activity was the co-commissioning (in partnership with Turner Contemporary) of a contemporary work by artist Jyll Bradley, as part of the Historic Dockyard's temporary exhibition *Breaking the Chain*, commemorating the 350 year anniversary of the Dutch Raid on the English fleet at Chatham in the Battle of the Medway. Cooperation between the two institutions on this initiative has laid the foundations for further collaboration, and following the exhibition, the installation *Dutch/Light (For Agneta Block)*, will move to Turner Contemporary, Margate, from September 2017, to remain for the period of the Folkestone Triennial – allowing further cross-over of cultural audiences. The commissioning of this art installation marked a new departure for the Dockyard, whose primary focus is on heritage and history. It was accompanied by a drive towards targeted marketing – focusing in particular on digital platforms and social media – aimed at triggering visits from those with an interest in culture and the arts, beyond the traditional history orientated visitor, and reaching into new markets, ranging from independent international travellers, to the resident Dutch community in London, and local visitors from places such as Whitstable and Margate.

Key Outcomes

The Medway Project was the last of the pilot projects to be implemented, and at the time of writing the full impact of the project outcomes is yet to be felt.

- 1 The pilot aimed to attract a new arts and culture market to the Historic Dockyard's 'Dutch Raid' exhibition and events by incorporating a high-profile artist-led intervention into a maritime heritage context. The process has proved transformative in encouraging the Historic Dockyard to experiment, innovate, and take risks by opening their heritage setting to contemporary arts expression, thus diversifying their offer to appeal to a broader range of 'cultural' visitor.
- 2 A key focus was on building strategic cross-sectoral partnership and collaboration – specifically with Turner Contemporary as the co-commissioners of the artwork – in order to achieve audience crossover in both directions. Tapping into Turner Contemporary's Twitter following also proved effective in generating interest in the *Breaking the Chain* event launch amongst a new potential audience – with the challenge of converting that interest into actual visits.
- 3 The pilot also aimed to develop digital and social media marketing campaigns, using content created in collaboration with the artist and specialist curators at Turner Contemporary. Teams from the Historic Dockyard and Turner Contemporary have worked together to create video shorts to be used in targeted marketing on digital platforms and social media. In the words of Alex Patterson, Collections, Galleries and Visitor Experience Manager, this has proved to be a 'real learning experience'.

Culture Kent - a 3 year project funded by Arts Council England and VisitEngland, as part of the Cultural Destinations Programme.

Led by **Turner Contemporary** the aims of Culture Kent were to showcase Kent's cultural assets; extend reach by attracting new audiences; create new strategic relationships and develop the information and knowledge core required to strengthen the Kent cultural tourism offer.

Culture Kent developed 6 pilot projects to test new initiatives and cultural offers and 6 case studies have been developed to disseminate lessons learnt.



Issues & opportunities

Linking heritage and culture.

Whilst 'art in unexpected places' was a core theme of a number of the Culture Kent pilot projects, a unique feature of the Medway Pilot Project was that, in this case, it was a heritage site leading the process. The Historic Dockyard is not new to artistic collaboration, but in the past, commissions have focused more narrowly on the representation of historic themes. The intention for the Culture Kent Project, in contrast, was to allow scope for artistic freedom and originality, opening up an expressive space in creative tension with its surroundings. This marked a new way of artist-led working for the Historic Dockyard, with the specialist knowledge and experience of Turner Contemporary playing a key role in supporting the Dockyard in working outside of its normal remit, and in taking risks with the generation of a different type of content to the usual for a heritage site. This has meant adopting a new, 'curatorial' approach to artistic collaboration, working with the artist to ensure that the installation is bold, whilst also being sympathetic to its historic environment – critical, for example, at public occasions, such as the exhibition opening, where *Dutch/Light (For Agneta Block)* featured as the backdrop to the civic launch.

The project has provided a valuable opportunity for knowledge exchange between the two collaborating organisations, Historic Dockyard Chatham and Turner Contemporary, taking their existing working relationship to new levels. Both institutions have a reputation for excellence in their specialist fields – heritage/history, and art, respectively – and for both, the growth of cultural tourism represents an opportunity to draw on their complementary data, knowledge and expertise in order to extend their reach beyond their specialist constituency. Cross-over marketing via social media and digital platforms using the content developed collaboratively by teams from the Historic Dockyard and Turner Contemporary is intended to feed into the generation of interest and visitation both for the *Breaking the Chain* exhibition, and for the subsequent transfer to Margate. The Historic Dockyard is collecting visitor data in order to monitor their success in converting interest into actual visitation from their targeted market segments.



Key learnings

Adapting organisational systems and structures to the fluid, organic way of working required in artist-led collaboration is a challenge, and would not have been possible without the institutional buy-in and support of the Dockyard management. The organisation had to learn to respond flexibly to the tensions between project management priorities and deadlines, and the dynamic creative process. Originally envisaged as an indoor installation, the artistic brief developed into an outdoor work providing an interactive element to the visitor experience – somewhere to sit and think in the coloured light cast by geometric shapes in the afternoon sunshine. The Dockyard then commissioned a poem, *Block*, from artist and writer Fabian Peake, to be incorporated into the outdoor space of the installation, and further enhance the experience of the site.

“The legacy of the pilot project is about the relationships that have been built, using them as a platform to move forward.”
Alex Patterson, Collections, Galleries and Visitor Experience Manager, Historic Dockyard Chatham

Legacy and ways forward

As the final pilot project, evaluation of the legacy of the Medway Pilot Project would, at the time of writing, be premature. Early indications suggest that this has been a valuable learning experience for the Historic Dockyard. The site has been found to lend itself to a contemporary installation, and there is a willingness to incorporate another arts intervention in the future. The key legacy identified so far concerns the relationships that have been built during the Culture Kent Project, and how these lead to a change in mind-set, away from viewing other attractions as competitors, to seeing them as potential collaborators, resulting in a stronger offer, which can enhance inbound marketing to the region.



Written by - **Tourism and Events Research Hub**, Canterbury Christ Church University, as part of the Culture Kent Research Programme – delivered in partnership with **Visit Kent**

