

“Crossing borders: a perspective on internationalisation for the National Trust movement” by Hannah Eastham.

“A few months ago, I got a job. Not for the money, because I’m not paid a penny. But I’m richly rewarded. I signed up to be a volunteer for the National Trust.” (National Trust: 2017a).

Enabling people to be spectators at heritage sites and also to actively participate in their management, conservation, and maintenance as volunteers is at the heart of the National Trust movement’s success. In 2013 in the UK, the home of the first Trust, it was reported that approximately 70,000 people nation-wide were offering their time to support the charity (Morris: 12th Sept. 2013).

In countries where the National Trust movement is already established, it can be seen that as people move further afield to live and work beyond local and national borders, such organisations are being challenged to maintain volunteer numbers; and, as traditional boundaries of the ‘community’ shift beyond the local level, organisations have an increasing responsibility to make their activities inclusive of members from ever more socially and culturally diverse backgrounds.

Internationalisation of National Trust activities to facilitate opportunities for exchange between people from multi-national backgrounds, sharing different skills, knowledge, and best practice, could be an important catalyst to promote the growth of the movement worldwide; and, at the same time attract new members to Trust organisations by facilitating meaningful grassroots exchange in communities where concepts of national identity and local borders are in flux.

However, growing the movement abroad in countries unfamiliar with the National Trust model, where there is not a widespread awareness of heritage conservation as a practice, and perhaps also not an established culture of volunteering, this can be a difficult task.

This article aims to examine some of the benefits and challenges of internationalising National Trust organisations; and will review current strategies which have aimed to foster international exchange, whilst proposing some tentative ideas about how this work could be extended in the future.

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Internationalisation has been defined as *“the increasing importance of international trade, international relations, treaties, alliances, i.e. inter-national, referring to exchange between or among nations.”* (Daly: 1999).

After the term ‘globalisation’ achieved definition and status in the latter half of the 20th century, businesses, services and institutions have been challenged to demonstrate their adaptability to the ‘global age.’ In response, they have sought to ‘internationalise’ themselves to attract investment and personnel from foreign shores: establishing English as a common language, setting up multi-national partnerships, and securing opportunities for education, skills, and personnel exchange, for example.

Over the years, internationalisation projects have gained momentum particularly in the business and Higher Education sector which has had varying success in securing funding partnerships and investment deals. It is unclear, however, for the National Trust movement which historically operates at a national level, what ‘internationalisation’ means and how such organisations can benefit from it.

Since the establishment of the International National Trusts’ Organisation (INTO) in 2007, there is an improved awareness within National Trust organisations of the importance of international cooperation, sharing of best practice, and increasing opportunities for capacity building (INTO: 2012). Moreover, many Trust organisations are proving themselves to be anything but purely ‘National’ in their agenda, developing overseas partnerships, promoting working holidays, and offering educational and training opportunities to people from abroad, for example. Whilst it is difficult to evaluate in

depth the outcome of these activities at both an organisational and community level, the following section will briefly summarise and consider the above.

Overseas Partnerships

In recent years, many National Trust organisations have established a number of international partners, both within and outside of the overseas Trust network.

Some have tapped into the appeal of their properties to international tourists by establishing agreements with similar Trust organisations overseas to provide reciprocal free visiting arrangements for members. The National Trust for Historic Preservation in the USA has 7 overseas partners, the UK National Trust has 14, with the National Trust of Australia having 19, for example.

Whilst this increases the attractiveness of the package that National Trusts are able to offer to members, it seems that such deals are usually brokered between countries with like for like economies. Reciprocal visiting arrangements between European and Asian National Trusts, for example, are much less common. This may be on account of the risk that people from wealthier nations could be seen to be taking advantage of free access to heritage sites, meaning organisations in less economically affluent countries and/or with fewer membership subscriptions would risk losing out on profits from entry fees paid by international visitors, a crucial source of income.

Other partnerships established between National Trusts and other overseas institutions focus on creating opportunities for capacity building and sources of funding to support heritage conservation activities. The Indonesian Heritage Trust for example, has more than 50 local and international partners from Australia, Netherlands, Lebanon, and others (BPPI-Indonesian Heritage Trust: 2017a), whilst The Indian National Trust for Art and Culture (INTACH) has maximised its potential funding sources by establishing partnerships with a diverse pool of multi-disciplinary local and international funding agencies (INTACH: 2017a), as well as succeeding in providing scholarship funding for students between the UK and India (INTACH: 2017b).

Whilst such partnerships offer many advantages, the main outcomes seem to facilitate international exchange between people already committed to the National Trust and/or engaged with some form of heritage conservation activity in their own country. It seems that there is still room to benefit more fully from international partnerships and learn how to use them also to attract non-specialist and/or non-members who are unfamiliar with the Trust movement.

Overseas Working Holidays

National Trust Working Holidays were first developed in the UK to offer alternative experiences to the regular tourist vacation by enabling people to participate in the maintenance and conservation of a heritage property. So far, there are limited evaluations of their impact, but an evaluation of the UK Working Holiday programme reported the following benefits to participants which included: personal and skills development, increased desire to volunteer, improved environmental awareness and knowledge, and a positive impact on organisational performance by challenging staff to develop new leadership skills (Institute for Volunteering Research: 2008).

“It is the conservation work that brings people here, as well as the opportunity to meet people from all sorts of backgrounds.” (Mack: 14 October 2010).

As bringing people together from many different backgrounds is an important part of the appeal of Working Holidays, many Trusts open up programmes to visitors from overseas. The UK National Trust currently promotes international working holidays through their web page for Rempart (France), Tesouros de Galicia (Spain) and The Friends of Czech Heritage (Czech Republic) for example.

Working holidays typically last around 1-2 weeks, assume a good proficiency in the working language, and require a minimum standard of fitness to participate in active work. It seems that they mainly appeal therefore to current National Trust members, or those who enjoy short term, adventure-style experiences instead of a regular touristic holiday.

Working holidays are also becoming popular with organisations outside of Europe. For example, the Taiwan Environmental Information Association (TEIA) organises a series of ‘Eco-Working Holidays’ at a number of heritage sites under their protection, programmes which have also welcome participants from overseas (INTO: 2015a).

However, for small organisations based in regions, such as Asia, where the National Trust model is not so well-established, there are significant challenges to persuading people from overseas to sign up for Working Holidays. Despite offering very reasonable prices for their participants, the name “Working Holiday” can create a misleading impression that one should pay to work while on holiday, and selling the experience to those who lack awareness of the National Trust or heritage conservation movement can therefore be difficult.

Moreover, it is important to be aware that participation by people from abroad in Working Holidays can also be prevented by national law. For example, due to restrictions by UK Law, the British National Trust is not legally able to offer its Working Holiday programmes to non-EU, or Swiss residents (highlighted in National Trust email correspondence with author 15th April 2015), meaning it is impossible to make their Working Holidays inclusive of short term international visitors from outside of Europe.

International Educational, Training and Knowledge Exchange

In order to broaden educational experiences for heritage professionals, as well as facilitate opportunities for capacity building, knowledge, and skills exchange, many trust organisations provide international level educational, research, or training opportunities.

The Indonesian Heritage Trust, for example, as part of its international efforts, organised the Bali Internship Field School for Subak in 2016 for students and lecturers from Indonesia and overseas to undertake research on themes related to cultural landscape conservation (BPPI-Indonesian Heritage Trust.Org: 2016). Meanwhile, The Fiji National Trust, through its participation in the INTO network was able to recruit long-term working holidays with volunteer specialists to provide expert conservation knowledge and skills to work at the historical port of Levuka (INTO 2015b).

Symposia, workshops and conferences have also been important venues for professionals from across international networks to come together and share knowledge and experiences. The Asia Heritage Network events and the International National Trust’s bi-annual International Conference, for example, have provided opportunities for representatives to collaborate and discuss shared issues affecting heritage sites at an international and regional level.

Whilst these can be effective ways for people to develop their professional skills and provide organisations with the chance to facilitate new partnerships with other Trust groups, the main participants in such experiences are still largely at the expert, rather than the local non-specialist level. It seems, therefore, that there is further work to be done to widen access to multi-national educational and skills development exchange for the general public.

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To summarise, the above section has touched upon some of the activities to grow the National Trust movement at an international level. It is recognised however that this brief review is not comprehensive enough to reflect the diversity of efforts which individual organisations are carrying out at this time, and can only provide a surface-level appraisal of some of the work undertaken.

Generally speaking, therefore, internationalisation for the National Trust movement thus far has improved accessibility for existing members travelling abroad for vacations, increased opportunities for overseas funding and capacity building, and opened up overseas' exchange between a select group of people brought together through Working Holidays and specialised educational/training programmes.

Whilst reviews of this work are limited, such activities seem to be personally and professionally rewarding for those who participate. However, many of these projects are only able to offer short to mid-term experiences, and usually engage with those with prior membership or familiarity with the National Trust, or with those currently engaged in heritage study and research. It seems therefore that it is necessary to work towards extending these international experiences to reach existing and new members at the everyday, local level.

Back to basics: National Trust Volunteers

The key to 'internationalisation' for National Trusts may therefore be a simple solution: building on what the organisation does best by providing structured volunteer experiences. By focusing on assisting medium to long term international residents to become part of a new community, whilst creating experiences for existing members to develop personal interaction and exchange with people from abroad, this may open up routes to grow the movement at the local level beyond national borders.

A personal account by the author of an experience in Japan can help to illustrate this point:

Visiting as a recent graduate, I arrived in Japan as part of a working holiday visa experience in 2014. During that time, I was able to meet the organisers of the Amenity 2000 Association, who had founded an organisation based on the National Trust model in the year 2000. Since 2014, I have been welcomed to participate in their activities as a volunteer and given the rights of full membership to the Association which is free for students.

This has enabled me to enjoy the work of the Trust and learn about Japanese culture in a way that would have been very difficult (and costly) for me to do otherwise. Activities involved participation in events, such as selling traditional crafts, planting rice, and tea ceremony. The most rewarding part however, is the main volunteer work assisting at the heritage property, a lodge on Mt. Rokko in Kobe. Through this, I was able to experience becoming a part of a community of volunteers, upon whom the Association relies upon to take chief responsibility for opening/closing the property, providing guided tours to visitors, managing retail, and undertaking maintenance work.

During this time I was able to develop Japanese language skills in a way that provided a more effective practical method of study than classroom based learning. Moreover, I was able to nurture over the long term a sense of place and an emotional connection to the Rokko Lodge, creating memories and friendships which motivated me to continue volunteering there when I returned to Japan again in 2016 as an international student. (Hannah Eastham)



Since that time, other international students who are keen to learn about Japanese history and culture, have also joined as members to the Association. These students bring new energy and language skills and their interaction with local volunteers, many of whom have limited prior experience with foreign visitors, provides valuable opportunities to learn about other cultures (Fig. 1).

It is important to remember that the original success of the Trust movement relies on its capacity to bring people to work together around special places, creating memorable and fun experiences, free of the stress of business or career orientated objectives. This could be the key to expanding current internationalisation efforts within these organisations.

Case studies from the UK have also highlighted the benefits of National Trust volunteering for non-British nationals who have chosen to live and work in other countries, for example Carlos from Brazil: *Volunteering is great because it allows Carlos to increase his language skills, make friends and build relationships both with other volunteers, staff and also with our visitors* (National Trust: 2017b)

Attracting new volunteers from non-specialist backgrounds and being able to facilitate longer term engagement with the Trust may also rely upon offering projects which break the traditional mould, such as the “Summer Challenge” project which gave Yemen-born asylum seeker Khalil Ali the opportunity to be trained as a tour guide at the Birmingham Back to Backs property at the UK National Trust.

With English as my second language, I couldn't understand what 'National Trust' meant. In my culture, we trust people just once and if they break that, we never trust them again. After the Summer Challenge, Mukith, who runs the programme, said: 'Do you trust us now?' I said: 'With my life!' (National Trust: 2017c).

Even though the project was relatively short term, feedback from the website indicates that it was able to raise awareness of the National Trust to somebody previously unfamiliar with the movement; and, in addition, welcoming Khalil to the programme had mutual benefits for other staff and volunteers, who were able to develop coaching skills and knowledge of Khalil's background and culture over 6 weeks of training.

Offering events, or ‘taster’ experiences of the Trust's work can be a simple and effective route to attract new volunteers to an organisation. For example, the Amenity 2000 Association actively seeks to welcome international students to their events, such as the ‘Kuzaki Dye’ (Plant Dye) event in October 2016, which appealed to a new arrival from Mexico to Japan and economics student at Nara University, Rodrigo: *“I've always loved handicrafts and experimenting with dyes using natural ingredients, so learning from Japanese volunteers about Kuzaki Dye was something I definitely had to try!”* (Fig. 2)



Figure 2 Rodrigo from Mexico and his handmade organic dyed cloth (photo taken October 2016 by Hannah Eastham)

Towards an Internationalisation Strategy

In order to work towards building sustained dialogue between different countries to raise awareness of the National Trust movement both within and outside of the country, focusing on engagement with medium to long term international visitors could be a simple and effective route to achieve this aim.

As it seems that people's attitudes to experiencing foreign cultures and travelling abroad are beginning to shift towards seeking authentic cultural experiences over the regular touristic vacation

(Prebensen, et al.:2014), there is an opportunity for Trust organisations to build upon the appeal of their special places, as well as building on the success of its Working Holiday programmes and educational exchanges at an international level.

Whilst small organisations such as Amenity 2000 Association still need to develop the capacity to be able to launch projects, such as their planned ‘Trust Youth Centre’ (INTO 2015c) which aims to bring together local and international student volunteers, examples of their early groundwork towards this project are a reminder that the international student market and/or those seeking Gap year experiences, or visa based ‘working holidays’ could be a way forward for expanding international efforts within organisations. In Japan, for example, it has been reported that:

“Young people with overseas experience are a driving force behind Japan’s internationalisation... One popular way is through the Working Holiday...based on reciprocal agreements between two nations that allow youths to enter each other’s countries to temporarily live, work and holiday for the purpose of grassroots cultural exchange.” (Breaden, et. al. 2014)

In recent years Australia, New Zealand and Canada have been popular destinations for British nationals on working holiday visas; and there are approximately 60 countries in the world which have some kind of reciprocal working holiday arrangement with one or more other countries. Australia for example accepts working holiday visa applications from passport holders of 23 different countries including South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, and Hong Kong.

If volunteering at the National Trust is, as the above case studies have shown, particularly beneficial to those who wish to improve their language skills and deepen their knowledge and experience of foreign cultures, then it may be that new and enthusiastic recruits such as working holiday visa holders, international students, and recent graduates working abroad could be a very valuable resource.

Whilst it is important to be sensitive to the challenges of recruiting international volunteers, such as language barriers, differences in cross cultural communication styles, and a risk of a high turnover of volunteers, the value of welcoming people from this group is that they can not only gain knowledge and appreciation of the Trust movement, but they can also provide existing members and staff with new perspectives about their own culture and ways of working. In this way, it may be possible not only to strengthen internationalisation efforts within organisations, but also enable the National Trust movement to play an important role in encouraging new attitudes towards internationalisation at a wider level.

For example, it is often observed that new foreign arrivals to English-speaking countries are put under pressure to quickly assimilate the mother tongue and adapt ‘Western ways’ of working. However, in non-English speaking countries, particularly countries of Asia, where large numbers of foreign nationals are increasingly coming to live and work on extended bases, it is more common to encounter the feeling that learning the national language and become integrated in local life is advantageous rather than essential.

Despite the obvious advantages of developing English as a common language for people to communicate for daily life and work, ‘internationalisation’ in its current form mainly emphasises the assimilation of an Anglophone-based model. It seems therefore that as a result internationalisation efforts in other sectors such as business, tend to be one directional, failing to appreciate the importance of fostering a mutual process of cultural and linguistic exchange that can develop authentic and meaningful understanding between people from different cultures.

As a result, expatriates abroad, particularly in Asia, where it is often perceived that there are overwhelming cultural and linguistic challenges can fail to develop the communication skills to integrate with the local community. If volunteering for a National Trust style organisation, therefore, could welcome the application of multiple languages in a stimulating environment to socialise with

people who share a passion to experience new cultures, we might see that in the future people would begin to establish a stronger attachment to special places, developing ‘roots’ in foreign countries too.

Internationalisation for National Trusts, therefore, will require engagement with volunteers over a longer term. By tapping into the appeal of foreign cultures and exchange between local and international residents, awareness of the value of the National Trust amongst people unfamiliar with its work can be raised. This has the potential to foster meaningful cross cultural engagement for the wider benefit of the community and it is crucial that we grow the movement at an international level to help National Trust organisations truly fulfil their role to “*protect special places for everyone, forever*” (National Trust: 2017d).

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