

Cultural energy

Elisabeth Jeffries

As renewable energy industries grow, a city in England is trying to understand if cultural tourism can be used to build an energy hub.

In July 2016, thousands of people stripped off and painted themselves blue, representing the ocean, then poured through the streets of Hull, UK. Entitled *Sea of Hull*, the event, created by artist Spencer Tunick, introduced the city — in the northeast of England — as UK City of Culture 2017. As an advertisement for offshore employment, it would perhaps have been a little far-fetched. Yet arguably the connections were there. The event suggested that the people of Hull depend on the sea — and so, therefore, do their livelihoods.

In the past, that meant North Sea fisheries and merchants shipping products to the Netherlands and Baltic countries or under the bridge, along the estuary and up the River Humber. It meant whaling expeditions and long-distance trading to colonial harbours. Today, following committed investment by German engineering company Siemens, it means renewable energy — or at least turbine blade production for the dozens of offshore wind farms surfacing across the North Sea.

The aim of Hull City of Culture is to attract hundreds of thousands of visitors to a range of cultural events during the course of 2017, eventually changing the city's reputation and attracting more businesses to settle there. Part of the City of Culture programme is directed specifically at its evolving role in energy industries: "We have an event at the beginning of 2017 which will put Hull on the map as an energy city," hints Phil Batty, Director of Marketing, Communities and Legacy at Hull City of Culture 2017.

Charting the city's development path requires careful consideration. Could Hull develop a brand as a city focused on offshore energy, cleantech or sustainability? New programmes like Green Port Hull, an enterprise zone, and Hull Energy City, a cluster of energy projects, are still taking shape and aiming to attract new businesses and investment. Alternatively, should Hull diversify its appeal to its other already existing industries like paper production and healthcare? And how can it best communicate its strengths to the rest of the country and the world to draw people in?



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Participants in Spencer Tunick's *Sea of Hull* event, which introduced Hull as UK City of Culture 2017.

These are all questions the town's strategists are still weighing up.

"We're anxious to get the product in place first," explains Mark Jones, Head of Economic Development at Hull City Council. "That means providing an offer to markets such as investors rather than being a 'wannabe' brand. When you start to get to work on it you then have a product that produces a brand with integrity — but quite often it is done the other way round," he says, alluding to ecocity brands with weak green foundations.

Energy attractions

There are plenty of energy city models to ponder as the city decides its future course, such as the showcase energy zone of Hammarby Sjöstad in Stockholm, Sweden. Specialist energy expertise is a potential way forward to develop a small-town economy, attracting visitors to view smart engineering projects. Several examples exist across central and western Europe. Energy tourism is a new niche in industrial tourism, according to Bohumil Frantál, an

expert researching the issue at the Institute of Geonics at the University of Brno, Czech Republic. Such towns, which he describes as 'eco energy cities,' successfully attract visitors but have limited and perhaps short-term economic impact.

The small town of Güssing, Austria, for instance, had spent 50 years alongside the iron curtain with no industry and a high rate of unemployment by the end of the 1980s. In the following decade, it began a long programme of independent decentralized local energy, introducing biomass, energy efficiency measures, synthetic natural gas and a waste gasification plant. Nowadays, it attracts around 15,000 mainly special interest visitors each year who come to view its innovations — potentially making it a demonstration platform for energy production in similar towns and villages. In addition, as Frantál points out, there's a novelty factor for tourists drawn to smart or innovative devices replacing outdated industries.

A range of other types of specialist energy tourism exist in central and western Europe,

according to Frantál. They include coal safaris (guided tours through surface coal mines, observing mining landscapes and mining machinery in full operation) and an information centre at Dukovany Nuclear Power Station in the Czech Republic. Frantál has also observed dragon kite festivals under wind turbines, defying opposition to wind energy.

Alpine hydropower and farm biomass tourism can also be classified as energy tourism, he suggests. Finally, there is 'dark' tourism in the form of site visits to disaster areas such as the Chernobyl power plant area. According to Frantál, the role of energy in tourism can be considered from three angles: it supports tourism by providing infrastructure; it is a potential tourism constraint due to unsightly or polluted installations; and it is a possible tourist attraction.

The energy and culture disconnect

Tourism is commonly disconnected from energy or industry except to arouse nostalgic experiences related to industrial heritage, such as with dockland revival schemes. Visitors to Paris are invited to enjoy the city's impressionist paintings or wander inside ancient churches, not its business centre at La Defense. Tourist information on Aberdeen draws attention to walks and whisky with scarcely a mention of the oil and gas giants driving the city's economy. However, energy has in a few cases been defined as a cultural component of a city's personality — an attraction built into its brand.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in Freiburg in southern Germany, and specifically in relation to renewable energy. In its traditional Black Forest setting with its gables, turrets and well-to-do precincts, the town is a far cry from the unassuming streets of Hull. According to data from Freiburg tourism office, overnight stays have more than doubled from around 619,000 in 1987 to 1.5 million in 2015 — some of this due to eco-innovation. The town has successfully integrated green attributes and a major commitment to cleaner energy into its marketing. This takes its most direct form in 25,000 special interest tourist arrivals each year, who explore its latest innovations.

Green City Freiburg

"The 'brand' Green City Freiburg was created in 2008," explains Bernd Dallmann, chief executive of city bureau Freiburg Wirtschaft Touristik and Messe (Freiburg Economy, Tourism and Trade Fairs). "It is mainly aimed at expert visitors such as architects and urban planners but also school children. In 2009 Cluster Green



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The Sun Ship, designed by architect Rolf Disch and part of Green City Freiburg.

City was founded — a network of about 150 companies from Freiburg and the region which work in sustainability. Cluster Green City takes care of the international marketing for the city of Freiburg in the field of sustainability. This means participation in all Intersolar exhibitions and conferences as well as in other exhibitions worldwide."

Visitors come to see and discuss the city's renowned passive high-rise building developments, traffic avoidance schemes and solar-powered streets and homes. As a result of a sustainability policy originating in the 1970s, when inhabitants rejected a proposed nuclear power station, dedication to cleaner energy has filtered beyond the business sector and infrastructural economy.

Over a few decades, the city's environmental motivation has shifted from the purely supply-based need for cleaner, more local energy to household demand for a better, more eco-friendly way of life and greater wellbeing. That in turn is now more deeply integrated into the city's reputation, attracting people to visit, live, work and build cleantech enterprises. Its location in an area of natural beauty also acts as a major asset.

"Freiburg is the capital of the Black Forest," says Dallmann, "so nature, sports and recreation are reasons and motives for visiting Freiburg... several agencies and partners offer green city tours and presentations. But also the 'regular' tourists are fond of this topic. We notice this, for instance, when people ask for regional food and hotels which are sustainable."

While many towns across the world have devised eco-friendly plans, Freiburg's

achievement is still unusual. It goes beyond the easy designation of an ecocity on the basis of electric transport or smart metering to a more whole-hearted adoption of sustainable living by residents, thereby attracting new arrivals. As the policies gradually penetrate the way of life, the city's culture alters, creating an upwardly virtuous spiral.

Some are trying to replicate this sustainable and long-term model. But for the most part, sustainable tourism is restricted to rather limited interventions relating to hotel heating and lighting alterations in holiday resorts. "In hotels, people don't care as much about the quality of the water and so on as they do at home. That is because they are paying more than usual for their accommodation, so they tend to be less environmentally friendly on holiday than at home. Greener hotels in themselves do not work that well as a draw for new tourists," comments Frantál.

Maritime and energy heritage

To come close to Freiburg's level of sustainability, Hull would have to similarly embrace energy as both tourism driver and attractor. As Mark Jones emphasizes, energy production is the present focus for this city, which is at a very early stage of development from the cleaner energy perspective. Green Port Hull, for instance, is the concept for a zone the size of 78 football pitches. It consists of three commercial docks, an airfield and other harbour facilities. Launched in 2011, the Green Port designation is at this stage stimulated largely

by Siemens' investment in its £310 million new turbine blade factory, which makes the most of the city's excellent dock facilities and marine industry experience.

The aim is to establish Hull and the East Riding of Yorkshire (a local government district) as a world class centre for renewable energy, creating wealth and employment for the region by capitalizing on its logistical assets and maritime advantages. "We said to Siemens: you need deep water, you need access to the quay, and we can deliver that in a certain time scale," says Mark Jones, explaining why Hull won the Siemens bid.

Further supplier sites are planned nearby. Biofuel company Vivergo Fuels operates a bioethanol and animal feed plant within the zone. Meanwhile, an energy waste gasification plant called Energy Works, due to produce enough electricity to power over one-third of Hull's homes, is under construction. Planning consent has been obtained for biomass power stations. The embryo of a cleantech hub, Hull UK Energy City, is in formation. With the springboard of offshore wind alongside its seafaring heritage, Hull could develop a reputation as a sustainable marine city, if its inhabitants so wished.

There is another driver for a more sustainable approach: floods. When Hull was overwhelmed by a tidal surge in 2013, inhabitants were in shock. "People make their living out of water so they respect water. It's in the DNA of people

what water means and the risks of it. Not many families were unaffected after it overtopped right into city centre... and there is concern it could happen tomorrow," says Mark Jones. Many millions of pounds have been spent on flood defences following the disaster.

Sustainability is certainly one intention in Hull city council's 25-year city plan, which was launched in 2013 and has received £1 billion investment so far. This broad strategy encompasses not only UK Energy City but also Hull City of Culture and Destination Hull, an initiative to attract leisure visitors to the town's old quarters and regenerated fruit market. "Energy City is about manufacturing whereas Destination Hull is about transactions — the city centre. The two complement each other. We want manufacturing jobs and spend in the city that will stick," says Mark Jones.

Hull City of Culture 2017 is thus a major opportunity for a town that wants to reshape its identity. To an extent, its planners are working on a blank slate, as Phil Batty explains: "Hull doesn't always produce negative perceptions. What we want to achieve is literally to put Hull on the map as a cultural destination."

The City of Culture programme contains a number of themes during the course of the year relating to its heritage and future. Among them, several events and cultural installations are planned, like *Sea of Hull*, to mark the city's connection

with the sea, wind and energy, as well as its maritime and trading history. Arguably, Hull's transformation would be more difficult without that cultural component communicating it to the wider world.

A cultural concern

Yet it is an approach still not very often used. As Frantál explains, "Previously, people lost their connection with energy, environment and landscape. Energy was invisible and untouchable, but now that is changing. Renewables are more visible in the landscape, whether that be solar or turbines. And as they become more visible, they become a more cultural issue."

Hull's task, then, is to successfully integrate the town's national and international image with its industry enough to attract renewable energy enterprises while not putting off leisure visitors. It is a delicate balance between specialization and diversification. At its core, though, a key theme is likely to recur: "We would not exist as a city unless we had a relationship with water," asserts Mark Jones. "There would be no reason to build a city here in the twenty-first century unless it had a relationship with water. What we have to do is renew that relationship with water." □

Elisabeth Jeffries is a journalist based in London, UK. e-mail: elisabeth.jeffries@journalist.co.uk