

**An analysis of the role of live entertainment
at English seaside resorts, with particular reference
to the 1990s and the beginning of the 21st century**

By

Stephen Mark Hayler, MA

Canterbury Christ Church University College

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PART ONE

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ABSTRACT

This study has demonstrated that, at the beginning of the 21st century, live entertainment remains an essential part of the cultural offer at English seaside resorts. Changes in tourism, changes in cultural attitudes, changes to local government policy-making and changes within the live entertainment industry itself have been investigated and suggest that such changes have not fundamentally altered the place of live entertainment as an expected part of the cultural experience at the seaside.

Live entertainment does not generally influence people's decision to visit seaside locations, but it is important to tourists once they are staying in the resort. It is increasingly important within the social and cultural life of the resort, especially in relation to residents. In these respects, live entertainment is not provided for economic reasons per se, but more as a part of the total cultural offer – for tourists and residents alike.

Local authorities are the key supporters of seaside live entertainment. They provide financial subsidies but also the administrative structures that allow live entertainment to continue. However, despite national government initiatives such as the need for all local authorities to provide inclusive local cultural strategies within their strategic planning, the rationale for the support of 'low' culture live entertainment of the seaside 'variety' is not clearly understood. This is partly because seemingly similar resorts have different priorities and practices towards live entertainment, but mainly due to a general lack of understanding of the place of live entertainment in the 'mosaic' that makes up the total seaside destination offer. This lack of understanding extends to the social, cultural and economic consequences of providing live entertainment. The study has identified the need to develop the

findings of this work to explore the true significance of live entertainment within the cultural part of leisure/tourism policy-making at seaside resorts related to attracting and retaining visitors and residents.

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Most of all, of course, I am indebted, as always, to my wife Sue. It is a truism that I could not have completed this study without her. This comment refers not only to her astounding revelations concerning the hidden depths of various computer software packages, but even more importantly, her tolerance and understanding. It was ever thus, and I can only hope it will remain so.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	Page No.
Acknowledgements	i
List of Tables and Figures	iii
List of Appendices	ix
	x

PART ONE

Preamble		1
Chapter One	Towards a conceptual framework	4
<u>Section One</u>	Introduction and definition of live entertainment	4
	The topic of live entertainment at the seaside	6
<u>Section Two</u>	Aims, Objectives and Conceptual Framework	10
	The economic context – the changing economic status and fortunes of seaside resorts	13
	The cultural context – changing cultural trends and attitudes	16
	The political context – the changing nature of government	20
	Conclusion	24
Chapter Two	The historical background: Live entertainment at English seaside resorts – from early beginnings to 1990	26
	Preamble	26
	Early development of live entertainment at spas and seaside resorts	26
	Cultural influences on types of live entertainment at the seaside	31
	The organisation and control of seaside live entertainment	39
	Local authority involvement in live entertainment provision at the seaside	46
	Conclusion	50

Chapter Three	The Economic, Cultural and Political context of cultural change at English seaside resorts in the 1990s	51
	Preamble	51
<u>Section One</u>	The Economic Context – the changing economic status and fortunes of seaside resorts	52
	Tourism at the English seaside in the 1990s	53
	Conclusion	67
<u>Section Two</u>	The Cultural Context – changing cultural trends and attitudes	
	Preamble	69
	Cultural tourism at seaside resorts	70
	The importance of the performing arts, including the impact of live entertainment at the seaside	80
	The importance of live entertainment in the decision to visit	84
	The effect of cultural change on particular categories of live entertainment provided	87
	Conclusion	95
<u>Section Three</u>	The Political Context – the changing nature of government	
	Preamble	95
	Central government policy and legislation affecting tourism and cultural activities	96
	Local government re-organisation and monitoring	100
	Changing attitudes and organisation of local government at seaside resorts in the 1990s	102
	Local authority funding and management of live entertainment venues at the seaside	106
	Local government ownership and control of seaside venues	112
	Local government arts and entertainment policy	116
	Best Value	119
	Local Cultural Strategies	121
	Conclusion	123

Chapter Four	The Research Programme	124
<u>Section One</u>	Research Methodology	124
	Preamble	124
	Social research – concepts, context and choices	128
	Live entertainment at the seaside: conceptually, an appropriate topic for qualitative investigation	131
	Gathering data and information from local government sources	134
<u>Section Two</u>	Research Methods	
	Resorts selected for investigation	142
	Issues to be investigated	147
	Gathering the qualitative data: informed-source, in-depth, semi-structured interviews	148
	The interview questions	151
	Analysis of the qualitative data	153
	Limitations	159
	Conclusion	162
 <u>PART TWO</u>		
	Preamble	163
 Chapter Five	The changing economic status and fortunes of seaside resorts	167
	Preamble	167
	The role of tourism in the economy of seaside resorts	167
	The emphasis on core markets	170
	The influence of business investment and residents	172
	The issue of the size of the resort	175
	Key factors influencing the tourist decision-making process	177
	Live entertainment as part of the tourist offer	180
	The importance of live entertainment in the tourist decision-making process	182

	The effect on tourists of increasing the amount of live entertainment	185
	The promotion of live entertainment and its link to resort image	187
	Live entertainment as a strategic tool	192
	Attempts at resort maintenance, development and regeneration	195
	The economic effect of providing live entertainment	210
	Conclusion	213
Chapter Six	Live entertainment and changing cultural trends and attitudes	215
	Preamble	215
	Changing cultural attitudes towards live entertainment, particularly of the 'seaside variety'	216
	The role of live entertainment in the social and cultural life of resorts	229
	Changes within the live entertainment industry that impact on seaside theatres	237
	Non-council run live entertainment, particularly in-hotel live entertainment	246
	Further significant issues, some resort-specific, mainly to do with obtaining suitable product but emphasising how each resort has particular priorities	247
	Conclusion	252
Chapter Seven	Live entertainment and the changing nature of government	255
	Preamble	255
	The influence of central government on local government tourism policy at seaside resorts	257
	Central government cultural initiatives that may affect local government cultural activities, including live entertainment	260
	The position of live entertainment in relation to local government structure and philosophy at English seaside resorts	264

	Seaside resorts, live entertainment, and Local Cultural Strategies	273
	The political and economic context and consequences of tourism and cultural changes on the provision of live entertainment	278
	The likely future involvement of local authorities in seaside live entertainment	285
	Conclusion	293
Chapter Eight	Shaping a new understanding of live entertainment at English seaside resorts	295
	Preamble	295
<u>Section One</u>	Key points from the study	298
	System-wide factors influencing live entertainment at English seaside resorts	298
	Changes in tourism, cultural attitudes and the live entertainment industry affecting live entertainment at English seaside resorts	300
	The similarity of the live entertainment offer at particular seaside resorts	306
	The place of the local political and administrative context in shaping live entertainment policies and practices	308
<u>Section Two</u>	Policy implications for local authorities at English seaside resorts	313
	Integrating live entertainment into local government policy-making	314
	Financial support given to seaside live entertainment by the local authorities	317
	Comparative methods of the effect of live entertainment provision	319
	Live entertainment at the local level: Policy-led or funding-led?	321
<u>Section Three</u>	Contribution to knowledge and recommendation for future research possibilities	326
Appendices		336 - 409
Bibliography		410 - 426

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

		Page No.
Table 3.1	Threats facing English seaside resorts at the beginning of the 1990s	57
Table 3.2	Types of live entertainment at seaside resorts in the UK (1994 summer season)	92
Table 3.3	Key points in relation to running seaside live entertainment venues	94
Table 3.4	Possible measures of performance for seaside theatre operations	109
Table 3.5	Some suggested performance indicators for English seaside resorts venues and events	110
Table 4.1	The main issues, and sub-issues relating to the changing nature and role of live entertainment at English seaside resorts in the 1990s	137
Table 4.2	Research Questions, associated research methods and justification	140
Table 4.3	Population of English seaside resorts, 1999, the 'top twenty'	144
Table 4.4	Population change in seven English seaside resorts 1911 – 1999	146
Table 6.1	Job titles of council officers programming live entertainment at seven English seaside resorts	268
Figure 2.1	Live entertainment programme from the Middlesex Music Hall, Drury Lane, 1892	38
Figure 3.1	Butler's resort cycle of evolution	59
Figure 4.1	Map of England with seven resorts identified	147

LIST OF APPENDICES

		Page Nos.
A1	Details of the resorts, and theatres in the study, 2000/01	336 - 342
A2	(Separate document) Statistics from the British Resorts Association Benchmarking exercise 2000/01 by Total, then by Quarter by Venue	343 - 372
B	Nine preliminary interviews 1998/9 with some key issues and sample quotes	373 - 375
C	Main issues/themes emerging from the literature review	376 - 379
D	Details of interviewees, with explanations as to which Questions they did <i>not</i> get asked	380 - 383
E	The interview questions	384 - 389
F	Common categories and concepts that represent the qualitative data	
F (i)	Area of Analysis One	390 - 396
F (ii)	Area of Analysis Two	397 - 401
F (iii)	Area of Analysis Three	402 - 407
G	Comments on the similarity of the live entertainment offer at particular seaside resorts	408 - 409

PART ONE

Preamble

The aim of this study is to examine the changing nature of live entertainment at English seaside resorts with particular reference to the 1990s and the beginning of the 21st century. Part one of the study takes the reader through the historical background of seaside live entertainment but with particular emphasis on economic, cultural and political changes of the 1990s. Chapter one provides a working definition of live entertainment, within a broad cultural offer, that suggests 'light' popular live entertainment is likely to continue as a feature of the seaside experience, but that the type and amount provided is being affected by economic, cultural and political factors of change. Seaside tourism trends require the providers of live entertainment to consider it within a mix of cultural activities that must cater for changes in visitor behaviour that are a reflection of wider changes in cultural behaviour. There are economic consequences to this if a seaside location continues to focus on visitors for its economic survival. However, very little is known about the current and potential effect of live entertainment, within an appropriate cultural mix, during a period of relative decline for some resorts. This lack of knowledge is explained in chapter one and related to three key change factors that provide the conceptual framework for the study i.e. the economic, cultural, and political context within which live entertainment at the seaside operates. It is suggested that, if the contemporary role of live entertainment in the life of English seaside resorts is to be discussed, it will need investigation via these three change factors.

Chapter two provides the broad historical background to live entertainment at the seaside, from early beginnings to 1990. Live entertainment was a 'given' part of the

seaside holiday experience but in the early days it was privately run for the privileged few. As seaside resorts grew in popularity, so popular culture dominated the live entertainment provided, and popular culture reflected the entertainment needs of the proletariat. Through various phases, increasingly spectacular entertainments at the seaside were provided including lavish variety shows featuring the nationally known stars of the day. However, as many seaside resorts lost some of their popularity and 'glitz', so did the shows and entertainments, with consequent problems for the management of the theatres. Decline at the seaside meant that the local authority usually assumed a more significant role in the provision of cultural activities, including live entertainment, because live entertainment continued to be considered a 'given' in the economic, social and cultural life of the location. The historical role of the local authority in owning and managing the live entertainment offer is briefly explored in chapter two but further developed in chapter three.

Chapter three presents the seaside live entertainment 'picture' of the 1990s. Certain types of tourism have declined in the 1990s but, despite a general image that projects much of the seaside experience as 'tired', tourism remains the economic base for most seaside resorts. Economic restructuring is the key to economic survival and there may be a role in restructuring for cultural activities, including live entertainment. Increased competition for the leisure pound has not meant the total eclipse of seaside resorts, nor their cultural offer. However, it has meant the need to consider more closely, and better understand, particular change factors that are influencing the future economic health and cultural 'breadth' of English seaside resorts. With regard to live entertainment at the seaside in the 1990s, economic and cultural change factors manifest themselves in the role played by the local authority. Local government, within parameters set by central government, fundamentally co-ordinate, and sometimes directly control, the economic and cultural activities of the location. The actions and activities of the local authorities in relation to live

entertainment i.e. the political reality of economic and cultural changes on the cultural offer, are explored in chapter three. There is a discussion related to arts/cultural policy including key issues such as the provision of subsidy and the need for inclusive cultural plans, but alongside a general understanding that live entertainment remains an essential part of the seaside cultural offer which might, nevertheless, vary from resort to resort. How far that offer continues to reflect popular culture at the beginning of the 21st century, during a period of general decline at the seaside, and how important it may be in relation to the economic wealth of the area, and prioritised in the local political structures, are explored in part two of the study.

The final chapter in part one (chapter four) explains the research methods that will be used to provide data and information, and the analysis and synthesis of that data and information. The results of this primary research are then presented in part two of the study and provide a contemporary view of the role of live entertainment in the economic, cultural and political life of particular, typical English seaside resorts at the beginning of the 21st century.

CHAPTER ONE

Towards a conceptual framework

Section one: Introduction and definition of live entertainment

As long-stay visitors to English seaside resorts have declined in number, the continuing role of live entertainment at the seaside may need to be identified and reassessed. In the hey-day of seaside resorts it was clear what cultural activities should be provided, including the scope and type of live entertainment that would meet with popular approval. Live entertainment at the seaside represented popular holiday culture and the entertainment and distractions provided would be well attended. As aspects of the English seaside experience have become unfashionable and declined, it may also be the case that seaside live entertainment, or certain types of seaside live entertainment, are no longer fashionable or sustainable.

Cultural trends and economic and social change, particularly in the recent past, have led many resorts to seek alternative bases to traditional tourism. Worthing in West Sussex has recently re-styled itself a 'Town by the Sea' rather than a resort (Worthing Borough Council, 1998). Thanet District Council has a regeneration strategy that seeks to provide 'sites for new tourist accommodation and attractions' but also to attract new 'industrial and distribution activities' (Thanet District Council, 1997). If traditional seaside cultural activities, including live entertainment, need to adapt to economic and social changes, this may require a stronger focus on the cultural needs of residents as well as visitors. It will also require a clear understanding of the role of live entertainment within an appropriate mix of seaside cultural activities.

A key concern of this study is to establish how far live entertainment may be, or may have been, a causal factor in seaside decline, how important a factor in the cultural life of seaside locations, and how crucial a factor in attempts at regeneration. Within creative and cultural activities live entertainment may be significant. As Thanet District Council (1998) point out 'There is a resurgence in the extent and quality of creative activity in Britain' and 'Culturally-led developments have been used in the past to stimulate economic development'.

According to Hughes and Benn (1997a), live entertainment may *not* be a significant factor in people actually deciding to visit resorts. Nevertheless, it *is* likely to be important once visitors have arrived, and to be a significant part of the cultural life of residents living in, or within reasonable travelling distance of, a seaside resort. A major issue for decision-makers at English seaside resorts is likely to be one of providing and justifying an appropriate mix of cultural activities and live entertainment is likely to be a part of any such 'appropriate mix'.

Any definition of live entertainment is subject to change and today would probably include watching sports, visiting theme parks and even interactive computer games in cyber-cafes. The definition adopted in this thesis is one applicable to contemporary live entertainment at English seaside resorts. In this context it emphasises the 'light' and 'popular' side of this area of the performing arts but does not ignore 'elitist' activities such as drama, opera and ballet, which may increasingly feature in performance venues at the seaside. Also, although some festivals at the seaside involve live entertainment activities, they are transient and need to be considered separately. The focus in this thesis is to explore issues surrounding those seaside resorts providing live entertainment on a year-round basis. Live entertainment is thus defined as:

'Those activities (amateur and professional) which give emphasis and expression to the unique characteristics and qualities provided by a setting which offers the opportunity for live interaction between the performers and the audience – activities such as variety shows, music hall, pantomime, pop concerts, rock, reggae, jazz and folk music, dancing, circus, comedy and magic, but also drama, opera and ballet performed in live venues as diverse as theatres, night-clubs, working-men's clubs and hotels.'

(Adapted from Hughes and Benn, 1995)

There are difficulties of definition between 'elitist' performing arts activities, 'popularist' live entertainment activities, similar cultural activities and 'active/live' leisure pursuits. The definition above will accommodate these difficulties and provide a working definition for those live entertainment activities commonly found at English seaside resorts.

The topic of live entertainment at the seaside

There are a number of texts which explain the annual migration of the English to the seaside - notably, John Pimlott's 'The Englishman's Holiday' (1947), H.G.Stokes' 'The English Seaside' (also 1947), Ruth Manning-Sanders' 'Seaside England' (1951) and Hern's 'The Seaside Holiday' (1967). In 1978 the historian and sociologist James Walvin produced a useful, comprehensive volume entitled 'Beside the Seaside: A Social History of the Popular Seaside Holiday', focusing on the period 1830 -1950. In 1983 John Walton's 'The English Seaside Resort: A Social History 1750-1914' was published, but it was not until 1997 that contemporary views of the economic, social, political and cultural issues facing seaside resorts were brought together in the 'Rise and Fall of British Coastal Resorts: Cultural and

Economic Perspectives' (Shaw and Williams, 1997). However, none of these books deal in any detail with the subject of entertainment at seaside resorts.

There are only a few texts that have focused on live entertainment (Rose, 1960; Mellor, 1966; Pertwee, 1979). These do so without connecting live entertainment to the economic and socio-cultural changes surrounding resorts. The book by Clarkson Rose (1960) is actually very useful in giving detail on the working of the live entertainment industry at the seaside, but deals only with the period 1894 -1960.

Apart from published books, there have been numerous reports, articles and studies on the topic of British seaside resorts. Most of these have appeared in the last thirty years as a response to the decline in staying visitors. Many of the reports have been commissioned by the English Tourist Board (1972b, 1982, 1983, 1984, 1985, 1986, 1991, 1991a), some by the Association of District Councils (1989, and Parry, 1994)) and many by local authorities seeking advice on possibilities for economic regeneration, usually, but not exclusively, connected to tourism (Thanet Tourism Study, Chrysalis, 1997). Some of these works considered cultural industries but none addressed the particular role of live entertainment in the economic, social, cultural and political life of seaside resorts. Only one commissioned report has dealt with the specific topic of live entertainment at the seaside: the English Tourist Board's 'Curtain Up' (1984). This document addressed the particular problems of the live entertainment industry but made few references to the wider economic and social and cultural context in which live entertainment operated at the seaside, although it did give views from the local government political perspective.

There is a great deal of written material on leisure policy and management (Torkildson, 1984, 1986, 1999; Haywood et al, 1991; Henry, 1986, 2001), but it is of a general nature, often concerns urban leisure, and does not include the category

'live entertainment'. General information on leisure at the seaside may include the occasional reference to 'entertainment/leisure activities', but even this will only be an 'add-on' to, for example, a survey by a Regional Tourist Board on tourists' behaviour. Such surveys may not be continuous, the methodology will vary and the research purpose will change over time. Even when a resort decides to carry out its own specific survey, e.g. Eastbourne's theatre audience research project 'Eastbourne Theatre: Performance Survey Report' (Eastbourne Borough Council, 1998), the information is obviously resort specific – conclusions cannot be applied to other resorts. Additionally, such surveys rarely connect their findings to the prevailing economic and social conditions of the locality, such as any decline in tourism, or attempts at regeneration.

There are many published texts on cultural tourism (ATLAS, 1993; Richards, 1993; Featherstone, 1991; Urry, 1981, 1995a, 1997, 2002) and many publications in the general field of performing arts, including its economic effect (Hughes, 1987, 1989, 1994, 1994a and 2000; Myerscough, 1988). Until the early 1990s however, the only data and information collected specifically to inform the debate regarding live entertainment at the seaside was, as noted, 'Curtain Up on the Resorts' (ETB, 1984). This attempted to discuss problems of supply and demand in the live entertainment industry as applied to seaside resorts in the 1970s and early 1980s. It took views from providers (local councils and impresarios) and performers.

A report from the Audit Commission entitled 'Local Authorities, Entertainment and the Arts' (1991) *did* include details of resort entertainment, but also much of a general nature, applicable to any local authority running entertainment venues. The information on seaside theatre utilised by the Audit Commission had been drawn from some of the continuous data gathered by members of the British Resorts Association during the period 1987-1993 in their annual publication on resort theatre

statistics. This exercise was discontinued in 1993 due to inaccuracies and poor returns. However, such initiatives raised the issue and profile of live entertainment at the English seaside resorts and prompted research activity by Professor Howard Hughes of Manchester Metropolitan University. Thus, some recent work specifically on the subject of live entertainment at seaside resorts is that of Howard Hughes and Danielle Benn, who published six articles and carried out three studies between 1995 -1998. Additionally, Hayler (1998, 1999) carried out a series of interviews with practitioners in both the public and private sectors and published a 'benchmark' article 'Live Entertainment at the Seaside' in Cultural Trends (Policy Studies Institute, 1999). Despite these works there is a paucity of both historical and contemporary data to achieve the aim and objectives of this study. As suggested, research has been sparse and sporadic. Yet the issue of live entertainment provision may be an important factor in the economic and socio-cultural life of many English seaside locations. At some resorts it may be crucial – it is hard to imagine Blackpool without extensive and wide-ranging live entertainment activities.

Despite the lack of hard, continuous data, the provision of live entertainment at seaside resorts has nevertheless, as noted, been subject to 'bursts' of interest and examination. Examples of such activity would include occasions when a venue is heavily subsidised by the local council and financial and management decisions need to be taken as to the extent of such subsidy. Two examples in the 1990s at resorts on the Kent Coast would be the 'Strategic Review of the Winter Gardens, Cliftonville' (Thanet District Council, 1993), and when contracts were awarded under Compulsory Competitive Tendering, as in the case of the Granville Theatre in Ramsgate (Thanet District Council, 1995).

Until recently, there were no continuous, consistent published statistics of up-to-date data on the subject of live entertainment at English seaside resorts, but work by

Hayler (2000/01) for the British Resorts Association has generated basic statistics which underpin the primary, qualitative research of this study (see Appendix A2). However, there is 'no single agency concerned with taking a continuing overview of the (live theatre) industry' (Quinne, 1999). Providers of live entertainment are not well served by relevant information - particularly as regards changes in the live entertainment industry and its applicability to the tourist product, its role in cultural tourism, or its general economic effect. 'In tourism studies there has been a recent surge of interest in art-related and heritage tourism but little attention has been paid to entertainment which has, in reality, been a significant feature of holidays' (Hughes and Benn, 1997 p236).

In the last decade of the twentieth century it is clear that the character, economic base and demographic profile of many seaside towns has been changing (Shaw and Williams, eds. 1997). Such changes may have a significant impact on the provision of cultural activities at the seaside, including live entertainment. Cultural activities may actually influence and/or be influenced by such change. Live entertainment is likely to be an important factor in changes/cultural activities affecting seaside resorts and it is this issue which forms the focus of this thesis. The following section will now outline the precise aims, objectives and conceptual framework of the study.

Section Two: Aims, Objectives and Conceptual Framework

Recent changes at the seaside have occurred through factors such as economic, social and cultural change, central government initiatives, and local government policies and practices. The provision of cultural activities at seaside resorts has been subject to these pressures and priorities. Live entertainment has traditionally been a part of cultural activities at the seaside but its role, usefulness and changing

nature have not been fully investigated in the recent period of change at seaside resorts. There is a need to appreciate the contemporary role live entertainment may play within the changes taking place at English seaside resorts. Crucially, this will include the effect of these changes on live entertainment provision at the English seaside. Such a task requires an analysis of what has happened, why it has happened, and the effect of what has happened; for example, have any changes in the live entertainment provision affected the numbers of visitors to the seaside? Consequently, the aim of this study is:

To examine the changing nature and role of live entertainment provision at English seaside resorts, especially in the 1990s and early 21st century.

To achieve this aim it will be necessary to meet the following two objectives:

1. To identify the changing character and management of live entertainment provision at English seaside resorts - with particular reference to the 1990s and the beginning of the 21st century.
2. To establish the extent to which, and the ways in which, key factors have influenced this change.

In setting up this study preliminary interviews were held with key stakeholders (Hayler, 1998, 1999; Appendix B). These interviews identified three crucial areas of change affecting the changing nature and role of live entertainment at English seaside resorts. The interviews incorporated key themes from the pioneering work of Hughes and Benn (1995, 1997, 1998). Collectively, these areas of change are the economic, cultural, and political context within which cultural change has

occurred. An examination of these areas of change will provide the foundation for an explanation of the changing nature of live entertainment at English seaside resorts and provide a firm theoretical basis to achieve the aim and objectives of this study. The three key areas of change are identified as:

1. The Economic Context – the changing economic status and fortunes of seaside resorts.
2. The Cultural Context - changing cultural trends and attitudes.
3. The Political Context – the changing nature of government.

The three key areas of change provide the basis for the conceptual framework of the study – both as separate factors, and as inter-related components. They are now briefly, separately, discussed as an initial explanation of their significance in an examination of the role of live entertainment in a period of conflict and change affecting English seaside resorts. The three key areas overlap and this inter-related dimension is commented on below. This will illustrate the relationships between them – relationships that underpin the conceptual framework of the study. This approach highlights the need to retain a focus in the study via three crucial themes, but not pre-judge their individual, potential relevance.

The economic context – the changing economic status and fortunes of seaside resorts

This area of change concerns the economic status and fortunes of seaside resorts including issues of image and character of resorts and any consequent effects on the tourist decision-making process, including the significance of live entertainment.

The history of seaside resorts has been one of stages in a fluctuating 'life-cycle' - periods of steady and sometimes spectacular growth, and periods of relative, and sometimes rapid, decline. This decline may not be irreversible – it may be possible to prolong a stage where capacity levels are reached but the resort is no longer particularly fashionable. It may be possible to reverse decline with various rejuvenation and re-orientation strategies such as targeting new markets or changing the attractions.

It was Butler (1980) who first suggested that tourist destinations might be subject to a life-cycle process – from exploration to post-stagnation. Butler's theory is well understood, has been comprehensively debated and its applicability to tourist issues has continued to 'exercise the minds' of academics and practitioners in the field of tourism over many years (Haywood, 1986; Cooper and Jackson, 1989; Cooper, 1990; Goodall, 1988, 1992; Agarwal, 1993, 1997). This study will briefly utilise destination life-cycle theory to discuss how far there might be a role for live entertainment, perhaps as part of image, in projected resort rejuvenation or regeneration. It is likely that different resorts will regard the role of live entertainment differently. The utilisation of Butler's resort life-cycle theory would support this approach as the theory suggests life-cycles are destination-specific, with each stage being variable in length, having different shapes and patterns and

varying impact according to usage, understanding and co-ordinated application in different locations.

This study will investigate any economic influence attributed to image and character, including cultural activities, in a seaside market that is changing. A key aspect will be whether activities such as live entertainment significantly affect the visitor decision-making process and/or the enjoyment of the visit. It may be that business tourism is increasing; it may be that residents' (cultural) needs are becoming more important, or it may continue to be the case that it is prudent to cater primarily for long and short-staying visitors. From the point of view of the experience of a visitor/resident, there are certain crucial aspects of the resort that may positively or negatively affect the decision to visit/reside, the enjoyment of the experience/lifestyle and, for visitors, the likelihood of returning to a particular resort.

Any change in the status and fortunes of seaside resorts will need to take account of the general issues of image, character and culture of a location inasmuch as it may affect the tourist decision-making process, i.e. whether or not to visit the English seaside as opposed to an alternative location. Does the image and character project a positive/appropriate message? As noted, destination choice is also strongly associated with perceived image. The economic effect of such imagery is explored in chapter three, section one. The potential economic linkages to cultural attitudes, including live entertainment are touched on below and explored more fully in chapter three, section one.

Regardless of perceived image or the provision of particular/cultural activities at English seaside resorts, it may be that certain resorts would have followed a 'natural' decline by simply lacking competitiveness and distinctiveness. It may not be clear what part live entertainment may have played in this, or what part it may

play in the possible rejuvenation or regeneration of English seaside resorts. However, live entertainment has traditionally been a significant, perhaps integral, part of the British seaside tourist experience which, by the 1970s in totality was seen as 'ageing and lacking competitiveness in the face of new products such as the Mediterranean package holiday' (Shaw and Williams, 1997). The live entertainment on offer during this critical period may have contributed to this negative resort image. Developments in tourism demonstrated how British resorts would now have to compete with the 'appeal of the new' (Shaw and Williams, 1997). Waters (1967) expresses these new phenomena with great clarity: 'The travel industry is not made up of people taking a once-in-a-lifetime trip. The average tourist is (now) a collector of places, and his appetite increases as his collection grows'. The 'places tourists collect' need to be fashionable, topical, with contemporary facilities and activities. It may also be that *new* tourist experiences defy cultural roots. Seaside resorts were always distinguished by their cultural conformity but people may no longer seek to conform. It is suggested that consumers are increasingly against being part of the 'mass' and are conscious of what Urry (1995a) calls the 'consumption spaces hierarchy'. Here destinations are not so much distinguished by cultural conformity such as social class, as by (culturally influenced) distinctions of taste and fashion. The consumption spaces hierarchy is organised in terms of variegated distinctions and the mass consumption built fabric image of seaside resorts may not be flexible enough to accommodate this. It may not be giving off the relevant 'cultural signals'. Live entertainment may be part of any such negative aspects, at least as far as cultural tourism is concerned. There are economic consequences to this and in such ways cultural change is inexplicably linked to the economic status and fortunes of resorts.

Alternatively, perhaps in certain locations, live entertainment may be a factor in projecting an appropriate, positive image - live entertainment locations such as the

Bournemouth International Centre are modern and attract top performers and products.

In such diverse ways the significance of culture on the (economic) history, and future development of English seaside resorts may be more difficult to gauge than a straightforward decline in visitor numbers would indicate, or less obvious to rectify e.g. by attempting to attract non-tourism businesses to the area. However, it seems likely, in many cases, that the type of culture on offer, including live entertainment, may simply be out of fashion - especially if it is presented in a traditional way.

Cultural attitudes to live entertainment at the seaside will have to be investigated, as well as general trends and attitudes to that area of the performing arts defined as live entertainment in this study. However, caution needs to be exercised. Such investigations are intended as useful supportive material to sections on the economic status and fortunes of resorts, rather than precise suggestions on the effect of the provision of certain cultural activities on, for example, the decision-making processes of tourists. No one area of analysis can be viewed in isolation, or its relative importance suggested, until all have been investigated.

The cultural context – changing cultural trends and attitudes

This area concerns changing cultural trends and attitudes, including the influence of such changes relating to performing arts and live entertainment, including live entertainment of the 'seaside variety', and changes within the live entertainment industry.

Culture can be defined in various ways. Williams (1983) talks about the 'works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity'; Storey (1993) suggests 'such

practices as the *seaside holiday*, or the celebration of Christmas.’ Popular culture would also be ‘well-liked by many people; inferior kinds of work; work deliberately setting out to win favour with the people’ (Williams, 1983). In this context, popular culture is simply culture widely favoured or well liked by many people. Live entertainment of the ‘seaside variety’ was once very popular. This may no longer be the case.

It may be there are significant attitudinal changes to that part of the British cultural experience at the seaside generically described as live entertainment. Such attitudes would need to be investigated both in general terms, as well as in relation to a situation (seaside resorts) perceived as no longer so obviously representing popular culture. Seaside cultural experiences including live entertainment e.g. ‘seaside variety’, are uniquely associated with the seaside and particular resorts putting on a programme of Variety shows may simply be places perceived as no longer fashionable. If such unpopularity exists then it may be compounded by live entertainment of a particular type – perhaps perceived as associated with (some) declining seaside resorts.

As regards general cultural activities, the traditional seaside and its activities may not be well adapted to ‘wild’, ‘natural’ activities such as hiking that the increasingly influential service classes favour (Shaw and Williams, 1997). If these classes *do* attend live entertainment as defined in this study (whether at the seaside or not) they may be looking for the more serious ‘high arts’ of ballet and opera, rather than live entertainment of the music hall and variety tradition that came to dominate seaside entertainment. These latter forms may well still be associated with seaside cultural experiences, or perceived as being particularly associated with a visit to a seaside theatre.

Additionally, any 'uniqueness' of many seaside live entertainment products has been eroded. As long ago as the 1960s the growing 'globalisation of culture' meant that many of the experiences that were once unique to the seaside could now be enjoyed nearer home – 'the film at the cinema will be the same, the voice of the bingo caller will have the same phoney mid-Atlantic accent' (Hern, 1967). If people are seeking their popular culture, live entertainment experiences *other than at the seaside*, it is likely to significantly affect seaside resorts. Inland resorts and urban locations may be providing both traditional performing arts activities including live entertainment, and contemporary live entertainment, or some combination, that is similar to offers at the seaside. This is competition to the seaside. An investigation of general cultural trends and changing attitudes in relation to live entertainment (as a 'genre' of the performing arts) will help establish the contemporary live entertainment significance of seaside destinations, and 'seaside-type' live entertainment, in the provision of this aspect of the performing arts.

A closely associated issue concerns the belief that live entertainment at the seaside is conventionally identified in a residual manner as being 'that which is *not* 'the arts' and which, by implication, is in some sense inferior...The arts may be regarded as the works and practices of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development' (Williams, 1988). According to Hughes and Benn (1997a) 'The arts...are deemed to be intrinsically worthy and creative, uncommercial but necessitating effort to appreciate (and) what remains is 'popular culture' including live entertainment'. It may be that seaside resorts still wish to provide a particular form of 'popular culture' performing arts. But if taste and fashion indicate the decline of traditional seaside entertainment, there is clearly a need to assess the type of cultural activities provided, and the general cultural pressures and tastes that might influence future provision.

Seaside live entertainment provision may have suffered from changes in cultural attitudes that reflect a decline in the numbers of people visiting coastal resorts. It may also have suffered from direct competition for the 'live entertainment pound' from more 'modern' (geographic) locations, or from locations not associated with traditional (seaside) live entertainment experiences. It will be necessary to investigate the place and significance of such 'traditional' entertainment. Undoubtedly, it was once a prominent part of the seaside holiday – people expected to see lavishly staged variety shows and the top stars of the day, often playing a resort for a twenty-week summer season. Visitors would book their shows as soon as they arrived and attending shows was a major part of the accepted ritual of the seaside holiday. But this has been progressively less so in the latter decades of the twentieth century. Less people going to the seaside and less people going to the shows, meant fewer audiences to support the lavish shows and highly-paid stars (English Tourist Board, 1984).

According to Hughes (2000) television has conditioned people into expecting precision and spectacle, but it is not possible to replicate television on the stage. Live performance requires imagination and an acceptance of suspension of belief. There may be a lack of understanding of this amongst 'non-traditional' (seaside) audiences, or even 'traditional' audiences increasingly used to the 'spectacle' of television (Hughes, 2000). Perhaps the 'television generation' are prompting other changes such as changes in theatre etiquette and protocol.

Against this background providers of live entertainment at the seaside may have to seriously consider the effect of a lessening cultural influence of their product, as well as having regard to recent government legislation that is seeking to emphasise the importance of cultural activities, particularly the performing arts (see chapter three, section three). There will be a non-statutory requirement for local government to

provide relevant 'best value' cultural activities, incorporated into an appropriate economic, social and cultural strategy. The importance of various categories of the performing arts will need to be established. At seaside resorts these would be categories within the definition of live entertainment adopted for this work. An analysis of the role and scope of an appropriate cultural/performing arts/live entertainment mix, related to the cultural trends and changing attitudes towards the particular product generically understood as seaside live entertainment, is an essential pre-requisite of providing a service of 'best value'. Notwithstanding the fact that there may be (cultural) moves towards the 'natural' and 'heritage', even towards 'elitist' performing arts for influential segments of the population, seaside resorts will probably continue to provide live entertainment. Tourists expect it, as do residents.

The political context – the changing nature of government

The final area of change concerns the changing nature of central government policy relating to tourism and seaside resorts and changing attitudes and organisation of local government at seaside resorts, particularly related to cultural activities, including live entertainment.

The means by which local authorities at the seaside could justify providing economic and cultural services has often been controlled from central government, largely via tourism planning guidance. Re-organised local government (Local Government Act of 1972, operative from April 1974) did not alter this situation. Additionally, public policy towards and within English seaside resorts has been directed from central government through a variety of organisations - for example, central government allocates funds to bodies such as the British Tourist Authority, the English Tourism Council (formerly the English Tourist Board), and the Regional Tourist Boards.

These bodies are then constrained in their allocations and actions by the directions of central government. More recently, Regional Development Agencies have been established to 'work with the existing Government Offices for the Regions in promoting inward investment, helping small businesses, and co-ordinating regional economic development' (Labour Government's Queens Speech, May 1997, in Wilson and Game, 1998). Apart from influencing organisations directly related to tourism, central government also has a potential influence on cultural activities and leisure provision through direct funding and policy guidelines e.g. through Regional Arts Councils, who will then often collaborate with Regional Tourist Boards and local councils.

Unlike libraries, there is no legal obligation for local authorities to provide live entertainment, but they have a long history of going beyond their statutory duties in the funding of the performing arts. The historical and political context of central government direction and control of cultural activities at the seaside will be explored in chapters two and three, but it is worthwhile pointing out at this stage that there is evidence of a general cross-party political consensus which has allowed local authorities to provide a wide range of leisure facilities, including live entertainment.

Also relevant is the different attitude of New Labour to that of its predecessors. In brief, this suggests a more directional, if not direct, role for central government, making local authorities articulate clear cultural strategies 'directly' (perhaps via Regional Cultural Consortia) to a particular government department. This approach is described in various documents from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS 1998a, 1998b, 1998c, 1999, as well as regular speeches and publications from the Secretary of State (1997, 1998). To emphasise this attitude Davies and Sellwood (1998) suggest that the pro-active role of the Secretary of State has shown 'clear links between the government's political objectives, the Department for

Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), the cultural agencies, the creative industries and grassroots beneficiaries of cultural activity. Local authorities are an important link in that chain'. The impact at the seaside promises to be significant and needs to be investigated as a potentially important 'area of change' in influencing live entertainment provision.

As already noted, there have been many studies as to why seaside resorts have declined and what should be done about it. Many of the reports are linked to the role regional and local governments have to play and there is little doubt that, due to the system of structure planning introduced in the 1968, 1971 and 1990 Town and Country Planning Acts, and its later amendment, the Planning and Compensation Act 1991, greater powers have passed to regional and local government. This devolved power will be discussed in chapter three, particularly in relation to the provision of cultural activities. The reports have picked up on the need for regeneration strategies that can only be lead by the local authorities (ETB 1991a). The local government role in planning for renewal is of crucial importance. It is likely that no other single body has the required structure, status, resources, self-interest and local knowledge to promote and develop (tourism and cultural) strategies which cater for the economic, social and cultural well-being of the locality.

As previously stated, local government must now also provide Best Value. In August 1998, a chapter on 'Improving local services through Best Value' was included in the local government White Paper, 'Modern Local Government: In Touch with the People'. During the early part of the 21st century new legislation will place Best Value firmly at the heart of local government. Writing in 1998 Davies and Sellwood suggested: 'The implications of Best Value for policy is that cultural services will need to have a written policy...cultural services will require published strategic plans indicating the position of cultural services within the local authority's

activities as a whole and the cultural landscape of the authority's geographical area of responsibilities' (Davies and Sellwood, 1998 p85). Such plans are usually referred to as 'cultural strategies'. An analysis of the role of live entertainment at the seaside at the beginning of the 21st century will need to establish what preparations local authorities at the seaside are making towards Local Cultural Strategies (LCS). At Eastbourne, for example, a new role of Head of Cultural Services was created in 1999 – responsible for Museums and Arts Development, but particularly for the theatres and consequent programming of live entertainment (Eastbourne Borough Council, 1999). In such ways local authorities at the seaside may be beginning to recognise the continued significance of live entertainment to their locality. In some cases they are being 'forced' into creating a situation whereby they have to justify their live entertainment policy. In any case, there is increasing pressure on local authority providers to establish the role and significance of all the component parts of a cultural services mix, including live entertainment. Perhaps they are persuaded by the following type of argument:

'Cultural policy in the UK has undoubtedly had the narrow focus of 'the arts'. It is too usually envisaged as being relevant to the governments of countries and cities; it is clear though that local governments of seaside resorts have, in effect, long had a distinct policy regarding 'culture'. Local government has played a significant role in provision of seaside entertainment from the earliest days of tourism. The provision of 'things to do' has always been an important factor in the fortunes of seaside resorts but it is increasingly so post-war as the package holiday in the sun has become so popular. The decline of UK seaside resorts has many causes but if seaside resorts are to maintain (or boost) the number of their visitors, appropriate entertainment is crucial. Entertainment at seaside resorts has changed considerably over the last forty years but the current political and economic environment is such that the local government input to the entertainment element of the holiday may be further affected.

The consequences for tourism may be unfortunate unless local government 'cultural policies' are maintained.'

(Hughes and Benn, 1997 p235)

Conclusion

This chapter has provided an introduction to the topic and a brief explanatory framework, identifying three key areas of change. An investigation of these areas will explain and justify the place and importance of live entertainment during a period of general decline of British seaside resorts. It will also provide a unique insight into the contemporary live entertainment 'scene' – both as a factor in national cultural activities and also, crucially, as far as it may influence the provision of such activities, including live entertainment, at British seaside resorts. Changes in the 1990s will be discussed in chapter three, following a general historical perspective in chapter two.

The areas of change will be separately analysed in detail, but there are presumed relationships between them. There is also a complementary relationship between central government policy and government agencies, and the changing status and fortunes of seaside resorts. It is central government, working through bodies such as the Regional Development Agencies and Regional Tourist Boards, that can influence resort regeneration. But resort regeneration can only happen with the co-operation of local government.

There is a relationship between general cultural trends and changing attitudes in relation to live entertainment and, again, it is the changing attitudes and organisation of seaside local government towards cultural activities (influenced by central government policy and actions) that is crucial in this respect. As will be

demonstrated in this study, it is local government, not the private sector, that provides most of the live entertainment at English seaside resorts.

It is the local authorities that have the pivotal role in both the economic direction and cultural activities of the location 'the role of local government would seem to be vitally important... Justified on social, economic and political grounds, borough and district government intervention in British resort development in the twentieth century has operated in key areas including planning, resource provision, supervision and regulation, direct ownership of certain key components and tourism promotion' (Morgan and Pritchard, 1999 p187).

To achieve the aims of this study, the detailed explanation of the relevance of three areas of change and their inter-relationships will need to be presented from the perspective of local government. In most cases it is the local councils that have traditionally provided most of the live entertainment via seaside theatres that were council owned, controlled and managed. This situation continues at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Furthermore, it is the individuals working within local government who are the key agents of change and have the on-going responsibility to provide Local Cultural Strategies. At the English seaside this is likely to include various forms of live entertainment. The following chapter will give the broad historical background that has allowed this situation to come about.

CHAPTER TWO

The historical background: Live entertainment at English seaside resorts – from early beginnings to 1990

Preamble

Historically, live entertainment was a 'given' at the seaside. People expected it to be provided, whether or not they engaged in it. It is likely that this history has influenced, and may still be influencing, the provision of live entertainment today. This chapter will provide the historical background to live entertainment at the English seaside, pre-1990. It will indicate the varying role live entertainment has played in the life-cycle of seaside resorts, from early beginnings as fashionable holiday locations, through the 'Golden Years' of mass tourism between 1950-1974 (Demetriadi, in Shaw and Williams (eds.) 1997), through some decline, to 1990. Chapter three will then discuss the seaside live entertainment of the 1990s.

Early development of live entertainment at spas and seaside resorts

English seaside resorts had their origins in the movement to 'take the waters' at the spas – both inland spas at places like Bath and Tunbridge Wells, and spas at the seaside such as Margate and Scarborough. In eighteenth century England the 'infant spas were growing into flourishing towns whose importance in social and cultural life was second only to that of London' (Pimlott, 1947 p35). Throughout the rise and fall of English 'watering places' there have always been crucial factors (timing, location, the personalities involved, such as Richard Nash at Bath) as to why a particular location, or situation, led to a spa or resort being more or less fashionable. The key ingredient was the correct ambience, the required image.

Only then would the location attract sufficient 'notoriety' to become popular and the consequent necessary investment. Personalities such as Nash also dictated the social life (of Bath). As the number of visitors were sufficiently few (perhaps 12000 individuals each year in the first decade of the eighteenth century), they all received a personal welcome from the 'King of Bath'. These select people also generally came from the same social milieu and knew each other. Their 'favourite modes of entertainment were communal - dancing, gambling, conversation, party games...there developed naturally a set routine...The eighteenth-century watering place could be likened in this respect to a cruising liner or a winter-sports hotel, where the company is small and self-contained' (Pimlott, 1947 p40). Clearly, entertainment and amusements at the embryonic 'seaside' was an organised affair with little doubt as to what was required - both in terms of habit, structure, and structures. A spa culture developed, and to adopt the mores and exclusive leisure pursuits of the 'in-set' was an essential requirement for acceptance and integration.

The reasons for being at the spas and then the seaside, were to do with the fashion for 'taking the waters', both bathing and drinking in the early days, and then bathing and promenading, 'taking the ozone', for the Victorians and Edwardians. Of course, there is only a certain amount of the day that can be allocated to these rituals before they become too repetitive and other distractions and amusements are sought. A day in Bath in the first decades of the eighteenth century would usually begin with bathing between six to nine in the morning. Afterwards there would be a general rendezvous at the pump-house to drink the hot waters, talk and listen to the band. Then people would separate and go to their respective coffee houses to read the papers, or talk, or write until breakfast. As in London, there was considerable entertaining at breakfast, which was often taken at the assembly houses. Breakfast parties were often enlivened by private concerts, lectures on artistic and scientific subjects, or dancing. This would be followed by church. At noon the company

would appear in public again, visiting the milliners or toyshops, promenading, perhaps taking the air on horseback. There would be gossip to be had at the bookshop. Dinner would be taken in the afternoon (earlier than in London). Evening prayers and a second visit to the pump-room, often with entertainment, would follow. A further promenade would be taken before tea at the assembly house. The evening would either be spent at the theatre which, after a chequered early career often became a nursery for the London stage, or entertaining, visiting friends, gambling, or dancing.

Clearly, in the early days, this life of pampered leisure could only be enjoyed by the privileged few - those who had the economic means and, in the age before paid holidays, that crucial ingredient, (leisure) time. The continuation of the spas as fashionable pleasure resorts depended on continuation of the intimate social round, which implied social exclusiveness. In the first half of the eighteenth century, however, this exclusiveness was being challenged. The middle classes - the merchants and colonials, ambitious doctors and clergymen, literary men, artists, actors, in fact all those interested in mixing with the fashionable - began to infiltrate. As witnessed by the early development of the spas, before fashion becomes truly popular and enters mainstream culture, that is 'well-liked by many people' (Williams, in Storey, 1993), it is enjoyed by an influential minority who determine its boundaries. Towards the end of the eighteenth century those boundaries were being broken down. Despite the best intentions of Nash and his imitators and devotees, the fashionable spas were being infiltrated by the middle classes and, of course, those less desirable elements who always prey on good society - the pickpockets, the procurers and other adventurers.

Exclusiveness was being eroded and therefore the character of the spa was changing. In any case, a new fashion for sea-bathing was emerging. Bath, and

many of its spa 'challengers' such as Buxton, Tunbridge Wells, Cheltenham and Harrogate were inland, and would be left 'adrift' in the rush to the sea. Notable exceptions were Scarborough which, as early as 1736, had been one of the first spas that could also boast sea-bathing facilities, and Brighton, Margate and Weymouth - which each possessed some form of spring water and could take advantage of the increasing popularity of the seaside locations.

Circumstances allowed this new fashion to be enjoyed by all social classes, who would soon be able to sample the delights of the seaside. The Industrial Revolution and growth of the railways enabled the middle classes, and then the urban proletariat, to engage in the distractions of the seaside. This was a social revolution where the exclusiveness of the early resorts would be swept away in a tide of day-trippers and holidaymakers, the sheer numbers of which could hardly have been anticipated at the start of the nineteenth century. The new seaside resorts still offered the health-giving properties of the ozone, but would also be rapidly transformed into playgrounds for the masses, offering a range of amusements, innovations, attractions and distractions, which the Victorians, in particular, would embrace with enthusiasm. The entertainment offered would be aimed at the particular clientele the resort wished to attract (rather like the early spas), but the economic need to effectively compete in a growth market would also influence the decision-makers and entrepreneurs to be 'bigger and better'. This led to remarkable innovations and experiments in leisure activities. In the second half of the twentieth century, when seaside resorts began to seriously decline, the *lack of* entertainment facilities needs to be considered as a factor in that demise. Tracing the range and type of entertainment provision and assessing its influence on the image and culture of a resort, and the culture of the nation, is a useful method of attempting to establish the strength of the linkages between entertainment and

resorts. It will also help describe the position of live entertainment in leisure provision.

According to Hughes and Benn (1998):

'Live entertainment has been associated with tourism since its earliest days (Casson 1974; Feifer 1985) and certainly since the development of resort towns in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Tourism in the early resorts, the inland spas, may have existed under the pretext of health, but in reality there was considerable social activity, such as coffee houses, gaming, and theatre, which was likely to have been a major attraction (Searle 1977).'

In this context, live entertainment is really anything that is a distraction. Anything that diverts the attention, and probably amuses. It may be organised and provided (as in the early days of the spas), and may not require too much effort on behalf of the consumer. It is 'light', 'pleasurable', and 'safe' - both literally, in not being a physical danger, and in the sense that little credibility is attached to being involved in it, and so little 'loss of face' is incurred, either by participating or abstaining. It is not difficult to enjoy! This image of live entertainment probably still exists at the seaside today - the entertainment of the masses, for the masses, part of popular culture, and not in any way 'elitist'. As Hughes and Benn suggest: 'There is no generally accepted definition of entertainment but it is conventionally identified in a residual manner as being that which is not 'the arts'...entertainment therefore has overtones of being light, pleasurable, and undemanding' (Hughes and Benn, 1997a p110).

A wider definition would include the truly 'weird' and spectacular that could be found in particular in the Blackpool of the first part of the twentieth century. 'The herbalists and quacks, the 'side-shows' of the 'Pool-winning Buddha and the Laws of Karma',

the health-giving advice of the 'Rejuvenator' - an illuminated tableau with a pedestal marked 'Ozone' and a dancing stream of nine year old children to remind visitors of the health-giving properties of the resort' (Cross, 1990), do need to be briefly mentioned in a work containing a history of seaside entertainment. Live entertainment became part of the 'spectacle' and the 'extraordinary' that helped make the fortunes of the English seaside resorts. The modern lack of 'spectacle' and 'extraordinary' may be part of the reason for the decline of the seaside. This is, nevertheless, the legacy left by the Victorians and Edwardians. Likewise, the itinerant minstrels, Pierrots, and Punch and Judy of Victorian times (some of which can still be seen today), must have their place. However, the emphasis in this work will be on *organised* live entertainment as it predicts, reflects and imitates popular culture, and as far as it is a determinant of seaside leisure provision and consequent seaside 'health', both economic and cultural.

Cultural influences on types of live entertainment at the seaside

As stated above, entertainment at the early developing spas was never really a reflection of *popular* culture and recreation but the 1800s would witness some profound changes in the world of entertainment, not least because the masses would become better educated and eventually be able to enjoy the pastimes and recreations of the 'better classes'. This would include the music halls, which were originally designed to attract the middle classes but became symbols of the 'common people's musical culture' (Popular Culture, Open University, 1987 p45). Indeed, popular culture, 'a system of shared meanings, attitudes and values, and the symbolic forms (performances, artefacts) in which they are embodied' (Burke 1978), would embrace the emerging and dominant middle classes, as well as the working classes. With growing economic power, with better education and, eventually, time, the proletariat would come to fundamentally influence the culture of

the nation - they could now become involved in activities from which they had previously been excluded. This might include only the 'pit' at the theatre, or the cheap seats at the concert hall, but they were involved and would become fundamental influencers of leisure and entertainment provision during Queen Victoria's reign.

At the early Victorian seaside, however, the entertainments were still those which were for the fashionable - promenading, the assembly rooms and libraries, reflecting the urban culture of the provinces as well as London, and mimicking spa society:

'It was only towards the middle of the nineteenth century, when the seaside holiday was becoming increasingly open, middle-class and family centred, that a distinctive pattern of organised entertainment began to emerge, centred on the beach and the pier rather than the assembly room and circulating library...nigger minstrels and itinerant bands provided informal entertainment...donkeys were available to amuse the children, and boat and stage-coach trips catered for the enterprising. This mainstream holiday market attracted safe, stylized, predictable, lowest-common-denominator entertainment, often of poor quality and execution, as complaints testified ...although extremely popular.'

(Walton, 1983 p156, 167)

An excellent early example of the influence of entertainment on popular taste, which led to the beginnings of the organisation of seaside live entertainment, was T.D.Rice, who arrived from America in 1837 with his song 'Jim Crow'. This enormously popular song became the 'taste of the town' and 'stunned' the ears of ordinary people: 'Street-minstrels blackened their faces in order to give proper effect to the verses' (Rehin 1981 p22). This set the trend for the 'nigger' minstrel, and 'Negro' minstrelsy - a generic label for the complex, musical and theatrical spectacle

that rapidly spread throughout Britain. Troupes of these 'Ethiopians' arrived from America. They were a new breed of boisterous entertainers, with blackened faces, straw hats, striped blazers and huge spotted ties. 'For fifty years their songs, nostalgic of the plantations and spirited and catchy of the music hall, resounded on the piers and beaches of all the more popular resorts' (Manning-Sanders, 1951 p122).

By the close of the nineteenth century black-faced sands entertainment was not sophisticated enough and had become badly dated. Probably the last of a long line was 'Uncle Mack' and his troupe at Broadstairs in Kent, who survived until the late 1940s. They were exceptional because the minstrels had been under 'attack' for a long time by more sophisticated and organised troupes. These were the Pierrots, who had been challenging the minstrels in every way during the last quarter of the nineteenth century – 'in art, in form of entertainment, and especially in colour...not a clown...far more dangerous than that, (Pierrot) had within him the elements not of fun - but of romance...romance came into seaside entertainment' (Rose 1960 p17, 19). In 1891, Clifford Essex, who introduced the Pierrots, set out specifically to capture the rich field of popular entertainment. Commercialised live entertainment was about to arrive and would play a prominent role in the economic fortunes and social tone of resorts, justifying the 'importance of the seaside resort as a space for early 'mass' entertainment in the evolution of the tourism phenomenon' (Morgan and Pritchard, 1999 p2). More gentle, refined, carefully dressed - and sporting female singers - the Pierrots were instantly and hugely successful. By the mid 1890s they, 'rather than the minstrels, had come to characterise beach music and entertainment' (Walvin 1978 p78). Gone were the limitations of burnt cork - the Pierrots did everything. They would evolve into the 'Concert Party' with varied, versatile shows epitomised by H.G.Pelissiers's 'The Follies', the 'idol of the West End' (Rose 1960 p19), and Will Catlin's summer show theatres at Scarborough, Colwyn Bay and

Llandudno. In the 1890s, Pierrot troupes were performing up to four shows a day from their open-air pitches on the sands, facing up to all weathers. Before the turn of the twentieth century, both the minstrels and Pierrots, and all the forms of itinerant music-making such as the German bands, brass-bands, military bands and light orchestras competing for the public's musical attention, were beginning to be organised and professionalised by impresarios. Impetus was being given to this by what Walvin calls a 'mass musical culture...40,000 brass-bands across the country...brass-band music was working class music and it rang out wherever working people gathered for rest or recreation. At the seaside they gathered in unusually large, expectant crowds...music was played out of doors and was hence accessible to those who could not afford to pay the small entrance fee to the bandstand or contribute when the 'hat' was passed round' (Walvin, 1978). But despite its popularity, out of doors entertainment at the seaside was being challenged by the investment in local pleasure beaches, bandstands, piers, theatres, and sometimes music halls, although this genre of entertainment was mainly focused on London and centres of urban population (see below).

These activities mirrored urban developments, the rise in the consumer power of the working-man and the consequent increase in expenditure on leisure activities. There was a mass popularity to the provision of live entertainment, both in urban areas and at the seaside. Live entertainment could now warrant major investment (despite, at the seaside, its seasonal nature) and, given the impetus of the working-class excursionist in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, would produce the richly embellished pleasure palaces so symbolic of the mid to late Victorian seaside, and eventually the 'big productions' within them. Live entertainment was becoming something people expected to see wherever they were staying, or conducting business.

As noted, live entertainment was also becoming highly competitive and organised. 'Pierrots – like artistes travelling the halls – soon fell under the sway of managers and agents. One Blackpool troupe of Pierrots soon controlled fifteen others at various resorts; another at Scarborough was later able to control theatres there and at other resorts. Personal fortunes, as well as a new musical form, blossomed from the Pierrot shows' (Walton, 1978 p78). This occurred around the mid-1890s and there was such an explosion of entertainment at the seaside that the Pierrot troupe could still be successful despite being challenged by the emerging 'Concert Parties'. These were not particularly elaborate. The first one at Weymouth in 1894 consisted of seven members providing their own musical accompaniment, but their winning formula was that they were contemporary. The popular songs of the day, and perhaps some classical songs, would be performed by singers from basso-profundo to soprano, with perhaps a songs-at-the-piano artiste and a light comedian. Though not yet 'Variety Shows' they are the first real examples of 'for-profit' business methods at the seaside: promoters and impresarios taking over the running and control of these small groups of entertainers and bringing them indoors in the early part of the twentieth century.

The Pierrot shows, typically a six-handed concert party, were still generally being performed right into the 1920s (Rose 1960 p106), but such leisurely programmes that might include a classical piano solo in each half, and long intervals, were gradually being modernised with contemporary material. Like the 'Concert Party', the Pierrots were really embryonic variety shows, and were operating alongside each other as variety gained a hold. A good example of the very early variety sort would be the first 'Twinkle' show at Ryde Pier Pavilion in 1921. This was an attempt to add some glamour to Pierrot - although the performers were still dressed in Pierrot costumes, and still with only piano accompaniment. The spectacle and

glamour of the new shows reflected the 'gaiety' of the 1920s and more lavish variety shows were on the increase.

Meanwhile, music hall entertainment (sometimes called variety theatre or vaudeville) had become enormously popular. 'An evening of comic and sentimental songs, rendered by solo performers, possibly with the audience invited to join in with the chorus by a master of ceremonies, and the musical programme given variety by knock-about comedians' (Popular Culture, Open University 1987). 'There can be no denying, in the last twenty years of the century, of a musical culture, spawned by the halls' (Walvin 1978 p 81). Music hall, however was in decline by 1910 and suffered a 'collapse between the wars' (Walvin, 1978 p122) although variants of music hall - such as Blackpool's seasonal variety theatre - would still be influential for a long time to come. One reason why music hall is so important in the history of live entertainment is the 'prototype modern entertainment industry' that developed within the music hall operation. There was a great deal of seaside music and entertainment being performed in the open air, but there was a

'...parallel evolution of indoor entertainment's. Theatres and music-halls –reflecting again the changes in leisure to be found throughout the country – were, like the pleasure beaches, bandstands and piers, built by ambitious individuals and groups keen to enhance their town's attractions, and their own fortunes. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the thousands of artistes who travelled the country from hall to hall switched their attention to the coast...by the turn of the century, 142 trains were needed every Sunday in England and Wales, simply to move the multitude of theatrical troupes around the country.'

(Walvin, 1978 p80, 95)

Seaside entertainment was big business (although still largely seasonal) and theatrical investors such as William Broadhead in the North West switched their attention to the coast - Broadhead owned ten coastal theatres at his death in 1906; his family soon added eight more.

Music hall clearly influenced the theatrical infrastructure at England's resorts, and the operational side (still largely private) of the live entertainment industry. It also had a significant effect on the development of that style of live entertainment, variety, that came to typify the seaside, although the degree of significance is controversial. Music hall was a style that started and was developed in London (the epicentre of music hall) and then the provinces, particularly the growing urban conurbations. In the pre-1914 seaside resort it was certainly significant as regards the 'popular' type of entertainment provided, and the lavish innovations and surroundings in which it was set. Typically, the opulent Alhambra music hall in London of the 1860s and the grand music halls constructed post-1880 in inland conurbations would be imitated in lavish surroundings at the seaside. Examples were Blackpool's ornate and realistic Indian Lounge in the Winter Gardens, or Weymouth's Pavilion which displayed 'almost as many domes as St Basil's Cathedral in Moscow' (Anderson 1978 p53). Music Halls originated as eating and drinking hostelrys, often with the audience dancing and joining in the entertainments and, although they were portrayed as 'family' entertainment and 'suitable' for the seaside, they were often quite noisy, sometimes 'blue', and would remain essentially a London phenomena. They never were as influential on culture at the seaside as in the urban conurbations (Open University, 1987). Nevertheless, a programme from the Middlesex Music Hall, Drury Lane of 1892 (Figure 2.1) would be fairly representative of the later halls and demonstrates how Music Hall, 'Concert Party', Pierrot, Fol-de-Rol, 'Twinkle' and Variety are really all part of the same

popular entertainment genre, if influential in different ways, in different parts of the country:

Figure 2.1 Live entertainment programme from the Middlesex Music Hall, Drury Lane, 1892

7.25 Overture and selection, by the band
7.30 Florence Berniss, serio-comic and dancer
7.45 Charles Deane, comic vocalist
8.05 Maude Manfred, ballad vocalist
8.20 Johnny Dwyer, the favourite
8.35 The Merry Mannons, in their comic Anglo-American sketch, entitled "Uncle Yank." 6 principals, 2 scenes
9.00 Sisters Fortescue, duettists and dancers
9.15 A musical burlesque sketch entitled 'Little Marguerite'; supported by Emily Fothergill, Alice Laurence, Edwin R. Barwick, and Frederick Williams. 4 principals, 1 scene
9.40 Kitty Nolan, the emerald queen
9.50 White, Carey and Broome, American variety artists
10.05 The Donnells (James and Kate) duettists and dancers
10.20 The great realistic and sensational sketch entitled 'The Maid of the Alps' by G.M.Marriott's combination, including Edith Finlay. 5 principals and 11 supers, 3 scenes
10.55 Florence Hastings, the popular serio-comic
11.05 The Florador Musical Quartette
11.20 The Merry Muriels, variety artists; and the 'Queen' played at 11.30
The above programme is subject to alteration.

J.L.Graydon's renowned lighting entertainment, conducted by the able chairman, Mr.A.Roberts. Full band under the direction of M.Zeluti.

(Source: Popular Culture, Open University, 1987)

The 'sophisticated' programme above indicates how live entertainment was becoming organised, and recognised as a major business opportunity. Popular culture in the last quarter of the nineteenth century was now being openly expressed

in the forms of entertainment at the seaside and the resorts themselves were looking for some control.

The organisation and control of seaside live entertainment

The popular brass-band concerts and the visits of the major stars of the day singing popular songs meant new purpose-built theatres and music halls, and the construction of those extravagant 'Pavilions on the Sea' (Bainbridge, 1986), the piers, often incorporating spectacular theatres. Seaside live entertainment, to a large extent, was becoming *the* popular culture of the day, particularly when the 'season' shifted to the seaside. Theatrical impresarios and theatre owners naturally switched their attention to the coast. This was sometimes to the chagrin of the local authority, which was increasingly recognising the importance of controlling these 'reflections' of popular culture. According to the newly formed Fetes Committee of Margate in 1900: 'Entertainment offered by the town to the visitor via private enterprise was generally inadequate' (Williams 1992 p3), and the concert parties (often still on the sands 'pitches'), would clearly have to be controlled - for the benefit of the visitors and the resort alike. At around the beginning of the twentieth century this led to the development of a more significant role for the local authorities in providing live entertainment and live entertainment facilities. 'Crucial in the development of Britain's seaside resorts in the twentieth century was the public-sector provision of entertainments and facilities to attract tourists' (Morgan and Pritchard, 1999 p142). It also led to deliberate local authority organisational activities such as the establishment of Entertainments Committees and Entertainments Officers.

Margate was the first resort to appoint an Entertainments Committee (in the 1890s), and an Entertainments Manager (Mr John Saxby, in 1901). The local authority at

Margate was always in the vanguard of popular live entertainment provision and innovation. Margate had catered for the masses since the early days: 'Margate is already beginning to be crowded, as usual, with all sorts, and for all purposes' (The Times, 5th August 1799). 'The history of municipal entertainments in this country can be traced back to Margate...for Margate blazed the trail that others were to follow' (Williams 1992 p3). In Margate at the beginning of the twentieth century live entertainment was the usual combination of Concert Party (seven or eight acts with three or four alternating shows, still mostly on the beach), 'nigger' minstrels, dancing and concerts. According to Williams (1992, p7, 12):

'...entertainment after the First World War followed the fashions dictated by the cinema and the shows running in the West End...seaside entertainment had moved on from the simple 'minstrel melodies' to a more sophisticated format...the fashion was 'summer season' shows, but the entertainment was by no means limited to the summer season; the Corporation had hoped to enlarge the period of the season and to that end, provided entertainment all year round.'

According to Bainbridge (1986 p179) the boom time for Concert Parties was the 1920s and some of these, like Harry Hanson's Court Players at Hastings, would somehow survive against the new trend for 'spectacle' and 'glamour' that would become the post-war Summer Show Spectaculars. Harry Hanson actually took over in 1930 and lasted for thirty-six years, but was an exception in lasting so long, and by the late 1920s it was the radio and radio stars who were the prime force in influencing entertainment. The radio had taken a 'veritable stranglehold on mass entertainment' (Williams 1992 p12). The public demanded to see the stars of this new medium 'in the flesh'. The vehicle for the stars was to be top of the bill in a weekly variety or vaudeville (the American expression for 'variety'), which would feature about ten different acts per show. This would run as a six to ten week

season in the summer, and the new radio stars would feature in the grand finale - stars such as Tommy Handley, Ted Ray, and working class heroes such as George Formby and Gracie Fields. These would particularly appeal to the ever-increasing number of working-class people in the audience (Williams 1992 p15).

In the 1930s an additional craze to be accommodated was ballroom dancing. Blackpool at that time claimed seven million visitors (Walton, in Cross 1990 p229) and the Victorian pleasure palaces (including dancing at the Central Pier), the Tower (with two dance floors) and the Winter gardens could barely cope. Open-air dancing was also extremely popular, often on the piers. In Blackpool, there would be three main sessions per day, dancing to both local bands, and 'star' radio bands like Henry Hall and Ambrose, as well as bands engaged by the local authority.

By the 1920s and 30s *music* controlled by the local authority was already a long-standing tradition in certain resorts. As early as 1874 a band consisting of nine musicians was contracted by Worthing Corporation to play three hours a day on the pier (Bainbridge 1986 p175). By the mid-1920s Worthing (like Bournemouth) had a full-time, all-the-year-round municipal orchestra, housed in a new pavilion at the shore end of the pier. At Margate, the Municipal Orchestra, increased to up to 36 players, would now (1920s) be performing for dancing as well as for classical and operatic works, backing the leading vocalists of the day and augmenting the new six week Summer Show - Ivan Kalchinsky's Blue Slavonic Company. This was a cabaret form of entertainment, six to ten weeks with different names, and would continue throughout the 1930s.

After the Second World War some of the resorts that had been fortified against invasion, or directly attacked, would find it difficult to recover from economic and structural decline. 'Resorts around the British coast were transformed in the Second

World War – beaches were mined...piers were closed or partially dismantled. The Second World War and its aftermath brought major difficulties to the tourism industry...The suspension of the tourist trade for six years and the neglect of amenities presented many resorts, particularly those on the east and south coasts of England, with an urgent requirement for investment' (Morgan and Pritchard, 1999 p37). This decline was partly reflected in the amount and type of entertainment provision. At Margate, for example, the Summer Show had disappeared and would not re-appear until 1962. It was replaced by weekly variety bills, which in the late 1940s and early 1950s would still feature the radio stars of the day as well as many of the greatest crowd-pullers of the time, such as Laurel and Hardy (August 18th and week, 1947). But there was no longer a major, continuous programme of live entertainment.

In contrast to those resorts that had suffered structural decline during the war, Blackpool was continuing to move ahead from the rest in terms of the range and depth of entertainment provided. It had been a 'safe' resort during the war and had acquired the additional attraction of the BBC recording up to five radio shows each day - a total of six to seven thousand people, daily, watching the likes of Charlie Chester, Arthur Askey and 'Henry Hall's Guest Night'. Blackpool would continue to be 'far and away the most significant provider of seaside entertainment' and is one of those tourist centres 'renowned for the level, variety and quality of their entertainment' (Hughes and Benn 1997a p111, 112).

In the post-war period and the 1950s there were clearly enough tourists at the seaside to encourage many impresarios and producers to invest in entertainment provision. Typical of these would be Edward Kent on the east coast, who would have two or three variety shows running simultaneously at Great Yarmouth, Lowestoft, Felixstowe, and further shows at the Hull Tivoli and Continental, which

would be putting on a 'summer cocktail' of variety theatre featuring semi-names like Old Mother Riley, Kitty and Norman Evans (interview with Phil King, 05/03/98). The Concert Parties were still functioning throughout the 1950s, as were the Fol-de-Rols - a sort of 'up-market' concert party developed from the Pierrot style - with two or three different acts, but by the end of the 1960s they would be eclipsed by the public's desire to see the stars of the new mass communications media - television. Additionally, the '...large growth in the pop industry did not go unnoticed - in Margate...the early '60s were marked by the successful visits of many pop artistes like Helen Shapiro, Adam Faith, and in July 1963 the Beatles - appearing twice nightly for a week at the top of a fairly normal variety bill' (Williams 1992 p11). Stage versions of television shows were also very popular with Hughie Green's 'Double your Money' and 'Opportunity Knocks' playing to packed houses for ten weeks in 1962. This was the first summer show since 1939 in Margate, but importantly different in that it was born from television and did not vary its contents, as the shows before the war had done.

Despite the emerging competition from television for people's attention, and continental package holidays for the tourist pound, in the early 1970s Margate's multi-hall major venue, the Winter Gardens, could still support long summer seasons: "plenty of hotels...place was packed...21 week season in the Queens Hall, eight weeks season in the Main Hall" (interview with Chris Wolfe, General Manager of the Winter Gardens, 07/05/98). These were Summer Shows with big names topping the bill, but soon resorts like Margate would find it hard to compete for the top acts. The supply of artistes that could pull in the crowds, and were prepared to perform in seaside resorts, was rapidly diminishing. In any case, artistes were generally not prepared to commit themselves to a long run at the seaside when they could make as much money by a number of 'one-nighters' around the country, or much more money from television. Margate was the first seaside resort in the

country to recognise these trends and abandoned the idea of a major summer show, replacing it with a different concept in 1982, the 'Season of the Stars'. This consisted of hiring eight different major stars, each of whom would fill part of the main season, and marked a change in traditional summer season entertainment at the seaside

By the early 1980s it was obvious that there were severe problems affecting the future provision of live entertainment at English seaside resorts. According to Hughes and Benn (1998 p296):

'Concern in the 1980s about the continuance of live shows as part of the tourist product led the English Tourist Board to establish a Working Party to identify problems and provide suggestions for the way forward...The basic premises of the Working Party were that live shows were in decline and facing a 'major crisis' but that it is essential for the well-being of the resorts that this expectation (of live entertainment) is fulfilled.'

The issues adversely affecting Margate in the mid-to-late 1970s were being repeated throughout the country. British tourists were discovering continental holidays as a cheap and convenient alternative to their traditional break at the seaside. Popular culture was rapidly changing, and leisure providers at the seaside had not always recognised this. Certainly, the live entertainment industry had not adapted quickly enough to meet consumer expectations, and was experiencing particular problems of inadequate supply and inflated deals for artistes. At the seaside, it was often the local authorities that had taken over many 'failing' seaside theatres as the private sector withdrew from ownership. The local authority officers and members were under pressure to solve the problems of unsold seats in the entertainment venues. The situation in the early 1980s was best described via the

one survey/document that has focussed specifically on live entertainment at English seaside resorts - 'Curtain Up on the Resorts' (ETB, 1984). This survey suggested that traditional forms of entertainment were not well patronised by certain visitor groups. It highlighted the problems of resorts promoting an out-dated product:

"Live entertainment at English seaside resorts is facing a major crisis (with) problems ranging from over-priced stars and the shortage of new talent to failings and inexperience on the part of some local authorities and theatre management's...(to) the high cost of tickets for a family...complaints from ratepayers who could not afford to see the shows they were subsidising; and the damage that would be done if these conditions result in fewer resort theatres."

(Peter Bedford, Chairman of the Resorts
Entertainment Working Party, cited in ETB,
1984 p 6)

Summer seasons were already regarded as a thing of the past because:

'Few stars will appear in long running seasons...high costs...the older generation, who responded well to summer shows, no longer provide audiences in the same numbers...TV, competition from free entertainment in hotels.'

(ETB, 1984 p31)

Much of the criticism (particularly, not unsurprisingly, from impresarios) was aimed at local authority management of resort venues. The pre-1990 background of local authority involvement is now briefly discussed.

Local authority involvement in live entertainment provision at the seaside

As is clear from earlier comments within this chapter, the history of live entertainment at the seaside cannot be fully understood without reference to the growing influence of local authorities during this period.

Local authorities were established by statute in the mid-to-late nineteenth century to regulate and provide facilities for public health and order. Sewage systems and roads, then social services and housing were the priorities before any attempts at the improvement of the cultural lives of the citizens. With regard to these 'cultural services', there is a long history of public libraries, museums and art galleries that have been funded from local taxation and governed by local authorities. Powers to do this were granted under private Acts of Parliament through the Museums Act (1845) and Libraries Act (1850).

There never has been a statutory obligation to provide specific leisure or entertainment activities, so any initiatives to extend these functions of local government came from the local authorities themselves. In the late nineteenth century the resort towns promoted local bills to Parliament seeking powers to conduct entertainment. It was seen as an economic necessity. There was intense competition for visitors, and investment in performance venues, and control of the live entertainment programme was considered essential to attracting the particular clientele desired, some of which would be commercially unattractive to private entrepreneurs and investors. In these cases it would be left to the local authority to provide entertainment.

'The relationship between leisure and local government was particularly important at seaside resorts, for here a town's prosperity

in a highly competitive world was strongly influenced by its recreational amenities and public order machinery...where entertainment by private enterprise was perceived to be inadequate, seaside local authorities were increasingly willing and able to step in and make up the deficiency. Sometimes, as at Southend, Great Yarmouth and Brighton, they bought up ailing private concerns; sometimes, as at Margate and Torquay, they promoted new schemes of their own.'

(Walton, 1983 p 163)

This degree of involvement was common throughout the rise and 'golden years' (1950-1974) of English seaside resorts, and demonstrates the obligation felt by the local authority to provide visitors with the attractions they would expect. The motives were commercial rather than altruistic but at various points in time there have been extra pressures for local authorities to be pro-active in the 'cultural services' field. Central government initiatives in the 1940s, for example, meant money was being spent directly on the arts for the first time and this helped establish a positive attitude towards the provision of entertainment and cultural services.

The Local Government Act (1948) empowered local authorities to spend up to 6d (2 ½p) rate on entertainment and the arts, and the Local Government (financial Provisions) Act (1963) allowed county and parish councils to spend 1d (0.5p) rate on any purpose they considered to be in the interests of their area or its population; this could include contribution to entertainment and arts provision. Following the 1965 White Paper 'A Policy for the Arts: the First Steps' a post of Minister for the Arts and Libraries was created within the department of Education and Science. The Labour government of the period took a wide-ranging view of the arts: 'In any civilised

community the arts and associated amenities, serious or comic, light or demanding, must occupy a central place' (HMSO, 1965). According to Waters (1989 p96):

'Since the 1960s local authority involvement in the provision of entertainment, arts and cultural services has come to be seen as a social service. Thus results are not evaluated wholly in financial terms but also in numbers attending, the social and cultural mix of the audience, community development or general well-being...many theatres have been saved from extinction or converted to use for other entertainment – fourteen of the twenty one No. 1 touring theatres (those with over 1,000 seats) were civic owned in 1982 compared with only one in 1960.'

Local authorities have played a vital role in the cultural life of the nation despite, with regard to arts and cultural services, a lack of co-ordination between the various tiers of government. Additionally, there has often been a lack of co-operation within the same authority, with leisure services fragmented between several departments with locally-determined budgets. This problem was examined in the 1960s and 70s and it was suggested that local authorities should 'look to reduce the number of committees, grouping together similar or related services' (Redcliffe-Maud, 1967) and that related departments be placed under one officer (Mallaby, 1967). Non-metropolitan counties should consider forming a separate committee for leisure (Bains, 1972). These issues at seaside resorts will be given a contemporary view in later chapters, but prior to 1974 the usual response of local authorities at seaside resorts was to appoint an Entertainments Officer. This recognised the degree to which entertainment was a part of seaside culture and the importance of entertainment in the visitor experience and, therefore, perhaps, the potential economic importance attached to the arts, as well as the cultural experiences of the visitor. In the 1950s and 60s this officer might report to a Director of Entertainment. There might also be a Director of Publicity. As the importance of tourism to a

particular resort has declined, these senior posts have tended to be downgraded to 'Chief Officer' status, and tourism has often become part of 'Leisure and Amenities'.

At seaside resorts the provision of a suitable and sufficient arts and entertainment infrastructure was considered necessary to attract visitors - financial support of entertainment is an investment to encourage an influx of tourists and has been considered such for many years (British Resorts Association, 1976). This would be seen as equally important when staying visitor numbers started to decline in the mid-1970s and will be discussed in chapter three. As an indicator of local government involvement in performing arts activities, it would be useful to be able to quote historical figures of local authorities ownership and control of entertainment venues. The few studies that can give such indications will be discussed in chapter three. Suffice to say in this chapter that prior to the 1990s, many of the larger resorts had three or four council-owned and controlled theatres each. The total figure of seaside theatre seats might represent up to 50% of all provincial theatre seats (see chapter three for contemporary figures, including ownership and control of seaside theatres, where the continued importance and influence of local authority involvement is discussed).

It is sufficient at this stage to reiterate that live entertainment has been an integral part of the seaside experience and most local authorities at the seaside would seek to own, manage and control at least one venue for this 'light' type of performance. Such venues were seen as essential – 'A visit to the theatre to see a summer show when on holiday at the English seaside has been a traditional part of family holidays for decades' (English Tourist Board 1984 p2).

Conclusion

This section has given a broad historical overview of the pre-1990 live entertainment industry at the English seaside. Some influences on the industry have been commented on, including the place of popular culture in shaping the type of live entertainment that came to typify seaside resorts. This overview has set the general historical context by which changes in popular culture (as far as these might affect live entertainment at the seaside) can be explored in depth. It has also given some insight into the historical workings of the live entertainment industry and the increasingly important role played by local authorities in the provision of live entertainment at English seaside resorts. The overview provides a background to the conceptual framework by which the two objectives of this work can be answered from primary investigations. First, however, there is the need to look in detail at the three key areas of change during the crucial decade of the 1990s. This detail will provide the background for further in-depth investigative interviews with particular key agents of change - those individuals working within local government, the council officers and members, who are the people who continue to provide the great majority of the live entertainment at English seaside resorts.

CHAPTER THREE

The Economic, Cultural and Political context of cultural change at English seaside resorts in the 1990s

Preamble

The decade of the 1990s was a period of significant change at English seaside resorts – in terms of economic status, cultural change, and the changing nature, attitudes and organisation of central and local government. This chapter will explore three key areas of change that influenced the changes being experienced at seaside resorts. The three aspects concern the changing economic status and fortunes of seaside resorts; changing cultural trends and attitudes (relating to the performing arts, but particularly live entertainment at the seaside); and the role and place of central and local government. The focus of this chapter is the 1990s but the situation sometimes requires a brief comment on earlier influences that precipitated the current state of affairs. These comments are kept to a minimum.

An investigation of three key factors influencing change at the seaside, particularly at a time of crisis (such as some resorts experienced leading up to and during the 1990s), will naturally focus attention on the component parts of the seaside 'experience'. This chapter will look at the role of live entertainment as it relates to the 'seaside experience' during the 1990s. To establish its contemporary role, live entertainment will then require further, deeper, contemporary investigation in relation to economic, cultural and political change. This will be provided in chapters five, six and seven.

As already noted, live entertainment was traditionally regarded as an essential part of the seaside holiday experience. This may still be the case, or the case for certain groups of visitors to the seaside, related in some instances, perhaps, to their decision to visit. A discussion concerning the component parts of the seaside experience would include all the cultural activities on offer – themselves part of a composite product or ‘offer’. This will be provided in relation to a debate on ‘cultural tourism’ in the second part of this chapter. The emphasis in section one will be the economic context. The final area of change will discuss the role of live entertainment in central and local government (cultural) policy. The three key areas of change are not discrete, so an explanation illustrating their interdependence but emphasising the crucial role of the local authorities is provided in chapter four.

Section One: The Economic Context – the changing economic status and fortunes of seaside resorts

‘By the closing years of the (twentieth) century British coastal resorts were in crisis – falling visitation and economic malaise rooted in changing holiday tastes and formats placed the architectural and social integrity of the seaside in jeopardy.’

(Cooper, in Shaw and Williams (eds.) 1997 p79)

There may be a discernible link between tourism trends and resort status that is strengthened by modern-day perceptions of the English seaside experience. This section explores this link within an economic and social/cultural context, focusing on the ‘traditional’ view of resorts and how far such views may be significant in the changes being experienced at seaside locations in the 1990s – perhaps even as to whether some locations may cease to be resorts in the fullest sense i.e.

‘...areas people resort to for leisure purposes...areas where tourism is the main and vital activity...probably the biggest employer, the foundation of a large number of small businesses, the basis of the town’s economic prosperity and the creator and sustainer of the town’s facilities.’

(British Resorts Association, 1989)

Tourism at the English seaside in the 1990s

Tourism in the United Kingdom is big business. It generates almost £53 billion per year - £15 billion by UK residents staying overnight, £22 billion by UK residents on day trips (Hayler, 1999 p64-67). The British *domestic* holiday industry is also big business. In 1999, the British took 75.3 million holidays in the UK, spending £11 billion. England accounted for 61.2 million of these holidays and £8.6 billion of the spend (British Resorts Association, 2000). There are difficulties in separating out resorts from any coastal location but it is estimated the coastal sector in England accounted for 21.4 million seaside holidays and £3.8 billion of the spend (British Resorts Association, 2000). However, according to the United Kingdom Tourism Survey 1997, quoted in Hayler (1999 p68) it is foreign holidays which have shown significant growth, although domestic short holiday trips comprising one to three nights away have also demonstrated significant growth. Between 1993 and 1997 alone, domestic tourist short holiday trips increased by 52 per cent, against domestic long holiday trips which increased by 10 per cent. (Although again, it should be noted that details of domestic holidays can only give an indication of the trends at the seaside).

The figures for day visitors are not clear. The UK Day Visits Survey (1998) suggested there were in excess of 240 million day visits to the British *coast* in 1997,

generating a £2 billion spend (British Resorts Association, 2000). The British Resorts Association (BRA) estimated that British seaside resorts received in excess of 110 million day visits, as well as 24.8 million visitors staying for four nights or more in 1997 (BRA, 1997). These (day and 4+ nights) visitors generated a substantial spend of £5.4 billion.

A further factor is the seasonality of both main/long (4+ nights) and 'additional' holidays. Between 1990 and 1997 August continued to be the most popular month for long holidays - averaging 29 per cent of all British domestic long holidays (British National Travel Survey (BNTS) 1998). July and August combined averaged 53 per cent during the period 1983 – 1997 (BNTS, 1998 – disaggregated figures not available for the period 1990-1997). The additional domestic holiday market – the market for short breaks, is much less seasonal than the main holiday market. 'In 1997, 39 per cent of additional holidays were taken between October and April compared with only 13 per cent of main holidays' (Hayler, 1999 p69). National figures for the seasonality of day visitors are not available.

In short, the British seaside is still attracting considerable numbers of visitors but is facing stiff competition from the trend for British nationals to take their main holiday abroad. People used to go to the seaside for their main domestic holiday but this is increasingly no longer the case:

'It is not possible to make firm predictions about the future of the seaside. But it is possible to consider the implications of the continuation of the trends that have been evident since the mid-1970s. The total demand for tourism and even for domestic tourism has been increasing strongly throughout this period. However, there have been important shifts in the composition and direction of demand. Short holidays, heritage, specialist products, activity

vacations, self-catering and independent holidays have all increased in their attractiveness. In contrast, long summer holidays at the seaside...have declined in attractiveness.'

(Shaw and Williams (eds), 1997 p16)

With such significant changes in the pattern of domestic holidaymaking in England, the seaside resorts were likely to be left with a dependency upon traditional (long-stay) holidaymakers. This group has tended to be elderly, generally low-income, low-spending (Shaw and Williams (eds) 1997 p86).

It had long been recognised that there were particular problems affecting English seaside resorts and a proactive stance was required (British Resorts Association, 1989; Cooper, 1990; English Tourist Board, 1991). The unique problems associated with the traditional English seaside resort meant that very often neither the investment nor the expertise was available to generate the quality of product and service necessary to compete in the 1990s:

'Market shifts have produced a negative cycle of falling product quality, reduced prices to hold on to available markets, lower profitability, lack of investment even for refurbishment – and further decline in the quality of the experience provided in the resorts. By 1990, much of the more demanding clientele had switched to competitor destinations.'

(English Tourist Board, 1991a p7)

Shifts in the pattern of domestic holidaymaking were badly affecting the economic and social status of English seaside resorts at the beginning of the 1990s. However, this was only one of the demand-side issues affecting seaside locations (see Table 3.1 p57). There were also major problems on the supply-side, and in the

organisational responses created by these pressures. It was not a case of ignorance - these factors had long been recognised as 'threats' (Table 3.1 p57) and various attempts were made to better understand them, and to take action to redress the situation. It should be noted that local authorities have led practical attempts at regeneration and their essentially *economic* approach is discussed below. (Local authorities have also provided leadership and direction in the provision of *cultural* activities, including live entertainment and this is discussed in the final section of this chapter).

Table 3.1 Threats facing English seaside resorts at the beginning of the 1990s

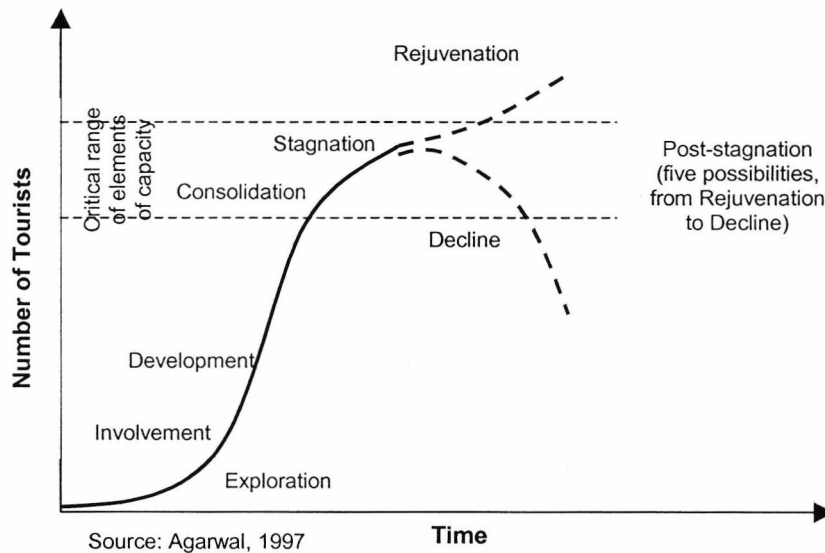
<p><u>Demand-side:</u></p> <p>Diminishing share and volume of the domestic holiday market</p> <p>Continuation of low-status, low-spend visitors, growth in day visitors</p> <p>Competition from holidays abroad/foreign markets offering better value, modern facilities, more reliable weather and a travel experience</p> <p>Dependence on long-holiday market and difficulty of breaking into short-holiday market</p> <p>Limited appeal to overseas visitors</p> <p>Highly seasonal destinations</p> <p>The increase in car ownership leading to improved personal mobility and a broadening of choice</p>
<p><u>Supply-side:</u></p> <p>New domestic tourism facilities in non-resort locations</p> <p>Lack of investment - outdated, poorly maintained accommodation and amenities</p> <p>Lack of wet weather and out of season activities</p> <p>Poor access and traffic problems</p>
<p><u>Organisational</u></p> <p>Political interference on decisions</p> <p>Financial restrictions and low budgets</p> <p>Lack of professional, experienced staff</p> <p>Local government reorganisation creating amalgams of resorts and diluting political power of resorts in larger authorities</p> <p>Short-term planning horizons due to local government planning and budgeting deadlines</p> <p>Low priority given to strategic thinking</p> <p>Lack of confidence in tourism business community</p> <p>Demands for increased operational efficiency and entrepreneurial activity in local government</p> <p>Local opposition to tourism as resorts' residential role increases</p> <p>Poor information and interpretation</p> <p>Shortage of research data</p>

(Adapted from Cooper, 1990 and Lane, 1992)

The above influences would apply in varying degrees to the seaside locations in this study, especially those of the 'traditional' type, and will be helpful with regard to constructing questions relating to the in-depth interviews for the primary research stage of this work. However, caution needs to be exercised as to how far to pursue these factors. Their significance may not equally apply to all resorts. English seaside resorts might be distinguished one from another by various criteria, including their variety within a range of basic factors, such as origins (from 'taking the waters' at Brighton to taking in the entertainments at Blackpool). Both were purpose built – the former (originally) for the elite, the latter for the masses. They might be distinguished by location - specific and discrete according to topography/'natural' geography e.g. Brixham, Salcombe, or Newquay (for surfing) or linear models, typifying certain resorts which grew rapidly during the later years of expansion e.g. Skegness. They might be distinguished by 'industry' e.g. Felixstowe (as a port/fishing), or Padstow – 'themed' around Rick Stein's fish restaurant. They could certainly be distinguished by the (tourist) social classes that predominately visit.

The usual method of categorising resorts is by resident population, and relates to large, medium or small resorts. But different responses to the issues facing resorts in the 1990s, even within the same population categories, only serves to illustrate the uniqueness of each location. This is illustrated by Agarwal (1997) who suggests that common factors at resorts (including resident population size) turn out to have very different degrees of influence, at *different* but *similar* resorts, even within the same stage(s) of an agreed life-cycle. Any applicability of Butler's (1980) life-cycle theory (Figure 3.1 p59) is 'destination specific', as two medium-size resorts in the 'stagnation' stage, for example, may deal with the issue of attempted rejuvenation differently and, as regards this study, any role for live entertainment within this.

Fig 3.1 Butler's resort cycle of evolution



Agarwal concludes that such models as the life-cycle view destinations as a single product, when in fact, resorts are a 'mosaic' of different elements (accommodation; seafront; cultural activities), each with a separate life-cycle. A resort's stage in a (life) cycle of evolution may therefore not be particularly useful in categorising seaside locations in relation to the potential influence of live entertainment, although of some use in establishing, perhaps, the influence of economic factors (see below).

It may seem rather extreme to ask planners and policy-makers to take account of all these associated factors but unless they appreciate the need to continually re-orientate and rejuvenate the *total* tourist product/experience/offer, they may not be able to keep abreast of competing destinations and constant market changes. However, recognition of live entertainment as being a part of the 'mosiac' that constitutes the total resort offer, at a resort at a particular point in the life-cycle, would help in discussing its contemporary role.

It may be possible to identify the changing *economic* and *social status* of English seaside resorts in the 1990s via the life-cycle concept but agreed positions are

fundamentally established and explained by the need for *economic* restructuring, not cultural activities. There is no doubt that, due to changes in domestic tourism trends, the underlying problem was continued over-supply within some mass tourism coastal environments. However, a particular resort area might have successfully 'rejuvenated' with regard to its future prospects of tourism. Even resorts seemingly on a downward spiral such as those in the Thanet area of Kent '...extensive deterioration has been allowed to take place in Margate, Ramsgate and Broadstairs' (Thanet District Council, 1998) could point to reasonable figures for tourism. But this is partly based on economic restructuring in the region i.e. the whole region benefits, *along with* tourism. In 1994 tourism in Thanet generated some £88.2m (Thanet District Council, 1995). By 1997 the figure had risen to £110m (Thanet District Council, 1998), mainly via economic regeneration, and tourism was still recognised as 'central to the economy of the region...of benefit to the residential community adding to the attractiveness of the District for re-location...essential to the long term success of Thanet in attracting industry into the region' (Thanet District Council, 1998).

Writers in the field endorse the value of a tourism/industry mix. Lane (1992 p1) comments:

'...we have failed to realise the true value and importance of tourism as an economic force and a catalyst for change. In many towns which have benefited from a more comprehensive approach to their problems...tourism has often played a key element in economic regeneration. Improvements in image and the quality of the built environment have paid dividends by improving confidence and boosting visitor numbers.'

However, Lane further comments 'One hundred or so resorts have lost their *raison d'être* and are now struggling to come to terms with their plight.' One hundred seems an exaggeration, but certainly many resorts in the 1990s were in economic trouble, possibly as a result of a lack of a clear understanding of how economic restructuring can lead to an eventual *downturn* in traditional tourism i.e. attempts to develop alternative businesses, may take the emphasis away from their traditional economic base. As noted below however, in the case of Worthing, there may also be considerable economic success by deliberately focusing on certain types of tourism, for example, non-mass, non low-spending segments, *along with* a focused approach to attract non-tourism businesses to the area. An understanding of different strategic and economic responses to the decline of resorts and changes in tourism behaviour will provide a clearer picture of the general downward changing economic and social status of English seaside resorts during the 1990s.

At the beginning of the 1990s economic and social forces had focused attention on a range of crucial factors at English seaside resorts. A number of these are indicated above (Table 3.1). Smith (1991) suggests 'universality' of some of these in his analysis of crucial factors. According to Smith, some factors are so crucial that positive attention to them will lead to a 'healthy life for certain seaside resorts and will force others into terminal decline.' To keep pace with market demands, Smith suggests investment, clear segmentation, and a good environment. There is nothing particularly 'revolutionary' about these factors but if they are to be effectively assessed and discussed, they must, according to Agarwal (1999) be set within economic restructuring – 'The concept of economic restructuring provides a theoretical context within which to understand tourism restructuring and economic development.'

The economic base at many English seaside resorts in the 1990s was undergoing change and led to a number of important initiatives intended to rejuvenate resorts. These were essentially based on economic restructuring. Initiatives and policies involving government and government bodies are discussed in section three of this chapter but general changes, noted by government, such as changing demographics and changing holiday habits leading to declining visitor numbers, which led to higher than average unemployment levels at seaside locations (Department of Trade and Industry's figures in Turner, 1993), are noted here.

The seasonal nature of English domestic tourism compounded these problems. Pattinson, (1993) in Agarwal (1999) quotes high (off-season) unemployment, low paid seasonal employment, skewed economic and population profiles, and rationalisation of a once booming service sector, as factors at resorts leading to the Government granting Assisted Area status to, for example, Great Yarmouth. Additionally, Clacton, Ilfracombe, Bideford, Dover and Deal, Hastings, Skegness, and the Isle of Wight were named as Intermediate Areas. The Isle of Thanet, including the resorts of Ramsgate, Margate and Broadstairs, were classified as a Development Area and subsequently granted European Objective 2 status and funding. Typical of a situation of economic and social decline linked to falling visitor numbers, Thanet Objective 2 area was designed to raise the profile of the area to potential visitors. The first programme (1994-1996) included a projected increase in visitor numbers by 5% during this period, mainly linked to improving the area's attractiveness to visitors. This would only happen if other priorities were included in a coherent, strategic programme e.g. improved access to Port Ramsgate and increased skill levels of managers and workers, including those in non-tourism activities. The second Objective 2 programme (1997-99) looked for the economic regeneration of Thanet within three priorities, including tourism and cultural industries. Again, this was designed to happen within a governmental framework

that linked (in this case), for example, community economic development, as well as the development of many small to medium enterprises. Thus tourism and cultural industries development can be seen to be closely connected to a range of other factors with all needing to be co-ordinated if sustainable resort rejuvenation is to be viable.

Problems of decline are destination specific and may particularly affect medium-size resorts (Cooper, in Shaw and Williams, 1997) but even the largest resorts were not exempt – the ‘UK’s major resorts figure amongst the worst areas nationally when measured against a range of standard economic indicators’ (Behind the Facade, BRA, 1999). Ventures Consulting Group reported in 1989 that much of the volume and expenditure at British seaside locations was becoming concentrated at eight major English coastal areas – Blackpool, Scarborough, Great Yarmouth, Torbay, Brighton, Newquay, Bournemouth and the Isle of Wight. These eight were accounting for at least 75% of the volume and revenue of seaside tourism in Britain. This was exaggerating the problems at some medium and smaller resorts. ‘Many smaller to medium-sized resorts...have seen only very limited investment in either new attractions or the refurbishment of existing ones...standards of existing accommodation have been falling’ (Agarwal, 1999). At seaside resorts in general, ‘Average wages are significantly lower than in the UK as a whole...seaside resorts have comparatively low rates of economic activity...levels of Gross Domestic product (GDP) at significant numbers of seaside resorts fall well below the UK average and some resorts show GDP levels which would normally warrant special attention’ (BRA, 1999). Of the 20 worst deteriorating districts in the UK, 8 were coastal towns (BRA, 1999).

However, it is often the case that moribund resorts, with little investment in the built fabric and few new alternatives, have refused to withdraw from the tourist market as

this has been regarded as politically and often economically, unacceptable. Even with inadequate infrastructure and leisure activities, 'as long as the facilities that cater for tourists exist, tourism will continue to be pursued, even if profitability is in decline' (Agarwal, in Shaw and Williams, 1997). It is clear that English seaside resorts have experienced considerable shifts in their economic and social base in the last decade, often in a downward direction. It is not clear how severe these shifts are in particular resorts, although granting of a particular status (Assisted Area etc.) is a strong indicator.

Of course, attempts at tourism regeneration underpinned by (non-tourist) economic restructuring may not be particularly relevant if the town wishes to remain fundamentally a resort. Blackpool (a 'large' resort – population 150,000) is a good example of being almost entirely focused on tourism. Non-tourism restructuring places less emphasis on tourism and more on other industries/services. 'Given the decline in the prosperity and prospects of many of the traditional resorts, those towns that have developed alternative economic bases may show strong population growth. They may be within commuting distance of centres of high employment; they may have developed their own employment/business opportunities; and their locations may be attractive to people to live in, and to retire to. Given these kinds of changes...the focus will be on the needs of residents, rather than visitors' (Hayler, 1999). Within the local population the retirement communities will be important as 'they are usually people of substantial resources. As such, seaside retirement has been described as 'one of the most important components of resort growth'...In many resorts, the influence of retired migrants was substantial...Their interests, often dominated by a desire for low taxation and a resistance to expenditure on resort development, were frequently inimical to those of the local tourism industry' (Morgan and Pritchard, 1999, p79). Clearly retirees to the seaside are economically important in their own right and may well influence tourism trends by for example,

restricting particular developments. Their importance in relation to live entertainment will be graphically illustrated by any relationship between the categories of live entertainment provided and the targeted markets (see later chapters), but it must be assumed that financially secure, politically influential retirees would only migrate to appropriate, salubrious resort locations. As such the overall economic effect on domestic tourism of retirement migrants is lessened in some resorts, exaggerated in others.

An example of restructuring with less emphasis on tourism, possibly influenced by local political structures determined by the views of the well-represented retirees in the community, would be Worthing - a large 'resort' with a population of 98,210 in 1999. 'It is no longer (if it ever was) a traditional seaside resort' (Worthing Borough Council, 1998). The intention has been to promote the town as a pleasant tourism base, particularly for shopping, but with a further emphasis on developing business tourism, and non-tourist business with the slogan 'Worthing – Centre for Shopping, Business, and Leisure' (Worthing Borough Council, 1998).

There are issues yet to be explored which are linked to theories of how far culture, including live entertainment, is a factor in the tourist product. The changing economic status and fortunes of English seaside resorts in the 1990s must also include issues of image and character of resorts and any consequent effects on the tourist decision-making process, particularly in relation to cultural tourism (see section two of this chapter). In this section, certain tangible aspects of the tourist product have been discussed and it may be surmised that poor supply-side factors already mentioned, and further factors 'peculiar' to the 1990s, such as many beaches being too polluted to achieve European Blue Flag awards, led to an impression of a downward spiral of neglect. Perceptions are the important point in issues of image and character. How people perceive a location may not be how it

chooses to (economically) position itself, but perception must be a strong factor in deciding whether to take a break at the English seaside – particularly in the 1990s where ‘quality and image are all important (and) the picture presented by many resorts is hardly appealing’ (Lane, 1992 p2). A poor image will obviously have detrimental economic consequences. Some attempts in the 1990s to change the image were linked to regeneration/rejuvenation and marketing strategies, linked in turn to a closer look at the tourist product(s) that could be developed at the seaside, and the surrounding area. Cultural activities are a part of that product. It may be assumed that the ‘fuller’ picture (in section two) might give policy makers a clearer view of the relevance of an optimum mix of product and image.

Nevertheless, it was the case that a clear understanding of the importance of product development, particularly from the point of view of the private sector, was lacking from policy makers. According to Shaw and Williams (1997 p118) this was ‘All the more surprising given that the single most important conceptual statement concerning resort development is based around the product life cycle and its relationship with product development...(this neglect) is mainly due to an over-emphasis on marketing perspectives in tourism research, which have focused on tourist behaviour, selling and advertising at the expense of product development.’ This may have distorted the projected image of some resorts.

Image is also a reflection of the prevailing culture. There is a case for suggesting that cultural attitudes towards the English seaside holiday and the consequential anticipated visitor experience directly affect people’s image and perceptions of seaside resorts. If so, such perceptions would influence their decision-making process in choosing a location. This would include the perceptions of, and the influence of, the facilities and activities at that location. In this study, these perceptions relate to the live entertainment part of the holiday/visit offer. In such

ways, live entertainment is indirectly connected to rejuvenation attempts, and marketing/image projections. In some cases live entertainment may be more economically significant. It may be that some tourists decide to visit a location based on the live entertainment (real or imagined) on offer. This is discussed further in section two.

In any case, the role and importance of image including the image and potential influence of cultural activities in tourist decision-making is not clear. Logically, promotional activity ought to be strongly linked to strategic targets i.e. segments of the population that are pre-disposed towards the product being offered. These segments might display the required 'cultural' characteristics. There would then be a hoped-for matching of product(s) to needs. However, it does seem that changes in the 1990s may have highlighted the particular importance of changing cultural attitudes (possibly within economic regeneration) as regards the future economic and social prospects and make-up of many English seaside resorts. This is discussed in section two of this chapter.

Conclusion

The preceding discussion has illustrated the changing economic circumstances at English seaside resorts during the 1990s. The economic context has been that despite a period of 'overall stagnation of activity...there are some areas of growth and others of decline. In the mid-1990s domestic tourism in the UK continued to be an important area of economic activity, worth £8.5 billion in annual spending. Almost half of this spending occurred at the seaside which remains the UK's pre-eminent tourism site, although it is more significant in some parts of the UK than others' (Morgan and Pritchard, 1999 p44). There have also been changes in the patterns of domestic seaside tourism such as more short-stay holidays, which may

require the tourism product, including cultural activities, to be re-orientated. There are similar problems and issues at similar resorts but they may be dealt with differently as, ultimately, each resort represents a unique set of circumstances.

The focus of this study is live entertainment provision at the English seaside but it has been shown that live entertainment is just one part of the tourism offer. Speculation on the economic future for English seaside resorts can be linked to their tourism offer including the cultural provision and within that, the live entertainment. The effect of culture, in all its forms, will influence the decision to visit (or to reside at) the English seaside. In fact, notwithstanding that economic restructuring seems the crucial element in any secure future for English seaside resorts, culture, cultural attitudes, and cultural provision, may be the underlying rationale for the continued existence of particular seaside locations. Certainly, cultural attitudes have significantly affected the amount and pattern of domestic tourism in the 1990s. At this stage of the study it is not clear how far live entertainment is a factor in this and/or a factor in the tourist decision-making process – both in the decision to visit, and the decision to participate once in the resort. But these decisions may be a direct reflection of the cultural offer at seaside resorts, part of the image. In these ways, live entertainment may significantly affect the economic status and fortunes of resorts, perhaps as an integral part of (cultural) strategies designed to rejuvenate resorts.

Changing cultural trends and attitudes, including the influence of such changes relating to cultural tourism and performing arts and live entertainment of the 'seaside variety', and changes within the live entertainment industry, are crucial factors to unlocking the effect of live entertainment on the economic, social and cultural situation at English seaside resorts. These are now discussed.

Section Two: The Cultural Context - changing cultural trends and attitudes

Preamble

The significance of culture and the place of live entertainment as an integral part of seaside culture related to the early history and development of the English seaside resort has been mentioned in Chapter Two. The previous section has mentioned the importance of image within the changing economic status and fortunes of seaside resorts during the 1990s. Image is strongly affected by cultural trends and attitudes. The effect of cultural change on English seaside resorts in the last decade of the twentieth century is the subject of this section. This is both general cultural change but particularly those aspects of cultural attitude associated with the performing arts and live entertainment of the 'seaside variety'. Live entertainment at the seaside is commonly considered to be a particular genre of performing arts, and its position within cultural activities of the performing arts type, including its relationship to cultural tourism, is debated in the first part of this section. This is a necessary grounding in any discussion concerning the economic importance of the performing arts in general, but particularly the economic impact of live entertainment at the seaside, including the importance of live entertainment in the decision to visit.

This section will also include comments on cultural trends identified earlier in the study, particularly the influence of television on audiences watching the performing arts, and live entertainment of the 'seaside variety'. These trends were mentioned in the first area of analysis but not explored until now. A clearer appreciation of their significance is given related to cultural changes in the area of performing arts. The section concludes with a discussion on recent changes within the live entertainment industry, brought about by cultural pressures, and some possible consequential effects on the management of theatres at the seaside. This is the prelude to the

third major area of analysis which concerns central and local government policy initiatives in the 1990s relating to tourism and, particularly, cultural activities.

Cultural tourism at seaside resorts

Williams, in Storey (1993 p2), suggests a definition of culture as 'a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period or a group.' Various definitions of *popular* culture are given including 'well-liked by many people'; '(work) deliberately setting out to find favour with the people.' The traditional seaside holiday would be an example that reflects these definitions, and a domestic holiday of 4+ nights at the British seaside is still taken by approximately 30 million people (British National Travel Survey, 1998). Seaside holidays thus still represented a form of popular culture in the 1990s. However, the extent and future longevity of that popularity is a key issue, influenced by (popular) attitudes to the perceived and actual experiences of visitors/ potential visitors to English seaside resorts.

English seaside resorts traditionally relied on mass-tourism, mass-consumption i.e. a popular culture. This was a commercial culture – mass-produced for mass consumption, with an audience of non-discriminating consumers. Mass tourism treats people in the same manner, as a homogeneous mass (perhaps a social class), with similar consumption needs. As seaside resorts experienced severe competition in the 1990s it was contemporary tourism consumption practices which needed to be considered. According to Urry (1995a) one crucial aspect of such practices is the existence of a 'consumption spaces hierarchy'. In the 1990s this vast array of places included seaside resorts but also:

'...inland leisure sites (Alton Towers), many towns and cities (Bradford), shopping centres (Merry Hill), museums and art galleries

(Tate Gallery in the North in Liverpool's Albert Dock), theme parks (Camelot), country areas (Catherine Cookson country), heritage centres (Wigan Pier) and so on in Britain, and then stretching across Europe and much of the rest of the world.'

(Urry, in Shaw and Williams 1997 p104)

The range of leisure spaces available for holiday/visit is enormous and people may require to choose locations according to criteria other than being part of popular culture. In fact, a snobbery might exist, consistent with the idea that popular culture is not high or worthy culture. The more spaces a tourist has seen, and the more diverse and unusual those spaces, increases the viewer's esteem, or 'cultural capital'. 'Cultural tourism' is emerging (see below). Diverse and unusual spaces (some 'natural', domestic seaside locations might be included) may eventually become popular, but by that time the esteem associated with exclusivity will have diminished.

As noted in chapter two, English seaside holidays were once for the privileged few but became part of popular culture in an industrialisation process that treated people as a homogeneous mass. As noted, the very fact that a location is popular can cause it to lose its exclusivity. It then moves down the 'hierarchy' for anyone collecting (holiday) consumption spaces. In the 1990s the discriminating traveller may not consider the domestic seaside if it represents popular culture. Mass tourism at the seaside in the 1990s is not likely to involve particularly influential social groups i.e. those with flexibility and non-routine patterns of work, those with high 'economic capital', those with high 'cultural capital' (Urry, in Shaw and Williams, 1997). Increasingly, these people make up a higher proportion of the potential domestic holidaymaker (see 'tourist/cultural tourist', below), and the fact that a general growth in domestic tourism has been accompanied by a comparative

decline at the seaside suggests the importance of cultural attitudes in destination decision-making. It may also go some way to explaining the growing popularity of particular non-seaside destination choices, or any increased interest in seaside locations that can offer the 'natural' and 'heritage' (Urry, 1996).

Mass consumption, and mass customisation i.e. a product customised for the individual, has led to consumer demand for a wider choice. There is a 'war against uniformity (and)...ultimately the end of the social as a significant reference point' (Featherstone, 1991 p83). In such ways visits to resorts are 'cultural signs' that might imply a conformity with traditional lifestyles, values and class that are no longer acceptable to the (new) arbiters of taste and fashion as far as it relates to choices with regard to leisure and holiday visits. By adapting Urry's general argument it can be assumed that the careful selection of holidays/consumption spaces are a reflection of lifestyle, and how people 'consume' (holiday) culture relates to their beliefs regarding their position in society, at least as a reflection of the type and amount of 'spaces' collected.

The traditional seaside holiday is an example of common culture in two senses – shared by many, and often perceived as 'low' or 'vulgar' (Urry, in Shaw and Williams, 1997). It represents the obverse of the move towards individualism of the 1990s. However, the numbers of visitors staying for 4+ nights has been shown to be at about the same level as in the 1960s. There are also high numbers of day visitors. Conjecturally, these total numbers may reflect some need to engage in common (popular) behaviour, often 'excitement, untamed emotions...fattening food...sexual promiscuity' (Featherstone, 1991 p136) similar to carnivals, festivals and fairs – 'popular culture' in various ways. Perhaps these activities may continue to be generally acceptable, or may be associated with particular seaside locations.

The type of leisure activity provided at seaside resorts must meet, initially, the cultural needs of the visitors. It is suggested that these cultural needs are changing, influenced by people who are 'aware of change and delight in the multitude of choice' (Urry, 1996), whilst the traditional seaside cultural/holiday experience is a reflection of a previous age of conformity and classification by class. These may not be the lifestyles to aspire to at the beginning of the 21st century, at least for the influential service classes. Thus opportunities exist for 'consumption spaces' that offer the 'unusual', with considerable 'cultural capital'. Many seaside locations could consider these alternatives but must not ignore the significant numbers of 'traditional' visitors who still patronise their resorts. Blackpool would be an example of the latter: 'Blackpool has remained reasonably buoyant throughout the history of seaside resorts, partly because it is so clear about the type of people it wishes to attract...(this) has ensured the continuous re-defining and re-creating of products and services to accommodate the changing tastes and habits of the consumer' (Hayler, 1999 p71).

Each resort is unique. Its history, status, and physical characteristics will influence future cultural directions, including those for the performing arts. This study is about live entertainment at the seaside. In cultural terms live entertainment sits within performing arts, which sits within the generic term 'cultural industries'. These 'industries' need brief consideration in order to distinguish the live entertainment part of the cultural tourist offer.

Defining cultural industries is problematic. Perhaps the 'spirit' of cultural industries is creative but there usually needs to be a commercial implication. A 1998 audit of cultural industries adopted the following definition:

‘A company, organisation, voluntary group or individual that contributes to the local economy via the production, promotion or provision of services, products or events which have an identifiable creative, craft or heritage base, and in turn creates jobs, income, training opportunities or increased visitor numbers.’

(Thanet District Council, 1998)

The commercial implication is deliberate and ‘contributes to the local economy’ might be a useful aspect of live entertainment at the seaside to keep in mind. Commercialism may fall outside the expectations of say, traditional arts communities, but the provision of live entertainment at the seaside was originally a commercial judgement. It may well be subject to increasingly rigorous economic, rather than ‘creative’, strictures in the future. Undoubtedly, cultural/creative industries, including live entertainment, are big business. United Kingdom revenues for the Performing Arts section alone totalled £828m in 1996 (Smith, 1998 p160).

The ‘cultural industries can include all forms of activity associated with what is traditionally understood as art and popular culture’ (Wynne, 1992 p1). In this case there would be no distinctions between art as ‘high culture’ (perhaps non-commercial) and commercial consumption of ‘low/popular’ culture. However, a wide definition of cultural industries such as this may not be too helpful in explaining the position of the cultural activities and particularly performing arts (including live entertainment at the seaside) that might influence tourists, or contribute to the local economy. Hughes and Benn (1997a p110), quoting various authors, provide a useful distinction:

‘Entertainment is conventionally identified in a residual manner as being that which is not ‘the arts’ and which, by implication, is in some sense inferior. It may, from a post-modern perspective, be

inappropriate to make a distinction between the arts and entertainment (Featherstone, 1991) but it is a common distinction nevertheless. The arts may be regarded as the 'works and practices of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development' (Williams, 1998). They are deemed to be intrinsically worthy and creative, uncommercial but necessitating effort to appreciate. What remains is 'popular culture' including live entertainment (Storey, 1993).'

As noted in chapter one (p6) the definition already adopted in this thesis reflects live entertainment of the 'seaside variety'. It emphasises the 'light' and 'popular' side of this genre of the performing arts but does not ignore drama, opera and ballet. Live entertainment is not a recognised category within the cultural industries (see lack of data, below) and live entertainment at the seaside has not benefited from national funding for the arts. The fact that there is no direct central government funding for live entertainment (notwithstanding problems of precise definition) is consistent with the Hughes and Benn quotation (above) i.e. live entertainment is *not* 'the arts'.

The general cultural attitude towards live entertainment at the seaside is that it is 'frequently distinguished from the arts as being associated with amusement, pleasure and frivolity, and being the product of commercial industry sold to a passive uncreative public' (Hughes and Benn, 1997a p110).

If live entertainment is distinguishable from other forms of cultural activity, it might be interesting to make some judgement regarding its relationship to the cultural experience at the seaside. According to the English Tourist Board (1993), the most popular activity during domestic holiday trips in 1992 was 'hill-walking, hiking, rambling', followed by 'swimming' and then 'visiting heritage sites'.

'Watching the performing arts', including 'visits to the cinema (!), concert, opera or ballet' occurred on only 5% of domestic holiday trips (Hughes and Benn, 1995 p12). Many people, prompted by 'opera or ballet' are unlikely to include 'live entertainment' in their response to an enquiry about 'watching performing arts' but, in any case, it seems that only a small minority engage with live entertainment whilst on holiday. However, that may not be a strong enough reason for not providing it – or indeed, not providing other activities which people may not engage in.

'The vast majority (78%) of domestic holiday trips are undertaken without any particular activity specified as the main reason (English Tourist Board et al.). Hardly any one of the activities identified in the annual tourist board surveys is, in itself, of great significance.'

(Hughes and Benn, 1995 p14)

Live entertainment could almost be 'missed' in a list of activities that might make up 'cultural tourism':

'The ATLAS Cultural Tourism Project (ATLAS, 1993) confirms that heritage tourism (museums and heritage buildings and sites) is more important than performing arts tourism, in as much as visits to heritage are more likely than visits to the performing arts when on holiday.'

(Hughes and Benn, 1995 p13)

This is too simplistic an explanation for 'cultural tourism' as far as it may have affected English seaside resorts during the 1990s. To discuss this further requires a clear definition of the tourist, particularly in relation to 'cultural tourism'.

The 'tourist' is usually interpreted as a person who is on holiday. The holiday is away from home (and place of work). People might be away for other reasons, and

Hughes offers a useful classification i.e. holidays distinguish themselves from other activities that are 'away from home' by having no particular end in themselves. They are 'non-instrumental' i.e. there is 'no real drive or need which impels a person to act in pursuit of a particular goal' (Hughes, 2000 p35). Their distinguishing characteristic is 'expectation of pleasure from novelty and change experienced' (Cohen, 1974 p533). Fundamentally, holidays are simply to do with 'change'. This helps explain comments in this section that tourists fundamentally want to go to a different place and may not seriously consider the things to be done or seen in that place. Recuperation, rest, relaxation may be the main drivers. However, most tourist services, including tourist operators and government agencies, consider the attractions at the location - the 'mosaic' of the product - as the selling points. By offering a particular tourist product, e.g. sun, sea, historic buildings, festivals, the tourist will be 'pulled' to the destination – both tourists on holiday, as well as other categories, including those not staying overnight. As noted, there are so many more 'spaces' competing for tourists that the 'push' (change) and the 'pull' (attractions) must both be considered, with references, for this study, to the 'popular' dimension.

'Cultural tourism' is seemingly applied to a wide range of tourists, often with little regard to their rationale for time away from home, or to their particular cultural interests. There may be a specific purpose to their brief visit e.g. attending a particular arts performance/event. Many tourists deliberately include an overnight stay in their cultural 'event', for example, provincial or overseas visitors attending a West End show might have an overnight stay in London included in their package. This is an example where it is more important to distinguish the (performing) arts-related tourist from the 'cultural tourist'. A further distinction between performing arts and live entertainment tourists (possibly creating a 'high' and 'low' culture divide) might help explain any current influence of live entertainment on the (cultural

or otherwise) decision-making that might affect actual and potential visitors to the English seaside. But information on this divide is not available.

According to Hughes (2000) there may be arts-related tourists (see below) who do not go to 'live entertainment'. Specifically, at the seaside, there may be tourists who are visiting for reasons other than the arts ('arts-peripheral') who may or may not consider 'live entertainment' as part of the visiting experience. There may be people in either of these two categories who do not think deeply about such distinctions and will partake of both 'high' and 'low' performing arts. Of course, there may also be many who expect 'live entertainment' rather than 'high' performing arts. This does not mean they will not attend 'serious' drama, opera and ballet. To reverse this possibility, if the seaside had existed as a popular tourist destination in Shakespeare's day, attendance at his (popular) plays would, today, be considered the reverse of 'cultural tourism'! In such ways, it is difficult to distinguish visitors to the seaside on the basis of performing arts' preferences.

However, when people are on holiday, they are seeking 'change' and may consider alternatives to the performing arts events they usually attend, if any. This could be extended to events they would usually only consider when on holiday (of either the 'high' or 'low' variety). With regard to live entertainment, it is more likely to be considered an integral part of the holiday product – perhaps, particularly live entertainment of the seaside variety, especially if it is not usually available 'at home', and, people who normally attend 'high arts' events may be more pre-disposed to do so when not on holiday. Certainly, live entertainment appears to be associated more with holidays than with the non-holiday part of life. This is particularly the case with variety shows – for example, only 37% of people who went to a variety show on holiday also go to such shows when at home (Hughes and Benn, 1995). There are clearly useful distinctions that might be drawn between people's/tourist's pre-

disposition towards attending particular performing arts' forms whilst on holiday. These distinctions might illuminate the economic and social importance of such activities at the English seaside, but hard data is hard to come by, as demonstrated by the next section, which concerns the economic and social importance of the performing arts. Before that, however, chapter two demonstrated how people's perception of live entertainment at the seaside had been influenced by television. This significant cultural trend has continued in the 1990s. Watching television is entertainment, but not live entertainment. However, the 'cultural experience of the industrialised world is received through television...(television is) more controllable by the individual...Television has altered the public's expectations of entertainment and encouraged them to expect 'quality', professionalism and technologically-based productions' (Hughes, 2000 p14, 19, 85). As noted in chapter two, people are keen to see the 'stars' of the day in live performance. In the 1990s these are the stars of television, but many of these can earn more from an appearance on television than, say, a run of six weeks in a summer show. If they have to tour it is likely that a series of one-nighter's can make considerable sums of money, especially if the performances are in the very largest theatres, or arenas. However, touring is very hard work, the material needs re-working and the skills of television may not transfer easily to the stage. Or more obviously, television stars may not have the required stagecraft that would previously have been acquired by working their way up the bill in provincial theatres. They are exposing themselves to a potentially unforgiving live entertainment experience. It is much easier to appear 'talented' in a pre-recorded television show with 'invisible' auto-cues.

At a certain level it may not matter how steeped in stagecraft the performer is. As long as the audience is enjoying the experience of seeing the stars in the flesh, enjoying the 'magic' of live performance this may be sufficient. However, television may have indoctrinated people to believe they will experience the quality and

spectacle that rehearsal and technology can deliver via television. The unique experience of live performance may thus be lessened. Additionally, the television culture of being able to switch channels easily, or record something if interrupted, or make a cup of tea during the adverts, may diminish audience attention span at live performance, or affect various other aspects of traditional etiquette at live entertainment functions. As a possible advantage towards live entertainment of the 'light' variety such as traditionally associated with the seaside, perhaps the simple-to-follow plots of many television programmes means there is little effort involved in enjoying the live performance. This will obviously vary according to whether the entertainment is 'low' or 'high' brow, and, perhaps, whether in the case of tourists, the audience is 'arts-related' or 'arts-peripheral'. In such ways audiences for (cultural) tourism are changing, influenced by television. Programmers at the seaside are, therefore, needing to consider the segmentation and pre-conceptions of their potential audiences. In this respect, it may be appropriate to appeal to a range of segments secure in the knowledge that to a greater or lesser extent, they are all influenced in their enjoyment of the live entertainment product by being part of the 'television generation'. As discussed, cultural tourism and tourism related to cultural attitudes is a reflection of prevailing cultural attitudes and trends. In this study, this most obviously manifests itself in relation to the economic and social effects of changes in attitudes to the performing arts, but particularly live entertainment. This is now explored.

The importance of the performing arts, including the impact of live entertainment at the seaside

The performing arts represent a significant section of the cultural industries sector. In 1998 more than 30 million tickets were sold in British theatres, with a gross value of upwards of £380 million (Quinne, 2000). This 'value' figure does not include

certain major private operators e.g. Apollo Leisure, who might be grossing something in the order of £90 million (Quine, 1999 p8). Existing data sources tend not to describe 'live entertainment' as a separate category, although the figures quoted can be broken into performance type which separates 'high' and 'low' performing arts e.g. ballet/opera/classical plays, or musicals/revue/pantomime.

Trends in attendance at live entertainment events (as defined in this study) are not picked up by central government statistics such as the General Household Survey, nor by the commercial market research carried out by MORI or Research Surveys of Great Britain's Target Group Index. As noted above, live entertainment is excluded from the arts funding systems. It tends not to be covered by (government/local authority etc.) surveys of holidaymakers, although there are the surveys carried out in 1994 by Hughes and Benn (see below). In short, little is known about how much live entertainment visitors to English seaside resorts engage in, or the extent to which any engagement contributes to the economic well-being of the location, including the extent to which live entertainment might influence the choice of holiday destination. As already noted (above) there are difficulties as to where live entertainment sits within culture and/or cultural tourism:

'Relatively few studies have examined the significance of live entertainment in tourism though there have been studies of the arts and / or culture within tourism. These have been concerned more with the 'high arts' and heritage than with 'entertainment' in the sense of the variety show, cabaret, musical etc.'

(Hughes and Benn, 1996)

Any attempts to assess the economic effect of live entertainment at the seaside in the 1990s are critically undermined by these problems and, in any case, there are

no consistent data sets that provide up-to-date data on live entertainment at the seaside (but see Hayler, 1999).

Tourism studies can identify 'global' economic impact figures e.g. Eastbourne's recent Tourism Study estimates a visitor spend in the town in 1998 of £118 million (Eastbourne Borough Council, 1999), but there is no attempt to estimate the economic effect of cultural services, let alone the live entertainment element of it. There are no continuous, consistent data sets for attendance, or spend (for example), at Eastbourne's theatres (but see the recent work by Hayler, Appendix A2). In fact, generally speaking, relatively little is known about what the holidaymaker does while on holiday. The UK national tourist boards have recently begun to publish information but the list of activities does not include 'entertainment'. 'Watching the performing arts' occurred on only 6% of all holiday trips and this is inclusive of 'visits to theatre, cinema, concert, opera or ballet' (UKTS, 1997). (It is interesting, in classification terms, how cinema often appears in statistics to do with *performing arts*).

The following comment from Hughes and Benn (1995) on tourist board data relating to attendance at performing arts is revealing: 'The data on activities is not collected from 'spontaneous' responses but is prompted and self-defined by respondents. It is unlikely that respondents who had attended discos, variety shows and the like would identify their activities with the category 'watching the performing arts'...it is probable, therefore, that the extent of participation in entertainment is under-stated in this tourist board data'. In any case, such data does not indicate whether the domestic tourist was staying at the seaside. However, an unpublished survey in 1985 (Research Surveys of Great Britain) *did* cover all forms of the 'popular arts' and 'high arts' and showed that 38% of holiday-makers had attended some form of live entertainment whilst on holiday. It also established that this activity was more

likely in the case of seaside holidays (49%) and for those in socio-economic groups C2 and DE (42% and 51% respectively). These are encouraging figures (if rather out-dated for providers of live entertainment at seaside resorts). General trends in attendance at cultural events during the ten year period 1986 – 1996 indicate growth in cinema, and lists plays, art galleries etc., but not live entertainment (UKTS, 1997). Additionally, information on the social grade of people attending performing arts can inform the general picture but is not specific enough regarding audiences participating in live entertainment activities at the seaside.

The 1997 United Kingdom Tourism Survey (UKTS) suggests that domestic tourists spent 5% of their budget on entertainment (equal to £754m), but 'entertainment' included visits to tourist attractions, including historic houses (UKTS, 1997 p19). According to Hughes and Benn (1995), the ATLAS Cultural Tourism Project of 1993 confirms that: 'heritage tourism (museums and heritage buildings and sites) is more important than performing arts, in as much as visits to heritage are more likely than are visits to the performing arts on holiday. The project found that 63% of respondents visited museums on holiday compared with 14% attending the performing arts'.

The 1997 UKTS does attempt to identify the activities and spending of the British domestic tourist. It also gives interesting data on socio-economic groupings, age, and whether children are included in the visit and lifecycle details, but it does not take account of the increasing economic importance of the day visitor, nor give details of which visits were to the seaside. Crucially, 'live entertainment' is not a separate category.

The importance of live entertainment in the decision to visit

In an attempt to address this gap in knowledge, and to establish the significance of live entertainment in people's choice of a particular holiday destinations, a survey was carried out in 1994 at England's premier resort, Blackpool (Hughes and Benn, 1997). Traditionally, people would have gone to Blackpool to 'see the shows'. There is no comparative data but it seems younger people today are less interested in shows, and more interested in pubs, clubs, discos, the funfair and the Pleasure Beach. People 55 and over are the main audience for live entertainment but both 45-54 and 35-44 age groups give live entertainment as the most important attraction or thing to do in the decision to visit Blackpool. There is a fairly even spread among the socio-economic groups as regards attending shows/live entertainment. The Blackpool survey is obviously a representation of people who visit the seaside. According to these results, if the providers of shows/live entertainment in Blackpool find unoccupied seats in their venues, it is likely to be because there are more younger people in the total number of visitors, or because visitors will say they are prompted by an attraction, but not attend the show.

In the same survey, live entertainment was one of the most frequently mentioned *least* important reasons for choice of destination. It could be that, rather like the provision of swimming pools in hotels, people want a facility to be available but may not avail themselves of it. This point may be particularly important at the seaside, where ambience and atmosphere is partly created by the facilities and attractions on offer, whether or not they are patronised. To maintain a traditional atmosphere would require traditional types of live entertainment, within appropriate venues. To move in a different direction would require a clear understanding of the target market and the importance they attach to live entertainment in the decision to visit a destination, and as part of the ambience of the location. Such a move, for example,

to emphasise the 'high arts' due to a shift in the visitor/resident mix, would eventually alter people's perception of the location – perhaps (deliberately) moving away from the image of a 'traditional resort'.

The 1994 Hughes and Benn survey can throw some light on a better understanding of the importance of live entertainment in the decision to visit, at least so far as Blackpool is concerned. Live entertainment did not generally seem to be the 'sole reason' or even a 'very important' reason for visitors choosing Blackpool. This was despite the importance attributed to shows and live entertainment in the 'main attraction' question in the survey. Live entertainment was, however, 'fairly important' in the decision to visit of nearly half of all respondents. People on main holidays were more likely to consider it important, people in older age groups (except the oldest bracket) were more likely to tick the 'fairly important' or 'very important' box. Local visitors (day and possibly short-stay visitors) gave the lowest rating to shows. To quote Hughes and Benn (1997 p119) 'The apparent moderate level of importance attached to live entertainment is reinforced by the fact that 84.4% of respondents say they would have come to Blackpool anyway even if there had been no live entertainment available.'

A 1985 English Tourist Board survey indicated that 'none of them' (i.e. respondents who had taken a holiday in England), 'spontaneously mentioned that the availability of live entertainment had been considered when deciding where to go on holiday'. Of course, such availability may play an *indirect* role. 'Entertainment provision is one ingredient that symbolises a holiday atmosphere and identifies a tourist area as such or as a particular type of tourist area. It is one part of the collection of 'attractions' that needs to be present if an area is to achieve that 'critical mass' for viability as a tourist destination' (Lundberg, 1985). In such ways live entertainment

may be considered one part of the 'mosaic' that constitutes the tourist product offering at the seaside.

Evidence as to the importance of live entertainment at English seaside resorts in the 1990s is inconclusive. There is obviously some connection between cultural attractions and tourists' decisions to visit but the strength of the connection is unclear. It is not clear what types of live entertainment are particularly tourist-related in a changing situation, although it seems likely that some entertainment of the 'popular' type is still seen as a requirement of the visitor/potential visitor, even if they do not attend.

Speculatively, it may be the case that in some resorts the tourist may be becoming less important than residents, and locals within a reasonable travelling distance. In other resorts the tourist may remain the focus of the arts-related product on offer. Of course, management decisions regarding programming are associated with how far venue managers at the seaside consider they are trying to attract tourists (and non-tourists), but at one level it doesn't matter who is in the audience providing the production/cultural offer is viable. 'Where audiences are from and whether or not they are on holiday is, in many ways, of no concern as long as the artistic and financial objectives of the theatre are being met' (Leader-Elliot, 1996, in Hughes, 2000 p99). At another level, managers clearly need to know who their principal audiences are: these customers will have particular requirements and expectations and can then be identified and targeted. Tourists may expect to pay more for their live entertainment whilst on holiday than they would normally do when at home. Anyone expects to pay more for the 'high' performing arts. These issues are associated with managing and marketing the arts at the seaside and are discussed further, below, as part of cultural change(s) that affect the provision of live entertainment at seaside resorts.

A key issue for providers of live entertainment at the end of the 1990s was thus a need to consider the economic, social and cultural effect on their location of putting on particular types and amounts of live entertainment. At the beginning of the new millennium cultural attitudes towards the seaside and the seaside product seem somewhat unpredictable. The entertainment industry itself may be unsure about providing traditional forms of resort entertainment, and venue managers may be uncertain of the future due to the complex cultural and sociological issues which seem to be more significant in affecting increasingly 'fickle' tourist behaviour and consequently the (partial) economic well-being of the resort. These demand-side issues will need further investigation but within an appreciation of supply-side changes where, to some extent, cultural changes have 'forced' change on live entertainment providers, including the management environment within which live entertainment operates, most notably with regard to the categories of live entertainment provided.

The effect of cultural change on particular categories of live entertainment provided

According to Hughes and Benn (1996 p185, 187):

'Live entertainment continues as a feature of the holiday product in UK seaside resorts...in nearly all the resorts (87 per cent), some form of live entertainment aimed at the holidaymaker had been provided in the 1994 summer season; the entertainment took many forms... most resorts had 'regular changes.'

Although live entertainment is generally provided at English seaside resorts, the product, the management of that product, and the context in which it has been managed have been subject to intense pressure for change during the 1990s. However, change does not come naturally within the traditions of the industry.

Typical of the comments still affecting some resorts in the 1990s were those in the only report specifically published on the topic of live entertainment at English seaside resorts. This was noted in chapter two, but a prescient comment is given here:

'Live entertainment at English seaside resorts is facing a major crisis (with) problems ranging from over-priced stars and the shortage of new talent to failings and inexperience on the part of some local authorities and theatre management's (to) the high cost of tickets to a family; complaints from ratepayers who could not afford to see the shows they were subsidising; and the damage that would be done if these conditions result in fewer resort theatres.'

(English Tourist Board, 1984 p6)

At the seaside, there has been a tradition of live entertainment and it might be that problems in the industry (identified in the mid-1980s) are as relevant today as twenty years ago, where the summer variety show (perhaps the 'litmus test' of seaside entertainment) was already regarded as a thing of past. Relatively few of these were running in the 1990s although, as the Hughes and Benn 1994 survey goes some way to confirming, 'many people would consider that a resort not providing a summer show was not adequately catering for its visitors'.

The demise of the summer show can be linked to factors such as:

- Cost: of artistes/of entertainment/VAT/of dancers and musicians
- Lack of suitable artistes/new talent/stars not willing to work seasons
- Weather/changing social patterns/recessions
- General decline in holidaymakers
- Change in public tastes
- High ticket prices (linked to high 'stars' fees)

- Alternative entertainment (TV/video)
- Reduced standard of production
- Entertainment provided in holiday centres/hotels

(Adapted from Hayler, 1999 p85)

Obviously, certain (cultural) factors are largely beyond the direct control of the two main 'collaborators' (impresarios/agents and local authorities), but crucial factors within the industry itself might be addressed. A key factor is that many performers or their managing agents command fees in excess of their true box office value, particularly if the individual performer(s) are past their 'sell-by date'. A 'star' on the 'way down' might want a guarantee perhaps, when performing in a 1000+ seat theatre, but a high percentage of the net box office take in a 650 seat theatre. In the 1990s it was no longer the case that certain 'stars' would mean 'House Full' signs. In any case, many well-known names are no longer prepared to commit themselves to say, a six-week run on a percentage deal, when the audience figures are unpredictable, for example, due to bad weather. (Paradoxically, a 'sunny' summer puts up the total resort visitor figures, but a venue manager often wants 'poor' weather for increased attendance - people want other things to do if they can't sit on the beach or promenade along the seafront). Also, many artistes can earn more from, say, one television show, than a six-week summer season. They may want to be on tour, but with a series of 'one-nighters'. They may be forced to be on tour as resorts move towards a more varied programme. For example (as noted), there have been shifts in the pattern and amount of summer season live entertainment activity, reflecting changes in holiday habits as well as cultural change affecting the performing arts. At the seaside in the late 1990, as Hayler (1999 p83) has pointed out:

'It is often difficult to distinguish the summer programme from the programme for the rest of the year. Apart from pantomime, the year typically includes a mixture of one-nighters -concerts, comedy, music hall, tribute bands – and productions – musicals, opera, ballet – which might run for up to a week. There may be less total activity in the winter but the type of live entertainment provided will be similar, although amateur and musical festivals tend to fall outside the summer months. The out of season entertainment will also cater for a wide variety of tastes, reflecting the demands of residents and those within a reasonable travelling time, as well as visitors.'

It may be that the type of live entertainment programme at certain seaside resorts is beginning to look like programmes in inland resorts, or even provincial theatre – certainly the relatively new phenomenon of 'travelling' musicals ('Joseph', 'Cats' etc) are likely to play both seaside and provincial venues (provided capacities are available). There will obviously be exceptions, depending upon the different location, history, and traditions of a resort, the competition - both directly for live entertainment and, indirectly, for the 'leisure pound' - as well as the resort's likely future direction, particularly as regards the emphasis on tourism.

Given the comments above on cultural changes linked to changes in tourists' behaviour, it may be more difficult to identify particular products that appeal to particular visitors – either arts-core or arts peripheral. This may lead to difficulties on the supply-side. As noted, seaside locations traditionally provided a long-running summer variety show (a few of them were still running (shorter seasons) in the 1990s) but as tourists and cultural tourism change this may become a non-viable product in many locations.

Categorising/classifying a particular product for a particular type of audience may prove difficult in the changing situation at English seaside resorts, particularly given

the lack of continuous data. The demand and supply of live entertainment at seaside resorts are inter-related and to some extent, inter-dependent. It is unclear how the types of production are decided upon but this is a potentially complex decision. Decisions may be simplified in as much as they are made due to the availability of the product but are often made without particular regard to hard data on likely target audience numbers. This is not unusual in the arts world where artistic, cultural and perhaps social criteria can be as relevant as economic.

However, some data relating to the 1990s is available (Table 3.2 p92), although problematic i.e. not continuous, not comprehensive, some 'British' (not 'English'), some 'summer' only. The data is also not independent, generally relying on the venue managers themselves to respond. The data does not link categories of live entertainment with composition of audience, but it does give some indication of trends in type of production. In 1994 variety shows were offered in 64 per cent of resorts but other (trade) listings suggest a 'trend away from traditional variety shows (1994 –1998)...although these shows 're-appeared' in 1999. Music Hall has all but disappeared from the summer listings; musicals, which are scheduled at other times of the year, have declined...music shows are the dominant feature in every year covered' (Hayler, 1999 p88).

Table 3.2 Types of live entertainment at seaside resorts in the UK (1994 summer season)

<i>Per cent of resorts in which performances of each were offered during 1994</i>	
	<i>Per cent of resorts in which performances of each were offered during 1994</i>
Variety shows	64
Childrens' shows	61
Plays	58
Musicals	52
Jazz	45
Folk/country music	44
Classical music concerts	44
Comedy	41
Pop/rock concerts	25
Cabaret	25
Pantomime	23
Opera	23
Circus	17
Ballet	16
Contemporary dance	10

Source: Hughes and Benn, 1997

The figures above confirm the general impression that seaside theatre is focusing on the 'popular' performing arts, although opera, ballet and contemporary dance are not insignificant. In the 1990s a typical programming mix would generally emphasise commercial performances, with some reference to those performing arts of a 'high' cultural standing. (As noted earlier, residents and people within a reasonable travelling distance might be targeted for 'popular' entertainment but also, particularly, for the 'high' performing arts).

Traditional, commercial, 'popular' entertainment had been the significant form of live entertainment in seaside resorts up to the mid-1980s. But it may be that certain key change factors emerging in the 1990s will influence changes in traditional programmes e.g. inclusive cultural strategies may be premised on a judicious

mixture of commercial/non-commercial criteria, perceived perhaps, as 'low-arts'/'high-arts' respectively.

In the 1990s there have been changes concerning management and ownership of England's resort theatres (see section three of this chapter). There have been changes affecting consumer/tourist taste in live entertainment that have had repercussions on the programming, changes in the supply of artistes and changes related to 'producing' shows. There have been significant changes in the amount and type of competition, including the effect of hotels providing in-house entertainment – identified by Hughes and Benn (1998) as a potential factor affecting the economic prospects and programming of seaside theatre. There is seen to be 'an obvious link between entertainment and hotels in the same way as there is between any tourist attraction or activity and the accommodation that is necessary for that tourism to occur. There are instances however where the link is more direct and the hotel itself provides entertainment' (Hughes and Benn, 1998 p2). Hotels may see live entertainment as part of an all-inclusive provision, rather like 'holiday camps' such as Butlin's. Additionally, the idea may be to distinguish one hotel from another, but fundamentally the purpose is to keep the residents in the hotel, spending money in the hotel rather than elsewhere. The one study on this phenomenon at an English seaside resort (Blackpool in 1997) suggested 20% of shows seen by visitors were in 'small' venues such as hotels, social clubs and bars (Hughes and Benn, 1997a). The potential impact on competing live entertainment venues may thus be significant. There is little hard evidence although Hughes and Benn suggest the importance of hotel entertainment will increase where there is a deficiency, or decrease, in live entertainment elsewhere in the (seaside) resort:

'In many tourist (especially seaside) towns local government owns and funds theatres and is often responsible for the production of the

shows...increased pressure on local government finances is partly responsible for a contraction of entertainment in seaside tourist destinations...the significance of hotel entertainment may thus increase.'

(Hughes and Benn, 1998 p9)

There were many issues surrounding the running of a venue for live entertainment at the seaside in the 1990s but the key points may be summarised as follows (Table 3.3):

Table 3.3 Key points in relation to running seaside live entertainment venues

- | |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Changes relating to tourism/cultural tourism• A life-cycle of live entertainment, lagging behind cultural change• Supply-side conditions and change within the industry• Political viewpoint (ideology/philosophy) such as Compulsory Competitive Tendering (see also chapter three, section three)• Size and scale of the facility• Performance (and programming), linked to target markets• Managerialism/marketing skills – growing commercialisation• Financial constraints/financial procedures• Artistic policy/style• The venue(s) role within overall council policy, particularly tourism and cultural policy, including the position in council hierarchy (see also chapter three, section three)• Ownership, including public/private co-operation (see also chapter three, section three)• The views of (non-council) stakeholders• Local/business interest, including hoteliers |
|--|

Note: Non-council run venue(s) will still be affected by council policy.

Conclusion

This section has discussed the importance of the cultural industries with comments on the influence of television, the economic importance of the arts and the perceived importance of live entertainment provision in the tourist decision-making process. The current situation of the live entertainment industry has been explored, including some implications for providers of live entertainment at the seaside. No strong conclusion regarding the positive or negative effect of the performing arts/live entertainment during a period of decline at the seaside has been established from this discussion, although attention often returned to the influence of culture. As noted in the first section of this chapter, culture is suggested as the main reason for decline at many seaside resorts, and sets the context for later discussions concerning the importance and influence of cultural strategies at seaside resorts. This approach is consistent with recent interventionist policies by both central and local government suggesting the importance of culture in the economic and social life of seaside locations, and the key role likely to be played by local authorities in this. The process adopted so far thus sets up the rationale for focusing this study on the role of local authorities. Their actions and the political context in which they operated during the 1990s will now be examined in the final section of this chapter.

Section Three: The Political Context – the changing nature of government

Preamble

The economic status and fortunes of English seaside resorts and the cultural context in which they operate are influenced by government. Central government can directly affect resorts by legislation or directive, for example, the requirement to produce a Local Cultural Strategy, and indirectly through a variety of agencies such

as Regional Development Boards. The co-operation of local government is required to operationalise central government initiatives. In this way the local political context is critical to the future of seaside resorts and the role to be played by live entertainment in that future. The potential effect of central government policy and attitude and the actual and potential response of local authorities at the seaside is discussed in this section, although, as already noted in chapter two and chapter three, section two, there is a history of local authority involvement in the provision of live entertainment at English seaside resorts. The discussion in this section in relation to the 1990s will set the political context for further investigation of the areas of change affecting live entertainment at the seaside at the beginning of the twenty-first century. It confirms the interlocking nature of the three areas of change, but with a crucial role for local government.

Central Government policy and legislation affecting tourism and cultural activities

Since coming to power in 1997, the Labour Government has initiated policy and enacted legislation that is likely to affect activities at English seaside resorts at the beginning of the 21st century. These are still 'bedding down' but they are the template within which live entertainment will be delivered, and are discussed in the first part of this section, along with a brief historical note on the role of certain central government departments.

Prior to 1992, government responsibility for tourism (and arts) was divided among various departments. In 1992 the Department of National Heritage (DNH) was created to bring together associated activities e.g. tourism and the arts. The DNH had a wide-ranging remit and at various times stressed the role of tourism in maximising wealth generation and employment potential. Central government utilised tourism planning guidance as a 'mechanism' by which local authorities at the

seaside could justify providing economic and cultural activities. Planning was seen as an aid in promoting regional development or regeneration associated with tourism, particularly in the face of declining numbers of domestic tourists at certain resorts. Agarwal suggests, however, that the main objective of the DNH had been changing and was now to 'conserve, nurture and make the cultural heritage more widely accessible' (Agarwal in Shaw and Williams, 1997 p140).

The DNH was re-named the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) in 1997 following the change of government and continues as the central government department responsible for tourism and cultural activities, including the arts. The DCMS operates a deliberate 'arms-length' policy whereby it sets general guidance and requires the various government/quasi-government bodies initiated by it to deliver the services within agreed parameters. Each part of the DCMS has a policy document associated with it. Tourism policy for England (Tomorrow's Tourism, 1999) included plans for:

- More central government support for the regions
- Regeneration of traditional resorts
- A greater emphasis on quality – in accommodation, in services, in information
- The development of niche markets to meet new and changing demands
- Initiatives to widen access to tourism for the 40 per cent of people in Britain who do not take a holiday

(DCMS, 1999 p46)

The general thrust was a new support structure for tourism. 'The Government is committed to ensuring better co-ordination across all Government departments'

(Smith, 1998). They seek a better quality tourism experience and widened access. More recently, emphasis has been placed on the promotion of sustainable tourism.

There was a new (1999) strategic authority, the English Tourism Council (ETC), in place of the English Tourist Board. The ETC was charged with devising overall strategies to help implement government initiatives and with co-ordinating the efforts of the ten Regional Tourist Boards, particularly in relation to domestic tourism. Consistent with the Agarwal comment (above) it may be that Tourist Boards will be more closely associated with arts and cultural activities in the future. In the past their main concern was maximising the wealth generation and employment potential of tourism. Typically, they had functions such as marketing (particularly promotion) and product development – often by ‘encouraging new attractions, accommodation or basic infrastructure’ (Hughes, 2000 p42).

Furthermore, ‘the regional boards...are particularly important as they influence and interpret national policies at the regional level...in addition to this, a major role is the provision of development advice to commercial operators in the area, and liaison and advice on tourism planning and management matters’ (Agarwal, in Shaw and Williams, 1997 p142). The Regional Tourist Boards (RTB) receive funding from the national tourist board, but in the mid-1990s this grant-in-aid was decreased and (successful) efforts were made to increase revenue from private sources and local government. There are continuing strong links with both the commercial sector and local government.

In addition to requiring local authorities and tourist boards to co-ordinate on various seaside initiatives, the DCMS saw the development of Local Cultural Strategies (LCS) as a fundamental part of any attempts to ‘help councils recognise and use their cultural assets and services to help boost the local economy and encourage

local regeneration' (DCMS, 2000). The Local Government Unit of the DCMS set out a distinct role for local authorities in developing LCSs by 2002. Local Cultural Strategies are discussed below.

It was envisaged that the thrust and focus of cultural services would be co-ordinated through Regional Cultural Consortia (RCCs). The linkages between the various bodies had not been firmly established but RCCs would bring together representatives from the regional agencies working in the arts, heritage, museums, tourism, libraries, sport and archives, and from local government, as well as others including individuals from the creative industries. The consortia were charged with drawing up a strategy that sets out the future of culture in their region. They were required to provide a strong voice for culture in the region and encourage a 'joined-up' approach to the delivery of regional cultural strategies. Regional Cultural Consortia and Regional Tourist Boards work closely with Regional Development Agencies (RDAs). The RDAs (part of the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR)) were established in April 1999 to draw up an economic strategy for their regions. In preparing these, RDAs must take into consideration the regional cultural and tourism strategies. As far as English seaside resorts are concerned, the RDAs are expected to be important in attempts to regenerate or redevelop their area. Indeed, RDAs have a clear role to further the economic development and regeneration of the area, promoting investment and employment. This must include links to cultural activities that directly or indirectly assist these aims, probably articulated in a Local Cultural Strategy (LCS).

At English seaside resorts any LCS must cater for the needs of the local community as well as consider the effect on tourism. It is not clear how local authorities at English seaside resorts will attempt to incorporate live entertainment into their local cultural strategies (see below) but they will need better information than has hitherto

been available. Local authorities are also required to provide Best Value in all their services (see below). Additionally, they may need to alter their organisational structures to deliver an efficient, accountable Local Cultural Strategy within a framework of Best Value. At the time of writing, local authorities at the seaside are in the process of adjusting to these changes. The specific structures and measures they may adopt will be discussed later in this study, but developments and requirements concerning the key issues of new local government structures, related to local cultural strategies and Best Value, are now commented on.

Local government re-organisation and monitoring

The Local Government Act (1999) stressed the need to strengthen the links between councils and local people and required councils to restructure in order to deliver quality service across all areas of responsibility. One key problem was identified as the existing committee structure – suggested as inefficient for the task of council decision taking and leadership i.e. ‘The real decisions are taken elsewhere, behind closed doors, with little open, democratic scrutiny and where many councillors feel unable to influence events. In short, people, businesses, and other organisations in the community do not know who runs their council’ (HMSO, White Paper, 1998). It suggested there could be performance indicators applied to all services and, although local circumstances would differ, best practice could be spread more widely, provided appropriate structures and cultures (openness and ready accountability) were put in place. According to the White Paper the benefits of the new structures would be greater the more the executive role was separated, and the more direct the link between the executive and the community it serves. Additionally, all councils had the scope to design a system of governance that was best suited to local circumstances. The executive was the ‘face’ of the council and would be the focus of negotiation with the Government, public bodies and

businesses, and other potential partners. The executive had to make the key decisions on policy plans and proposals, deliver appropriate services to appropriate standards (translating the wishes of the community into action), and draw up the annual budget for submission to the full council. Potentially relevant to this study, it was suggested that councillors would now be able to better scrutinise and challenge decisions. Council officers would continue to be given delegated responsibility under all these models. Officers would continue to serve the whole council and support the councillors in their changing roles. Some officers may have the specific role of supporting backbench councillors, others supporting the mayor, or leader and cabinet. The officers/employees were to carry out the authority's policies and deliver or secure services. They would be responsible to the political executive through their line management with statutory duties to account for their actions to the council in its scrutiny role.



Associated with structural change is Best Value (BV) which, as applied to live entertainment at English seaside resorts, is at various stages. All council services are subject to BV from April 2003 but each local authority could decide the order in which they apply Best Value to the various services. Weston-super-Mare had cultural services included in the Year 1 BV review (2000/01). Worthing would not 'BV' their live entertainment until at least Year 3 (2002/03). Best Value is likely to have significant impact on the provision of live entertainment at the seaside. In many resorts, the types of procedures and performance indicators applied may not have been used before. The philosophy and general principles of BV had been articulated in many Government publications; most of the comments below come from the White Paper (DETR, 1998a), other DETR publications (1999a; 1999b; 1999c), and the principles were subsequently incorporated in the Local Government Act 1999 (HMSO, 1999). Additionally, the Audit Commission had been working with the Local Government Association (LGA) to provide criteria by which further

consultation (e.g. with residents) could take place, before deciding which specific factors/areas, within which specific local authority service/activity will be 'Best Valued'. Best Value and Local Cultural Strategies continue to be two key 'drivers' of live entertainment policy and will be discussed following a review of the general approach of local authorities to live entertainment at the seaside in the 1990s.

Changing attitudes and organisation of local government towards live entertainment at seaside resorts in the 1990s

The post-war years had led to a variety of policy initiatives that established a cross-party consensus that allowed local authorities to provide a wide range of leisure facilities. Central government had ensured local government compliance in democratising access to leisure by White Papers such as A Policy for the Arts: the First Steps (1965), and the establishment of the Sports Council in 1972. Sport continues to be the area where the majority of local government money on leisure provision is spent but the significance of local authorities to arts and entertainment provision should not be underestimated. Local government provides and operates most of the theatres and concert halls outside London. According to the Audit Commission (1991) and Myerscough (1988), approximately one-third of these were in seaside resorts at the beginning of the 1990s. As already noted, local authorities at the seaside were never legally obligated to provide live entertainment venues and programmes but often took it upon themselves to ensure this aspect of the visitor experience was well catered for. It was generally accepted that visitors would expect to have a range of 'cultural services' available including libraries, museums and live entertainment, but only libraries are statutorily required. However, the 'economic advantages of hosting a wide ranging arts and entertainment programme have been recognised by a number of local authorities' (Edwards and Tolley, 1994 p3). This was further illustrated in the Audit Commission's 1991 report where it was

argued that 'a flourishing artistic environment can attract tourists and day-trippers on the one hand, and investment on the other as companies seek locations which provide a congenial working environment for their staff'. The same report suggested local authorities were often not clear about their artistic aims. Four further justifications for supporting cultural events and venues were advanced by the Commission:

1. To promote artistic excellence and offer opportunities for advancement;
2. The enhancement of the quality of life for local residents;
3. Theatre and arts centres act as focal points for the community;
4. Arts support is driven by the nature of the venue.

(Audit Commission, 1991 p12)

All of these would apply to seaside theatre but a fifth could be added – to provide a part of the holiday experience that is usually expected. The second point, above, is particularly interesting. It may be advocating the provision of a broader range of cultural and popular events that the commercial market might not be prepared to offer. In any case (commercial or not), and depending on the economic condition of the local area, a subsidy might be needed - even if the resident base is increasing in comparison to the tourist base as is the case at many seaside resorts (Ap, 1992a).

Social cohesion and, perhaps, social inclusion, may be behind points two and three – prescient indicators of New Labour's policy? 'Public sector support can help and allow lower income groups greater access to events which might otherwise be beyond their financial means' (Audit Commission, 1991 p12). Points two and three are much reflected in current central government thinking regarding Local Cultural Strategies. The fourth point concerns the prominent location in the town of many older theatres and concert halls. At the seaside these are often on, or adjacent to,

the pier. They are perceived as part of the local cultural heritage that should be sustained. A major cause of the decline of seaside resorts is the decline in the built infrastructure but local government subsidies that support live entertainment would help preserve and retain the prominent theatres, concert halls and winter gardens of seaside resorts.

The four points above are *part* of the reason for local government involvement and financial support of live entertainment at the seaside. The underlying factor is economic, but not in the sense that live entertainment must make money. It was simply believed that tourists were the economic basis for the resort, and live entertainment was seen as an essential part of the visitor expectation – whether or not visitors actually attended the performances. As the number of staying visitors has declined decisions have had to be made as to how far (or whether) to continue funding the existing live entertainment venues, and how far to invest in new facilities. In some cases the local authority may even want to divest itself of the venues and withdraw entirely, or perhaps collaborate with the private sector. There is a positive history of co-operation between the public and private sectors, and it may be that recent private interest in running venues and collaborating with local authorities will be increasingly common at English seaside resorts.

Many local authorities have a strong tradition of ‘municipal conservatism’ (Buck, 1989) i.e. a commitment to high expenditure on the physical maintenance of the resort, the running of the major tourist attractions such as parks, beaches and theatres, and the advertising and promotion of the resort. Councils who fundamentally believe in ‘municipal conservatism’ may prefer to retain direct control of theatre operations. Bournemouth is a good example of an authority that has been active in investing in live entertainment facilities and in promoting the positive effects of live entertainment programmes. Today, Bournemouth continues its role as a

leading authority in live entertainment provision with ownership and control of three venues, including the well-known Bournemouth International Centre (BIC). The corporation is also pro-active in generating a vibrant night-club scene to make Bournemouth the 'entertainment capital of the south' and works with many private sector organisations to up-date facilities or create new ones.

Alongside the issue of collaboration with the private sector, the question of local authority funding of live entertainment at the seaside is related to the economics of running the venues, including the relationship between the council and any funding bodies. Mention has been made of central government funding and the recent boost to this. Funding for the arts has increased from £199 million in 1998/99 to £235 million in 2001/2. Support for museums and art galleries has risen from £204 million in 1998/99 to £249 million in 2001/2, and libraries from £91 million to £97 million (DCMS, 309/98 in Sellwood (ed.) 2001). Of course, these are central government initiatives. Part of their purpose is to encourage local government to look more critically and strategically at its own funding of these activities, and the increases are tied to significant reforms of cultural institutions and clear, relevant policies and practices such as those noted above.

There is no specific mention of live entertainment in the reforms. This is the usual situation. Local authorities at the seaside have not generally been net receivers of Arts Council money. 'Low' culture 'live entertainment' is unlikely to receive 'arts' money. This will not change all the time government and funding bodies initiatives are predominantly 'arts' (and 'high arts') focussed. For example, recent Arts Council of England initiatives and discussion documents on bringing new audiences to the arts (Arts Council of England, 1998; 2000) are to do with getting young people to attend museums, art galleries and literature events.

The 1997/98 figures for Local Authority Expenditure on the Arts in England (Arts Council of England, 1998) showed that most authorities (84% of those surveyed) spent less than 2% of their total net revenue on the arts. Fifty-two per cent of responding authorities spent less than 0.5%. The new unitary authorities have the highest median net revenue expenditure at £3.49 per head of resident population. Sixty eight per cent of local authority net spending was on venues followed by grants to artistes/arts organisations (19%) and arts and development/staff costs (8%). The comparative figures for seaside resorts are not available but, depending upon definitions (the 'arts' versus 'entertainment' debate), it can be anticipated that there will be a higher than average expenditure in resort locations for example, to maintain venues, whether for 'high' or 'low' (performing) arts. A number of local factors might apply at seaside resorts. If the economic importance of the arts (entertainment) to the area is 'exaggerated' because visitors expect a programme of live entertainment, or if the built (theatre) heritage is regarded as crucial, both to the appearance of the resort and as venues for performance, a higher than average spend can be anticipated. In overall terms, over half the authorities were planning to maintain current levels of (arts) revenue expenditure and nearly 24% were planning to increase it (Arts Council of England, 1998). Despite this information local authority policy and consequent (financial) support for live entertainment at the seaside is not well documented or discussed. This is now commented on.

Local authority funding and management of live entertainment venues at the seaside

It is generally not clear why, or how, local authority money is spent on arts and entertainment. Local government theatre managers are often given wide discretion in arranging the programmes e.g. presenting next year's summer entertainment to the relevant committee in the autumn of the current year, before full information on

the current year's attendances and costs have been assessed. There is often little appraisal of the effect of grants or subsidies, alongside a lack of management information to formulate objectives. Significantly, it has been difficult to gain audience details – composition of the audience, matched to the target market, for example. Modern box-office technology would help here, although necessary qualitative data would need to include data collection methods that, for example, asked the opinions of the consumers. At the seaside, there are very few surveys that look specifically at audience(s) attending a live entertainment venue. Most surveys are carried out in conjunction with tourist boards, and *may* have questions related to leisure activities, but not specifically live entertainment. One exception to this is the work in Eastbourne to analyse audiences at the Devonshire Park Theatre and the Congress Theatre (Eastbourne Borough Council, 1998). This survey was planned to be repeated in the summer of 1999. Of course, even with a survey like this, the results need to be integrated into the policy decision-making process. It is not clear that this happens, and it is part of this research to understand whether relevant and useful information is utilised.

Local authorities provide financial support to artistes, art companies, and grants for cultural/arts events. They provide subsidies, generally in order to reduce the ticket price audiences are asked to pay. This practice may be particularly important in the development of a 'social-inclusion' policy i.e. subsidising people who would not normally attend the performing arts. (Social inclusion is one of the underlying themes in the proposed Local Cultural Strategies). If the subsidy relates to particular performances, it may need to be made clear. If the subsidy/grant is related directly to the entertainment facility, this should also be transparent. At most seaside locations the greatest subsidy expenditure is on the built fabric of theatres, concert halls and arts centres, so distinctions may need to be drawn.

Local authorities usually distinguish between fixed and variable costs. Many are prepared to meet the full fixed costs of the venue but seek break-even or a profit at the box-office. Additionally, it may be acceptable at the seaside to underwrite a trading loss on individual events, or even a season's entertainment programme, but the cost of this must be stated if the true position of live entertainment provision is to be understood. 'Few authorities set formal targets for minimum or maximum numbers of events of different types, for average ticket sales or for average income or subsidy for attendance. There is, in consequence, little monitoring of venue managers' performance and little incentive to improve that performance' (Audit Commission, 1991 p19).

The latest comprehensive data on seaside theatre costs and performance (Audit Commission, 1991) is more than twelve years old. It indicates the need for better management procedures. In 1988/89, only 32% of seats in resort theatres owned and managed by local authorities were sold, and some authorities sold 20% or fewer of their seats in a typical year (Audit Commission, 1991). Many resort theatres have large seating capacities, so 20% of seats sold can still be a considerable number of patrons. Notwithstanding the reasons for subsidising theatre performances at the seaside, it was suggested that these types of figures might need management analysis.

As noted above, local authorities at the seaside are required to articulate clear policies, regularly reviewed, regarding their arts and entertainment provision. Authorities might have to identify their objectives, particularly with regard to whether they are targeting residents, or visitors, or particular groups (e.g. the disadvantaged), or a combination of these. It might also be that there are particular economic reasons for subsidising entertainment e.g. relocating businesses will be

interested in the range and amount of cultural activity, and these may be influential in decisions relating to cultural activities.

The issues for managers of local authority controlled entertainment venues are complex but there is clearly a (government) suggestion for officers and members to involve themselves in an overall plan for arts and entertainment in their locality. This would then be linked to other local and regional plans. Such a plan would require clear objectives, with agreed measures of performance, consistently monitored, such as suggested in Table 3.4.

Table 3.4 Possible measures of performance for seaside theatre operations

Possible Aims	Measurable Performance – Examples of Indicators	Questions to Ask
To foster artistic excellence	No. of performers supported No. of other engagements and recording contracts by those performers Assessments of newspaper reviews of performances No. of groups applying for and receiving grant aid	Are we supporting deserving companies and performers?
To improve quality of life	The use made by the local population of facilities No. of performances by type (e.g. cultural, popular) The proportion of people from different groups of the population using the facility (participation rates)	What are the publics view on the quality of life and the authority's facilities?
To promote equity of access	Breakdown of audience by social background	Are we reaching the audiences we intend to attract? What is the average subsidy per seat sold?
To foster a sense of community	Percentage of residents aware of the facilities No. of hires by local groups	What does market research reveal of local residents' views of the facilities?
<u>Economic Promotion</u> - Tourism	Total No. of visits, length of stay and total expenditure Percentage of audience from outside the authority Percentage residents/hinterland in audience	What image do people have of the area? Is that image enhanced by the existence of local authority supported facilities?
- Long term economic development	Total No. of enquiries received, who makes them and the eventual result	What image do prospective employers have of the area?
Conservation of local cultural buildings	Trading profit/loss on promotions Cost of building maintenance	Are there less costly ways of preserving the buildings?
To increase participation in the arts by supporting local arts groups	No. of groups supported No. of groups using council facilities	Do these groups need grants?

Source: Adapted from the Audit Commission, 1991

Issues of significance to a particular seaside location would need to be highlighted and considered in any comparative analysis. Particular performance indicators could then be emphasised, although useful comparative analysis between theatres/venues at resorts would require consistent, general indicators, such as in Table 3.5.

Table 3.5 Some suggested performance indicators for English seaside resorts venues and events

Programme	Number of performance days Number of events (performances/hirings) Number of different productions/presentations Mix of events (number and percentage of different types)
Pricing	Admission prices charged Average ticket price Discounts/concessions offered to target groups Take up by target groups (number of such admissions; proportion of people eligible for a discount who attend; whether they obtain the discount; frequency of attendance)
Attendance	Total number of attendances % of seats sold by month/season/programme type/price Frequency of attendance by people from different segments of the population Complimentary tickets
Financial	Average ticket yield Deal – type/(net) contribution Deal – against performance type
Per event (and in total)	Performance on trading account (variable cost compared to income) Performance on revenue account (income compared to all other costs) Trading subsidy per attendance Trading subsidy per paid attendance (i.e. excluding 'comps', etc.) Revenue subsidy per attendance Revenue subsidy per paid attendance (i.e. excluding 'comps', etc.)

Source: Adapted from the Audit Commission, 1991.

These types of assessment and measurement of local government policies and practice in relation to cultural activities are the legacy of Conservative government

legislation related to, and part of, Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT). Introduced in the Local Government Act of 1988, CCT offered the creation of a potential new relationship, the client (council/department) and the contractor. The contractor could be part of the same department or an external company. This type of relationship could fundamentally change the culture of council operations. Given that the primary and original purpose of CCT was about the commercialisation of the public sector it was assumed that the market i.e. the consumer, knows best – the general philosophy being that private sector practices are inherently better than public sector practices/management. The Labour Government's 'replacement' is Best Value (BV). Theoretically, BV would deliver efficiency, effectiveness and economy of public leisure provision, without the suggestion that such practices overtly reinforce the hegemonic message of consumer-based capitalism.

CCT prompted some local government reorganisation. This was 'developed' by New Labour and new local authority constitutions, Best Value and Local Cultural Strategies were the resultant political and legislative 'mix' within which live entertainment at the seaside was to be delivered at the beginning of the 21st century. Nobody knows how these changes will affect the running of seaside live performance venues but it remains the responsibility of the local authority to give a strategic lead on all aspects of art and entertainment in their area. This steer could be the focus by which cultural activities will be delivered, possibly via the development of a clear arts and entertainment policy, with named individuals given specific responsibilities, and lines of accountability clearly defined. It might then be possible to 'separate out' the role of live entertainment at a particular seaside resort.

The integration of individuals involved in delivering a general arts and entertainment policy is speculated on below but firstly, this section on local authority management

of seaside theatre (part of the 'political context') would not be complete without details of recent trends in ownership and control.

Local government ownership and control of seaside venues

The 1990s witnessed considerable pressures for change in the day-to-day management of the live entertainment industry at English seaside resorts and although most of the theatres at the English seaside have some degree of council involvement, there is an increase in private sector involvement. In 1998 about 56 per cent of all theatre seats at the seaside were still entirely owned and managed by local councils (British Theatre Directory, 1999), but there has been increased private sector involvement in seaside theatre in the 1990s.

Apollo Leisure (part of the American leisure group SFX, then the Clear Channel Group) was the first theatre organisation (largest theatre group in Europe) to negotiate a deal to run theatres at a major English seaside resort – Torbay in Devon, comprising the three resorts of Torquay, Brixham and Paignton. It is an interesting example of public/private collaboration. Until 1991 Torbay Council was directly responsible for running five theatres with a combined seating capacity of 4,500, but falling audience figures and rising theatre costs prompted a report to Members that suggested the two larger theatres (the Festival Theatre, Paignton and the Princess Theatre, Torquay) were absorbing a disproportionate amount of the total subsidy. Unless costs could be reduced, one of them would have to close. Apollo Leisure (UK) Ltd. (in association with Barry Clayman Concerts) had already won the contract to promote the summer shows at both theatres. They negotiated a deal whereby the Council paid them a (first year) management fee of £245,000. The rate-born costs (two theatres) were also reduced, by £134,640 per annum, for each of the two years 1991/2 and 1992/3. The agreement with Apollo gave very

detailed requirements in terms of staffing, marketing, programming and maintaining the two theatres. The level and quality of service had to compare closely with that of the council. It was claimed (unidentified) savings had been achieved, although the arrangement left the Council with the responsibility for structural repairs and major maintenance of the buildings together with the financing of remaining debt.

Apollo had to put on more shows than the council produced and the mix and quality of entertainment had to be to the Council's expectations. Although no programming percentages could be provided, the entertainment mix at the time was arts, music, popular entertainment, variety, drama and specialist entertainment. The Council retained a Client Monitoring Officer to meet regularly with Apollo to discuss programming, marketing, maintenance and complaints.

'I believe that Apollo have done an extremely good job but undoubtedly their independent position outside of the Council helps tremendously with the media and public relations. To the average customer it is clear that there is no difference between the Council's management and private management. Apollo have invested in a new, computerised booking system and more staff are employed. Through our contract with Apollo the Council has been able to retain both of its principal theatres. In view of the difficulties in prescribing a suitable specification I will be delighted to retain a management agreement where both flexibility and control can be obtained by the Council in partnership with the private sector.'

(Bob Sweet, Director of Arts and Recreation, in ILAM, 1994 p 8-9)

The post-script to the Torbay arrangement is that Apollo re-built the Festival Theatre as a multiplex cinema, operative from summer 1999. During the 1990s they continued to run the Princess Theatre for Torbay Council. As at 1999 Apollo had further collaborative arrangements with particular councils concerning the Spa

Pavilion, Felixstowe, the Leas Cliff Hall at Folkestone, the Futurist at Scarborough and the Theatre and Floral Hall in Southport. (Additionally, Apollo operate multiplex cinemas at Morecombe and Rhyl, although they closed the multiplex at Llandudno in 1999). As a separate but linked point (discussed later in relation to availability of product) Apollo attempt to control the product by offering a 20+ date tour to these and other theatres. The artistes might be exclusively tied to Apollo, or offered e.g. to seaside venues, on advantageous terms *to Apollo*.

The comments in this section relating to public/private co-operation, or running venues entirely as a private or public operation, point to a wide variety of arrangements across the country, determining how seaside theatres were managed in the 1990s and the potentially different objectives under which they were operated. A 'fluid' situation existed, for example, at Great Yarmouth where the theatre on the Britannia Pier was privately owned and run but the Gorleston Pavilion (theatre) privately managed but council owned. The New Wellington Theatre, Great Yarmouth, was council owned but leased to the comedian Jim Davidson, who was trying to maintain traditional seaside entertainment on it. One indicator of the significance of local government in maintaining and retaining entertainment venues at the seaside is the number of theatres within the district boundary. At the beginning of the 1990s 'local authorities provided and operated the majority of theatres and concert halls outside London' (Audit Commission, 1991 p9). The English Tourist Board estimated in 1982 (the first and last ETB survey on seaside theatre, ETB, 1984a) that the seaside towns of England had 103 theatres with a seating capacity of 94,751 – which represented 35% of all professional theatres in the English provinces and 43% of seating capacity, (this did not mean they were all owned and run by the council).

At the time, the three districts of Blackpool, Torbay, and Bournemouth possessed no fewer than fourteen theatres between them, or one for every 28,000 residents compared with a national average of one theatre for every 141,000 residents (ETB, 1984a p6). Seaside tourism was the predominant form of tourism in 49 of the districts surveyed, of which 38 had at least one theatre. In the 124 district council areas with more than 500 hotel bedrooms there were 196 theatres – 70% of the 281 provincial theatres quoted. Clearly, the ratio of theatres to residents in 1982 was closely associated with tourism and staying visitors. Interestingly, the 1982 survey drew a distinction between theatres in historic towns such as Oxford, Bath, Winchester, and seaside theatre, suggesting that many of the former received an Arts Council grant and ‘pursue a more ambitious artistic policy than the majority of seaside theatres...which are orientated towards variety shows and which increasingly rely on local authority support as ‘loss-leaders’ ’ (ETB, 1984a p5).

By 1999, the number of theatres at the English seaside had fallen to 84 and the seating capacity, compared to the ETB survey of 1982, had decreased to 80,378 (Hayler, 1999). The average capacity per theatre between 1982 and 1999 had risen slightly – from 920 to 957. There are no comparable statistics available on the question of ownership and control of seaside theatre, but in 1999 forty-seven of the venues (56%) were council owned and run. A further thirteen (15%) were council owned, but managed privately, via a management contract. Additionally, four were (council owned) Trusts. The non-local authority sector at English seaside resorts in 1999 comprised twenty theatres, representing 24% of seaside venues. Of these, twelve are entirely ‘commercial’ operations, the other eight are represented by five Theatre Trusts (non-profit making) and three in the University sector. Of course, the number of theatres controlled by the local authority is related to any (local) cultural policy, including arts and entertainment. This is now commented on.

Local government arts and entertainment policy

It has already been noted how there have been significant increases in central and local government arts development initiatives during recent years. Such developments indicate the requirement for a long-term, integrated plan for arts and entertainment at seaside resorts, in order both to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of provision, and to comply with, and effectively implement, the initiatives coming from the Department of Culture, Media and Sport such as Benchmarking, (see below).

Local authorities are at different stages as regards the development of arts policies. There are seven suggested stages (Bond and Roberts, 1998). The most advanced stage would have authorities developing arts as part of a broader cultural agenda with clear strategic frameworks, in partnership with other agencies. This ambitious goal is nevertheless how central government may consider their directives can be practically implemented. Local authorities would have 'passed through' stages that require 'involvement with the arts over a number of years, would have developed arts policies and strategies, and have identified clear arts aims and objectives' (Bond and Roberts, 1998 piii). As suggested, most seaside resorts have been at the stage where they provide (performing) arts venues but their arts and cultural strategy was not clear. However, they are beginning to look more closely at their arts/entertainment provision, and an increasingly common response might be the suggested appointment of officers in this increasingly important area of local authority activity.

As regards live entertainment at a seaside resort, the appointment of an arts officer in a strategic role is unlikely, despite the historical importance of entertainment/cultural activities. Arts Officers are likely to be seen as coming from

the 'high arts' tradition. 'Performing Arts' (especially 'elitist') are not perceived as particularly fitting the seaside tradition but any incumbent will need to be cross-departmental, with reference to all relevant council departments including, for example, social services (for 'social inclusion'). Certainly a cross-council role would need to be the case if a corporate arts policy is envisaged where, say, arts are linked to economic regeneration. Firms wishing to move to an area might well take account of the range and depth of cultural activities in the locality. In this case, Arts Officers might be closely associated with the main influential, strategic, central management committee. Notwithstanding current central government suggestions on re-organising local council structures, this would currently often be the Policy and Resources Committees. This strong link between cultural activities and the main committee was not general practice at English seaside resorts in the mid-1990s as culture/entertainment, for example, was often part of the Leisure and/or Tourism committee. Theatres may, or may not, be a significant feature of a (higher) committee they report to, and such connections will require consideration if Local Cultural Strategies are to be effective. At Eastbourne, for example, in 1999 the theatres were part of Cultural Services which was in the division of Tourism, Leisure and Amenities, but the theatres section reported to the Community Services Committee, then on to the Policy and Resources Committee and on to the Council (Eastbourne Borough Council, 1999).

If there is no specialist live entertainment committee, recent changes to local government reflecting the increased executive approach to management would nevertheless suggest a need for any effective (performing) arts/cultural policy to be embedded in specialist sub-committees. If not, they are not likely to feature at the heart of corporate policy. (The inherent suggestion being that Local Cultural Strategies should be at the centre). Perhaps performing arts are not best placed in, for example, the leisure department, especially if links with the Sports Council are

associated with the leisure committee - art may suffer by comparison. 'There is no single or agreed position on where the arts should be located in the local authority structure. It is important, however, that the arts are adequately represented at the policy-making level in the local authority structure' (Bond and Roberts, 1998 pviii). Indeed, there is considerable discretion in the departmental structures local authorities adopt, and the title of employees. These are 'clues' to the relative influence of particular aspects of local government provision. The place of entertainment in the priority of a seaside authority, in which committee it is discussed, and the status of the relevant officers are all factors influencing decisions taken on live entertainment and need to be investigated via primary research.

Arts/cultural activities are generally regarded as non-political but there are decisions to be made relating to running venues that absorb substantial sums of local authority money, often in the form of subsidies. This is particularly true at the seaside – figures of a single theatre subsidy of up to £½ million are not uncommon. These figures suggest the need for clear, formal, adopted arts/live entertainment policy and strategies, particularly as a means of providing accountability. It is vital, as suggested by one recent policy document at Eastbourne (Eastbourne Borough Council, 2000 p3), in fact, it may become statutorily necessary, to 'involve local residents and other interested (business) partners' in decisions involving future live entertainment provision at the English seaside. Only the local authority has the organisation and political necessity to bring together the various interests that together create arts policies and strategies at a local level. It may be that many local authorities will see the 'opportunity' of Local Cultural Strategies as a further impetus to developing integrated and relevant live entertainment policies at England's seaside resorts. As previously noted, the current political context is 'driven' by Best Value and Local Cultural Strategies. These are briefly discussed as essential background to the political context.

Best Value

Best Value (BV) is a duty to deliver services to clear standards covering both cost and quality by the most economic, efficient and effective means available. It relates to a council's vision for the local community, including a 'cultural identity'. Councils will need to be clear about the services which local people expect and the resources and opportunities available to deliver them, although it may be unrealistic and unnecessary for a council to try to deliver everything themselves. Best Value is 'active' from April 2000. Best Value Performance Plans will compare the results of authorities' performances with those of other organisations. This introduces the idea of Benchmarking i.e. 'a process of measuring your service's processes and performance and systematically comparing them to the performance of others in order to seek 'best practice' ' (Foot, 1998 p5).

As far as seaside theatres are concerned, central government performance indicators (see below) have yet to be agreed, alongside the transferability of any such Benchmarking to the 'home' authority. Additionally, the decision to include live entertainment in BV reviews varies. Weston-super-Mare were 'best valuing' their theatre operations in 2000/01. Where Weston led others might follow and there is also (from 2000) a mechanism for comparative analysis (Benchmarking) across English seaside theatre(s). This is the data and information devised and operated by Hayler (2000 to date) in collaboration with the British Resorts Association (see Appendix A2 for Benchmark performance data related to seaside resort theatres in this study).

As already noted, in relation to seaside theatre performances, there previously existed little continuous, comparable data, and certainly nothing much that would meet the government's requirements – particularly the desire for measurable

outcomes when comparing performance between resorts/venues. The Government will give a clear lead in relation to performance standards where it judges the national interest requires it e.g. educational achievement. However, there is no clear government lead for cultural activities/live entertainment, (although there are 'independent' reports such as 'Best Value and the Arts', Leisure Futures, 1999), but there is a minimum requirement for improvement. This is against locally set targets in respect of strategic objectives, efficiency, effectiveness, quality and fair access.

This framework is intended to secure sustained economies from all authorities, as well as continuous improvements in service quality. There is local discretion available regarding priorities and it will be interesting to see how live entertainment at English seaside resorts is prioritised. The structure, size, objectives, policy and history of any particular local authority may 'push' live entertainment up the agenda at certain resorts, or 'relegate' it at others. The position of live entertainment in an appropriate department, related to the Local Cultural Strategy also needs to be assessed. The judgement regarding cultural activities (including live entertainment at seaside resorts) 'should be a rounded one, balancing performance across a range of indicators, and taking into account local circumstances' (DETR, 1997). Potential linkages between best value, benchmarking and arts/entertainment policies are now included in a brief discussion relating to the supposed catalyst for a 'joined-up' local approach, the local cultural strategy.

Local Cultural Strategies

Local authorities are major players in delivering cultural services. They spent £1,704 million on local cultural services in 1998/99 (DCMS, 2000). A key element of the local government policy articulated by the DCMS is quality delivery, by the local authority, of a Local Cultural Strategy i.e.

“To better integrate culture into their overall development plans...use their cultural assets and services to help boost the local economy and encourage local regeneration...delivering improved quality of life and encourage the involvement and participation of all parts of the community.”

(Janet Anderson, Culture Minister, DCMS 2000)

Local Cultural Strategies are not a statutory duty although the DCMS expects all local authorities in England will prepare a Local Cultural Strategy (LCS). A LCS is seen as having many benefits. According to the DCMS, they give clear rationale for supporting activities, they advocate the benefits of cultural activities, they bring culture centre stage in the business of local authorities, they provide synergy with the work of central government and national and regional agencies, they help deliver Best Value, they promote partnerships, they set a framework for performance review and they act as a lever for gaining funding from external agencies (DCMS, 2000).

Cultural strategies will have to include an agenda, direction, key choices, allocating resources and monitoring activities related to sports, parks, museums, libraries, the built heritage, the countryside, and arts and tourism.

‘A Local Cultural Strategy should be guided by a vision of how the local area and its culture may develop over the life of the strategy. It will cover a wide span of cultural activities in a specific geographical area, taking into account the cultural activities of the voluntary and private sectors and other public agencies and making reference to those natural and man-made features which help to shape the cultural identity of the local authority area and localities within that area.’

(DCMS, 1999)

The context of Local Cultural Strategies is within DCMS and DETR aims and objectives, incorporating the themes of quality, access and raising standards, as well as national 'cross-cutting' agendas to do with social inclusion, environmental sustainability, regeneration and lifelong learning. They should also relate to the national and regional strategies of various agencies. As noted, the key agencies as regards live entertainment are the RTBs, RABs, RDAs and RCCs. At a local level the Local Cultural Strategy should link with other plans and strategies including the local authority's Corporate Strategy and Best Value Performance Plan, the Local Development Plans and Regional Planning Guidance, the Annual Library Plan, and individual service plans and Best Value reviews. The production of an Action Plan is strongly recommended in order to focus the strategy and direct it towards its implementation; set the framework for monitoring; and help establish a review mechanism.

The two most common approaches to Local Cultural Strategies are service-specific - examining each service in turn - and thematic, tackling overarching themes such as social inclusion, regeneration, and relating all services to the major themes. Given the inclusive nature of LCSs, the thematic approach is likely to be favoured.

It is suggested by central government that it is only local authorities that can develop Local Cultural Strategies within the principles outlined. Local authorities have the legitimate leadership role and democratic accountability, regulatory and developmental authority, and are experienced at providing and enabling others to provide cultural services. They also have the organisational structures, or are putting them into place. It is envisaged that a LCS is best put together by a team, not an individual. The process would need to follow a clear strategy development with adequate preparation, including a realistic assessment of the available resources that the authority can put to the development of the Local Cultural

Strategy. There is a general advocacy of the benefits of cultural activities and it is assumed that live entertainment at the seaside will be absorbed into any LCS at seaside resorts. Indeed, in some cases it may be central to the provision of an appropriate mix of cultural activities.

Conclusion

This section has given a review of central government initiatives, and action taken and potential responses by local authorities with regard to cultural services, particularly live entertainment, in the critical decade of the 1990s. It has provided the political background for a further, detailed, primary research examination of the position of live entertainment in the economic, social and cultural activities of English seaside resorts at the beginning of the 21st century. The three sections of this chapter have shown that resorts have clearly been experiencing changes in terms of their economic fortunes, image, visitor attitudes to culture and live entertainment and the roles that government expects of seaside local authorities. How local authorities have and are responding to these changes at the beginning of the twenty-first century is essentially the objective of this research and precisely how such research will be undertaken will be outlined in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE RESEARCH PROGRAMME

Section One: Research Methodology

Preamble

This aim of this study is to ‘examine the changing nature and role of live entertainment provision at English seaside resorts, with particular reference to the 1990s and the beginning of the 21st century’. As stated in chapter one, to achieve this aim it will be necessary to meet two objectives i.e.

- To identify the changing character and management of live entertainment provision at English seaside resorts, with particular reference to the 1990s and the beginning of the 21st century, and
- To establish the extent to which, and the ways in which, key factors have influenced this change.

The first three chapters have provided the context for this study. In chapter one it was suggested that there would continue to be a role for live entertainment as an integral part of cultural experiences at seaside resorts. The role of local authorities was identified and it was suggested that local government would continue to play a crucial role in such a situation. Chapter two reinforced the important historical role of both live entertainment and local government in the development of English resorts. Chapter three addressed in detail three interlocking influences that have precipitated the current situation. It identified and tracked these factors during the critical period of the 1990s, reiterating and reinforcing the themes upon which the study is based. Chapter three has shown how these three influential aspects are

interlinked but has also distinguished the role of the local authority as the main 'instigator' of live entertainment policy at the seaside.

The three key areas of influence will thus need to be investigated from the perspective of the current providers of the majority of live entertainment at English seaside resorts i.e. the local authorities. The primary investigation for this study necessarily concerns the contemporary views of councillors and council officers in relation to the three areas of analysis. The framework for setting up a programme of contemporary research into live entertainment at the seaside must clarify the role of local authorities. No other body has the same degree of self-interest, the organisational potential, and the (quasi) legal and moral obligations to influence local leisure and live entertainment provision. Local government is the catalyst for cultural activities of the 'performing arts' type at the seaside. It is suggested that the local government role associated with economic, cultural and governmental changes identified in this study is pivotal. Local authorities have a high degree of self-interest in regeneration. In any case, no other organisation has the 'Best Value' obligation to provide appropriate cultural activities for residents and tourists alike. However, very little is known about how local authorities are approaching these issues.

The precise research methods to help explain local government operations and decision-making processes in relation to live entertainment will be detailed below. Underpinning such methods is a recognition of particular inter-relationships between the three key areas of analysis, but all seen from the perspective of local government. Local government is central to the debate and the reason why local government sources are the key to useful primary research. Statements have been made about the high degree to which local authorities at the seaside have traditionally been involved in live entertainment provision. This involvement continues to the present time and is most obviously demonstrated by the fact that

the Hughes and Benn survey of 1994 (the most recent attempt to survey *all* seaside authorities) suggests local authorities are the *only* providers of theatres and concert halls in 53.3% of (British) seaside resorts. There are only 13.3% of resorts containing theatres and concert halls where the local authority is *not* providing any venues. Even this does not mean they are not concerned with live entertainment policy. Recent work confirms the very significant role of local authorities in owning and controlling a high proportion of the live entertainment venues at English seaside resorts (Hayler, 1999).

The original basis for the need for this study was a belief that live entertainment was an important ingredient in the tourism product at English seaside resorts but its place, significance, perhaps its changing role, had not been sufficiently studied or understood. It was a 'given'. Tourists (and residents) expected it to be provided, whether or not they patronised it. This belief was substantiated. The key writers on the social and economic history of the seaside (Pimlott, 1947; Walvin, 1978; Walton, 1983; Walton and Walvin (eds), 1983) noted the significance of live entertainment in the development of resorts, and although it was rarely mentioned when resorts started to decline, more recent researchers Hughes and Benn (1995, 1996, 1997, 1997a, 1998, 1998a) and Hayler (1999) have indicated the potential continued significance of live entertainment. Concluding an article written in 1996, Hughes and Benn suggested:

'The decline of UK seaside resorts may be due to the failure to provide 'spectacle' and the 'extraordinary' (Urry, 1990) which may, in part, have been found in live entertainment. Consumer tastes may be changing; they are conditioned by television programmes, video games, personal computers, the cinema and theme parks. The response of the providers of entertainment to these factors may have a decisive influence on the well-being of seaside resorts in the UK.

There is thus a need to examine the dynamics of live entertainment provision in the context of the development of the seaside resort...most studies of resorts have considered entertainment only incidentally but the role of that industry in attracting visitors may be pivotal. The providers of live entertainment may have a considerable influence on the future of the UK seaside resorts.'

Hughes and Benn have highlighted the importance of local government – generally the main 'providers of live entertainment' - in the putting together of policy and practice at seaside resorts. It is thus suggested that, following an investigation of the three areas of analysis via secondary sources (chapter three), the main primary, empirical work of this study will concern detailed in-depth interviews with local government practitioners and members at a range of English seaside resorts. Change factors will be discussed but also, crucially, the *effect* of such factors on the provision of live entertainment at English seaside resorts at the beginning of the 21st century. (It should be noted how this approach is a *customer* but not a *consumer* focus. The customer for live entertainment at English seaside resorts is the programmer of the theatre, the consumer is the member of the audience. This limitation will be discussed below, and in chapter eight, particularly with respect to the potential for the subject matter of this thesis to be developed for wider academic enquiry).

The precise research methods chosen will reflect this local authority perspective as well as take account of issues of practicality. Methods must gather new data and opinion about an industry (live entertainment) which is little researched in general terms, as well as poorly represented in literature in relation to English seaside resorts. Nevertheless, it would be the case that most data and literature concerning live entertainment at the seaside would necessarily come from local government sources. It is the local government officers and councillors who are required to deal

with the phenomena associated with changes affecting live entertainment at seaside resorts. The actual research methods employed will also need to critically analyse the implementation of live entertainment policies and practices at the seaside. A contemporary view is not simply an uncritical reportage of the comments of practitioners.

All of this is within a cultural, social, and political framework which is subject to constant change. This must be considered. The views of respondents are within these known factors of change but additionally, often include personal estimates and assessments of the effect of such changes. The research methods, including analysis of the data, must also be capable of establishing commonality/divergence that overcomes personal bias, or generalised comments on the contemporary role of live entertainment at English seaside resorts will not represent typical cases.

The choice of research methods will be fully justified in this chapter. The interlocking nature of this investigation, focused on the role of the local authority, has been confirmed, but will require some flexibility in the interpretation of any single research method as both qualitative and quantitative analysis will be required. This will be explained, but any justification is firstly set within an initial framework surrounding the choice of research methodologies associated with a study of this nature i.e. within the social sciences.

Social research – concepts, context and choices

Research in the social sciences is conducted within accepted and understood research paradigms. The term paradigm can mean different things to different people. Morgan (1979, in Hussey and Hussey, 1997 p47) suggests a paradigm can operate at three different levels:

- At the philosophical level, where it is used to reflect basic beliefs about the world;
- At the social level, where it is used to provide guidelines about how the researcher should conduct his or her endeavours;
- At the technical level, where it is used to specify the methods and techniques which ideally should be adopted when conducting research.

There are two main, contrasting research paradigms that encompass the philosophical, social and technical levels of paradigm analysis. These are positivistic and phenomenological, otherwise known, respectively, as quantitative and qualitative. Although it is acceptable to combine aspects of the two paradigms, especially at the technical level, most researchers are guided by one or the other in their choice of social construct and research methods. Certain generally accepted assumptions, such as the methodological assumption (see below) help explain, but do not necessarily determine, the choice of positivistic or phenomenological practices and techniques. However, issues in a social science research programme related to such an assumption, and the consequent initial analysis of which paradigm the issues being investigated are 'closest to', are helpful as a starting point in seeking an overall research paradigm – the first 'clues' to the crucial technical level i.e. the eventual research methods and techniques.

In a quantitative paradigm reality is objective and independent of the researcher. There are predetermined categories of analysis that can be measured. For the qualitative researcher, 'the only reality is that constructed by the individuals involved in the research situation. Thus multiple realities exist in any given situation: the researcher, those individuals being investigated, and the reader or audience interpreting a study. The qualitative researcher needs to report faithfully these realities and to rely on voices and interpretations of informants' (Creswell, 1994 p6).

In this study, quantitative data (e.g. the acts booked, see Appendix A2) can be 'brought to' the qualitative material. The reality of the qualitative information is grounded in the categories of the entertainment that the participants sanction. Nevertheless, this study requires the (phenomenological) researcher primarily to be the instrument, to uncover the 'reality'.

The direction of a study, the movement towards methods, but, critically, the *process* of (social science) research is contained within the methodological assumption. As applied in this study, this will be within a (largely) qualitative paradigm. The methodological assumption in a qualitative paradigm is inductive. 'Categories emerge from informants, rather than are identified a priori by the researcher. This emergence provides rich 'context-bound' information leading to patterns or theories that help explain a phenomenon' (Creswell, 1994 p7). In this study categories have emerged from preliminary interviews and document analysis, particularly via the pioneering work of Hughes and Benn.

In the methodological assumption samples may be small, possibly over a period of time. 'Confirmation' of critical aspects of the phenomena will be sought from different sources and different methods, verifying such information with techniques such as triangulation (Silverman, 1993; Holliday, 2002). Although the design categories in qualitative research will be identified during the research process, it is generally recognised that certain types of research *methods* naturally sit within the contrasting paradigms. The methods chosen to carry out the research are therefore largely but not exclusively determined by the choice of paradigm – experiments and surveys in a positivistic study; in-depth, perhaps semi-structured interviews and case studies within an analysis from the phenomenological paradigm perspective, but, in this study not excluding some 'verification' of (quantitative) data.

The specific research methods for this study will be fully justified in section two of this chapter but, as at the initial stages of setting up a study 'there are compelling reasons for a single paradigm' (Creswell, 1994 p7), further discussion and justification of the mainly qualitative paradigm, applied to the subject matter of this study, is now entered into.

Live entertainment at the seaside: conceptually, an appropriate topic for qualitative investigation

The need to investigate the contemporary role of live entertainment, including the role of local government in the provision of cultural activities suggests some quantitative bases e.g. numbers of visitors or residents attending a live entertainment event, or the amount of financial support for particular cultural activities. But cultural activities are not always about economics and trends – they are also about aesthetics and cultural 'value'. Live entertainment is provided even when it is known it may not be well attended. Clearly, there needs to be a balance between economics and 'cultural aesthetics'. Qualitative, value-laden judgements apply. Perhaps the importance of a suitable range of cultural activities, including live entertainment, in the cultural life of a seaside location, is about to be recognised and justified via Local Cultural Strategies. Aesthetics might then be more important than economics. In any case, the actual experiences, prejudices, ideology, philosophy and perhaps, the politics of the providers of live entertainment, are likely to be key elements in this investigation.

Everyone has their own view of what is culturally 'worthwhile'. The views of the policy makers/practitioners will be particularly influential and, in this respect, the study is pre-determined to include opinions and prejudices of the decision-makers. However, since April 2000 there has been a means of objectively assessing the

actual outcomes of such value-laden decision-making. This is the British Resorts Association Benchmarking exercise conducted by Hayler (Appendix A2). This quantitative data will be utilised, mainly as a 'check' against the qualitative data, in what is essentially a qualitative investigation. If live entertainment exists, it exists in some degree, and can be numerically measured. Live entertainment at the seaside most obviously exists by the amount in each category e.g. Comedy, or Musical Theatre, at particular locations. This is common, quantitative data that can help in understanding the ways in which selected factors in a situation, including entertainment categories, are structured or interrelated, in importance or precedence. Notwithstanding the information generated via the British Resorts Association Benchmarking exercise, there are no established, universally acceptable, valid, reliable quantitative measures for live entertainment at the seaside. In any case, a scale or quantitative standard that might be suitable in one location may not be accepted elsewhere. There are too many unique local factors that relate to the policies and prejudices of the local decision-makers. Acceptable, agreed outcome measurements have not been developed and tested in this industry so it is appropriate to utilise some quantitative data but rely mainly upon (practitioners) descriptive information about what is happening with regard to cultural activities at a particular locality.

An investigation concerning local government policy and implementation of seaside cultural activities may construct a new theory to explain phenomena, or describe different patterns of behaviour. It may be that the first phase of empirical research for the British Resorts Association (Appendix A2) helps develop some tentative hypotheses that can be tested in subsequent stages, but this seems unlikely and by definition, a 'first phase' implies refinement and development before testing. Further data gathering to inform this would need to be extremely detailed and comprehensive. Perhaps more rigorous guidelines will emerge from this initial

process. Given that the nature of resorts may incline towards uniqueness, it may be that there are few similarities that might be tested via a subset of resorts. However, it should be possible to gather and assimilate basic, mainly qualitative data from a number of typical resorts that can inform further in-depth analysis. Chosen carefully, the analysis of 'the few' might demonstrate sufficient common, useful practices that might be applied elsewhere (with adaptation). Note: If there had been recognised standards in the operation of live entertainment venues at the seaside e.g. agreed, universal performance indicators, then policy decisions could have been assessed against these standardised instruments. This would have introduced the possibility of positivistic methodology, or at least, a more numerate approach.

The issue of live entertainment at the seaside is ripe for discussion. 'What to do with the Theatre/Pavilion/Winter Garden' is controversial and sensitive. The issues surrounding seaside live entertainment are becoming more high profile but the industry is traditionally 'secretive', somewhat closed. For example, the scope for deals is fairly narrow but may be influenced by personal relationships. Certainly, venue managers and programmers often regard deals with agents and producing managements as sensitive information. It may even be that councillors and senior officers are not fully aware of the deals being negotiated on their behalf. In this climate, unobtrusive techniques of investigation are appropriate. Avoiding 'tests' or prescriptive questionnaires, allowing people to speak freely, within a structured discussion, will be appropriate.

With regard to how different local authorities may behave, there is a need to identify and understand the process of the organisation's theory of action. This analysis may be 'bespoke'. It is becoming clear that local government bodies at the seaside have differing ways of tackling the issue of live entertainment provision. Local authorities' procedures and documents related to live entertainment and cultural

activities need to be analysed but such evaluation should be goal-free and responsive to the emerging ideas and theories. The general process for this study requires a personal touch to gain a personal insight and help explanation. It requires a certain degree of empathy and even, perhaps, some commonly agreed value-judgements, or at least (supposed) empathy with views being expressed. Again, qualitative enquiry is more suited to such an approach.

Gathering data and information from local government sources

It has been suggested that live entertainment will be part of a local cultural strategy at English seaside resorts. It is noted that the local authority is the body required to produce this, so local authorities will play a key role in the provision and development of future live entertainment. It is anticipated that, despite obvious limitations, local government as the key source and focus will provide sufficient knowledge to inform the process of understanding tourism/resort changes, cultural trends, changes in the live entertainment industry, and the role of the local authorities in all of this. However, it may be that local government is not fully aware of the complex issues and changes, and an investigation *only* from a local authority perspective requires further justification.

Research conducted via local government councillors and officers will depend on the degree of co-operation and openness of the information providers. Such research might be expected to reveal the actual policies regarding cultural activity and live entertainment. The committees, the structures, the implementation of central government directives, the policy towards entertainment venues (over time), and perhaps, the views of residents and other interested parties, will also be available. If the research were sufficiently comprehensive, it would reveal differences around the country in terms of organisational structure, culture, and

political ideology, but also, perhaps, commonality. This is not an over optimistic view of the information obtainable from local authorities. Local government bodies are the only groups who *have* to deal with the issue of live entertainment at the seaside. They should have a practical, historical and contemporary view. They should have documentation – the minutes of committees, and internal and consultancy reports - directly involved with leisure/entertainment and with wider council policy and strategy.

It is an interesting investigative situation when comparatively little is known about the (live entertainment) industry, or how it interrelates to cultural trends and cultural strategies. In this case, it is the responsibility of the researcher to create the full picture and judge the effect of applying industry-specific information to a particular case. The research methods should therefore include the means by which the nature and peculiarities of the live entertainment industry might be freely discussed with members and councillors. This will require techniques that allow discussion and analysis of the industry, by allowing new and potentially sensitive issues to emerge - issues such as the perceived problems of supply, the changing role of the agent and the (comparatively new) predatory nature of the private sector.

A range of research methods which includes an assessment of the economic status and fortunes of seaside resorts, live entertainment industry changes, and changes in cultural trends, *as well as* an in-depth analysis of the role of local government, would be sufficiently comprehensive to answer the aims and objectives of the study. In particular, it would deal with the key points emerging from the second area of analysis (cultural changes) but also demonstrate how these are inherently part of the two other areas. The interlocking nature of the three areas would be confirmed including how changes in one (or more) can materially affect the others. This could be achieved via interviews with informed-source local government practitioners.

This approach will ensure the providers are aware of the need to monitor and anticipate cultural trends affecting the live entertainment industry and developments in the industry itself. There is little doubt that there are sufficient significant changes in cultural behaviour (both people in general, and tourists) to warrant an investigation into cultural trends and patterns, and how culture may consequently affect the future prosperity of seaside locations. Cultural change related to leisure activities will have a direct effect on the live entertainment industry. This will be a general effect across common cultural boundaries and where cultural similarities exist, but it will be more marked at the seaside where live entertainment is traditionally perceived as an integral part of the experience of visiting a resort. New Labour's cultural policy, but also any policies for regeneration of seaside resorts, will be major influencing factors in the provision of live entertainment. Closely associated with this is the unknown effect of Best Value on cultural services at local government level. There will be further central government policies that will affect live entertainment provision at the seaside, and these can be effectively assessed from a comparison of the reaction and implementation policies of the local authorities. Data and information gathering to deal comprehensively with these three areas is an ambitious programme but can be accommodated by a clear focus on the crucial issues and the key 'players'. The main issues and sub-issues identified via chapter three are listed in Table 4.1 (p137).

Table 4.1 The main issues, and sub-issues relating to the changing nature and role of live entertainment at English seaside resorts in the 1990s

Main Issue	Sub-issues
Changing economic status and fortunes of seaside resorts	Tourism in the resort Live entertainment in the tourist decision-making process/part of the tourist offer Issues of infrastructure (including theatres)
Changing cultural trends	Effect on seaside tourism Effect on live entertainment (demand-side)
The live entertainment industry	Industry structure and method/management Supply-side issues The effect of technology/audiences
Changing central government policy	Policy towards tourism/resorts Policy towards culture/performing arts Policy towards public/private ownership
Local government	Ideology/philosophy/policy – particularly tourism, culture, live entertainment, financial Structure Key staff

A detailed analysis of the literature review themed around these points translates them into a more comprehensive list of issues and sub-issues (Appendix C). An investigation on the basis of Table 4.1 *and* Appendix C, but logically (re) grouped into the three key areas of change, provides the required basis for broad and supplementary questions (Appendix E) to meet the research objectives. These questions would then be posed to local government officers and members. This would keep the focus of the study within the policies and practices of the main providers of live entertainment at English seaside resorts *and* grouped into the three key areas of the study. Informed-source interviews with local government practitioners at a selection of seaside resorts are the key to establishing the attitudes, policies and actions of the key providers of live entertainment. The actual experiences, prejudices, ideology and philosophy of the people who sanction, provide and control most of the live entertainment at the seaside (local government employees/councillors) are crucial to an examination of the changing nature of live entertainment provision at English seaside resorts. The particular research methods

to provide appropriate data and information to meet the aim and objectives of the study, via these practitioners, will now be more fully explored.

Section Two: Research Methods

Conceptual research issues and methodology (the general approach to the research process) have been discussed. The actual methods will now be explained - the precise means of gathering data and information that will meet the aim and objectives of the study.

The research initially required a thorough secondary research investigation of the past and recent history of live entertainment at English seaside resorts. This investigation helped answer 'how' things had come about. This has been achieved in stage one of the justification of the overall process adopted (see Table 4.2). This descriptive stage was designed to examine the history of the changing nature of live entertainment at English seaside resorts, and it was necessary to explore how far, historically, live entertainment had been regarded as an integral, essential part of the seaside experience. Stage one was also designed to suggest key themes for deeper investigation.

Stage two moved the research from description to analysis. It provided a view of the situation in more recent times, with a focus on the 1990s and the beginning of the 21st century. Stage two included a process of content analysis of critical documentation but also interviews with 27 officers and members of local authorities at 7 English seaside resorts. The key to setting up stage three i.e. synthesis of stage two and stage three material, would be three interconnected, but chronologically sequential, fundamental underpinning research tools investigated at stage two (see Table 4.2 p140), along with the 'new' interviews. The three research

tools were the pioneering work of Hughes and Benn in the early to mid 1990s, the preliminary interviews with practitioners conducted by Hayler in 1998 and the Policy Studies Institute paper 'Live Entertainment at the Seaside' (Hayler, 1999). As noted, whilst there had been a considerable amount written regarding cultural activities at seaside resorts, and central and local government policies related to resorts in the recent past, there was very little that had been written on the specific topic of live entertainment at the seaside. A discussion focused on the work of Hughes and Benn, and Hayler (alongside 'generic' seaside documentation), *along with* the 'new' interviews would provide a solid basis to move to stage three of the research

Stage three primarily concerned the synthesis of informed-source, in-depth interviews located within particular cases. The choice of cases also usefully provided a means of quantitatively 'checking' the qualitative material, as they were all members of the British Resorts Association Benchmarking exercise i.e. all providing recent standard performance data. They also provided further resort-specific and generic documentation as, prior to the interviews, respondents had been asked to provide particular documents related to live entertainment at 'their' resort. More than ninety resort-specific documents were received, many of which were useful in clarifying, justifying and verifying interviewee responses. This gave significant 'substance' to the qualitative material. It could be 'matched' with the qualitative data. Additionally, quantitative outcomes could be compared with stated policies and practices. In this way, triangulated research had been employed i.e. a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods attempting to 'pinpoint the value of a phenomenon more accurately by sighting in on it from different methodological viewpoints' (Brewer and Hunter, 1989 p17). The emphasis was clearly on the qualitative responses of the interviews but there was a means of verifying particular responses. Stage three was progressive but also integrative in as much as synthesis took place with stage two documentation i.e. particular issues

suggested by stage two were integrated into the primary research. The stages of the research are illustrated in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2 Research Questions, associated research methods and justification.

Research Questions	Research Tools	Justification
1. What is the historical nature of the provision of live entertainment at English seaside resorts?	STAGE ONE: description Literature related to seaside resorts including specific articles on the history and traditions of live entertainment at the seaside.	Serves as the basis for the aim of the study – to examine the <i>changing nature</i> of live entertainment at English seaside resorts. To some extent, the ‘how’ things came about.
2. What are the recent key factors of change affecting the provision of live entertainment at English seaside resorts?	STAGE TWO : analysis Content analysis of: (a) 8 papers by Hughes and Benn (b) 8 semi-structured interviews by Hayler (1998) (c) PSI paper by Hayler (1999) <i>And</i> key ‘generic’ documentation, e.g. ETB/Audit Commission	The clarification of the key themes, with ‘clues’ as to ‘why’ things came about. Also a deeper understanding of key factors related to more recent times.
3. How are the key factors (and associated underlying factors) influencing the operation, nature and control of live entertainment at English seaside resorts, and to what extent are these factors unique, or part of a wider phenomenon?	Case study interviews: in-depth interviews with 27 officers and members at 7 resorts.	Resort-specific (and generic) documentation. Resort-specific quantitative performance data. Case study interviews used to elicit more detailed insight into the effects of key changes at particular locations.
4. Is there evidence of commonality in provision, not only in terms of common issues but also in terms of practices?	STAGE THREE: synthesis Integration of resort-specific documentation, quantitative performance data and interview material.	Interview transcripts (in addition to resort-specific and generic documentation), accessing practitioner perspectives of the key factors which have influenced decision-making at the local level.
5. What is the <i>effect</i> of three key change factors on the contemporary role of live entertainment at English seaside resorts?	Synthesis of stage two material – documentation and interviews.	Synthesis of material allows confirmation, clarification and conclusions to be drawn.

It can be seen from Table 4.2 that there was logical progression through the three stages of the research, from the descriptive and analytical stages through to synthesis of previous analysis, and synthesis of new quantitative but particularly, qualitative material. The descriptive and analytical stages had incorporated an 'audit' of (1999) live entertainment at the seaside i.e. the Policy Studies Institute article (Hayler, 1999), as well as the earlier quantitative surveys of Hughes and Benn (1994; 1997a) so there was confidence that stage three would be sufficiently grounded in both factual and qualitative material.

The final stages of the research (questions four and five), entailed, as noted, the synthesis of 27 in-depth, informed-source interviews with members and council officers, along with documentation supplied by these individuals, and resort-specific quantitative performance data. The research had moved from the macro level, including and incorporating an 'audit' of all seaside theatres, to the micro level involving a greater insight into key participant beliefs, perceptions and actions. In particular, these required in-depth interviews to elicit subjective viewpoints and opinions. Layder (1993) describes this as the 'realist approach', reflecting an approach which allows the researcher to deal with different complex levels or dimensions pertinent to a study in conjunction with one another. In order to answer the aim and objectives of the study a structured process had been devised that necessarily posed four further questions (Questions Two to Five, Table 4.2). These were clearly progressive in as much as they had to be dealt with in order to move through the stages, but complementary in re-affirming the underlying themes of the work. They were not mutually exclusive e.g. research questions three and four would involve some repetition, but with progression. The qualitative nature of the study would be demonstrated by the interviews in stage two. Work prior to this was designed to form general and specialist themes and questions in order to elicit pertinent qualitative comments from interviewees. Only then could judgements be

made regarding the contemporary role of live entertainment at English seaside resorts - judgements that would come from the key factors of change, as revealed by the key practitioners/customers of live entertainment at the English seaside.

Research methodologies have been explored and the specific research methods explained. These have dealt with the context of the study but not explained the parameters of the setting (Layder 1993 p8). The setting was typical English seaside resorts providing council-run live entertainment at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Resorts selected for investigation

Although this investigation cannot be strictly considered a case study investigation i.e. requiring an extensive examination, usually of a single instance, of a single unit of analysis, the choice of (largely) qualitative, summative evaluation leans towards a study that requires in-depth analysis of a few particular cases, selected purposefully. Nevertheless, case study methodology will be useful in the mainly qualitative approach of this work in as much as it would help describe current practice. It may possibly result in illustrating new and innovative practice but this would be a consequence of the investigation, not the primary purpose. It does not seek to implement or evaluate new procedures or use theory to understand what is happening – except, perhaps, where general concepts might apply to a comparable situation. Each case may possess distinct, distinguishing criteria, but there is a need to establish any commonality or differences that may exist between resorts that cluster together. This does not lessen the importance of the earlier comment regarding the unlikely applicability of one set of (seaside entertainment) factors to another resort. However, resorts are often perceived as similar, within an accepted 'definition' of resort typology. Examples would be Eastbourne/Southport ('genteel',

older visitors, quiet), or Southend/Margate/Blackpool ('brash', high percentage of day visitors, a bit 'run-down'). The Eastbourne/Southport example illustrates the problem of comparability e.g. by, say, local authority designation – Eastbourne is a Borough Council; Southport is within the Metropolitan Authority area of Sefton. Different political controls and priorities apply.

The most common criteria for classifying/categorising resorts relates to the size of the resident population. There are the 'big seven' with populations in 1999 of approximately 90,000 or more. These comprise Southend-on Sea (175,300), Brighton (163,700), Bournemouth (153,000), Blackpool (150,000), Torbay (112,000), Worthing (98,210) and Southport/Birkdale (89,400). The one large resort in this study is Bournemouth.

There is a 'cluster' of middle-size resorts (about twelve) with resident populations of between approximately 33,000 at Bognor Regis to 80,000 at Eastbourne. This group, by population, is the 'top twenty' (see Table 4.3) and includes such different locations as Felixstowe, Hastings, Great Yarmouth and Margate. Five of the 'case study' resorts in this study (Bournemouth, Eastbourne, Weston-super-Mare, Margate, and Scarborough) are within the top twenty, four of them are middle-size resorts.

Table 4.3 Population of English seaside resorts, 1999, the 'top twenty'

	Rank by population in 1999	Population in 1999
Southend-on-Sea	1	175,300
Brighton	2	163,700
Bournemouth	3	153,000
Blackpool	4	150,000
Torquay	5	112,000
Worthing	6	98,210
Southport / Birkdale	7	89,400
Eastbourne	8	80,000
Weston-super-Mare	9	80,000
Hastings	10	76,000
Weymouth	11	70,000
Margate	12	52,000
Clacton-on-Sea	13	50,000
Great Yarmouth	14	49,830
Folkestone	15	45,490
Scarborough	16	43,080
Ramsgate	17	40,080
Bexhill	18	40,000
Felixstowe	19	35,000
Bognor Regis	20	33,910

Source: Hayler, 1999 p73.

The majority of English seaside resorts (approximately 80) are quite small (Shaw and Williams, 1997 pp 27-29), perhaps *averaging* 10 – 12,000 people, or more, for example, Ventnor (7000), Hunstanton (4,500), but also Skegness (15,000) and Whitby (12,850). The two 'small' resorts in this study i.e. below 15/16,000 are Skegness and Hunstanton (see Table 4.4).

A case-study *approach* must relate to relatively small samples. Consequently, any situation selected needs to be information-rich. It must also be accessible, both in the physical sense and in the willingness of councillors and officers to engage in the study. Purposeful sampling can be applied but must not select extreme cases if part of the rationale is to look for commonality when seeking to improve understanding,

or to suggest tentative hypotheses. A critical case is not the same as an extreme case. A critical case simply encompasses the interesting, 'critical' issues. Stratified, purposeful sampling would aid greater understanding in an industry/situation such as the one under investigation, where there are clusters of above-average, average and below-average cases, according to common data from the British Resorts Association (BRA) – both the Benchmarking exercise and BRA documentation (Fact Pack(s), British Resorts Association, 2000 and 2001). This is the situation in this study, as there are well-understood and accepted criteria for distinguishing resorts one from another, but the most common is grouping by resident population. It might be possible to include representatives of each 'group' but a major restriction on choice was whether the resort was a member of the British Resorts Association Benchmarking consortium *and* (given the local government perspective) whether the local authority was owning, operating and managing the theatre(s).

As previously noted, there were statistics relating to the British Resorts Association Benchmarking consortium (Appendix A2) that could usefully be employed. These could give a quantitative basis to responses from interviewees i.e. not rigorous triangulation, but a 'check' on qualitative data, so selected cases would have to come from this group. These statistics included performance data from the year April 2000 – March 2001. As the interviews would be conducted during the summer of 2001, these figures would be the most recent available.

Given the comments above on accessibility/willingness to be involved in the study (including the 'release' of documentation), key individuals at the resorts in the Benchmarking group (12 resorts, 13 theatres) personally known to the researcher were approached. Llandudno and Porthcawl excluded themselves by being non-English. Of the remaining 10 resorts, 7 responded positively i.e. Bournemouth, Eastbourne, Hunstanton, Margate, Scarborough, Skegness, and Weston-super-

Mare. Judged by resident population size, as noted, there is one 'large': Bournemouth. There are four 'medium': Eastbourne, Margate, Scarborough and Weston-super-Mare. There are two 'small': Skegness and Hunstanton. Statistics related to population, including rank and (population) growth rates for the seven selected resorts are given in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4 Population change in seven English seaside resorts, 1911-1999

Resort	Rank in 1911	Population in 1911	Population in 1951	Population in 1999**	Percentage growth 1911-1999	Rank in 1999*
Bournemouth	2	78764	144845	153000	94.3	3
Eastbourne	8	52542	57821	80000	52.2	8 (Joint)
Weston-super Mare	18	23235	40396	80000	244.3	8 (Joint)
Margate	17	27085	42512	52000	91.9	12
Scarborough	12	37201	44810	43000	15.8	16
Skegness	75	4286	12539	15000	249.9	75
Hunstanton	92	2511	3419	4500	79.2	92

Source: Table adapted from Shaw and Williams (1997)

*According to the 116 'places with strong pretensions to seaside resort status' (Shaw and Williams, 1997 p26).

**These 'rounded' figures are from the British Theatre Directory (1999) used by Hayler (1999) for seaside towns that contain at least one council-run and managed theatre

Clearly, distinguishing resorts by population size, although common, is somewhat arbitrary, so must not necessarily be considered the crucial feature in policy making. Perhaps the political 'colour' of the council would prove to be a common factor in political initiatives, or the proximity of a rival resort, and these aspects were considered. However, the necessity for the resorts studied to be in the benchmarking group and for key individuals to be prepared to talk openly

determined the selection. The seven resorts cannot be regarded as representative of all resorts but they do reflect the three-size typologies and could be regarded as a range of typical situations. The location of the seven resorts is given in Figure 4.1. Brief details of each resort, including details of the particular theatre in each location that provided the British Resorts Association quantitative benchmark data are given in Appendix A1. These details should be consulted for a 'rounded view' of each of the locations.

Figure 4.1 Map of England with seven resorts identified



Issues to be investigated

Regarding the main issues to be investigated at each resort, as previously noted there were common factors emerging from the literature review and the preliminary interviews with Hayler (1998), linked and categorised according to three themes (see Table 4.1, Appendix C, and below). These translated into the research

questions (Appendix E). There was confidence that the documentary analysis at stages one and two of the research (Table 4.2) had been sufficiently rigorous to maintain a focus on the key issues, and associated sub-issues of the study. The guidance towards consistency of categorising documentary evidence into key issue areas was the preliminary interviews of 1998. This qualitative data had been distilled into broad areas. These areas were confirmed and developed by the documentary evidence, but enriched by comments from the practitioners interviewed in 1998. A few comments and sample quotes from the 1998 interviewees are included in Appendix B. These usefully illustrate, enrich and confirm the comparatively few *key* issues that concern industry practitioners. However, categorisation of the documentary analysis was guided but not dictated by the preliminary interviews. At stage two of the research (Table 4.2) these comments and quotes, linked to the literature review (stage one, and parts of stage two) were developed into three broad areas, with detailed questions in each area (see below and Appendix E). This was still consistent with the interviews and documentary evidence associated with the first two stages but demonstrated that there would also be unique situations: each resort is unique. There would also be issues, common or unique, identified by the interviewees that applied particularly to certain individuals at certain resorts. In such ways, the study would be moving from the macro indicators identified in the early chapters to these specific issues, modified and applied to particular cases, towards a micro view. The most appropriate method to gather the qualitative data at the micro level would be informed-source, in-depth semi-structured interviews.

Gathering the qualitative data: informed-source, in-depth, semi-structured interviews

The choice of informed-source, in-depth, semi-structured interviews relates to this being, essentially, a qualitative study directed at various local government

practitioners. It was considered important to interview different levels of officers, from the director of the relevant directorate, to operational people. The preliminary interviews of 1998 had indicated that many of the views regarding changes that affected live entertainment at the seaside were common. It had also revealed interesting differences between the official levels of people interviewed. Interviewees at different levels had common, but also some different views. No comparisons were made within the same resort, as would be the case with the deeper investigation. However, potential commonality and differences of opinion between levels and between resorts could be established by interviewing a range of people at different levels in the same local authority, and people of the same level in different authorities.

The officer responsible for programming, often acting also as the theatre manager, was considered an essential part of the interview process. Their responses were the ones most likely to directly relate to the actual events put on. They would be close to the agents, the audience, the acts. They would have the day-to-day operational view. It was necessary to interview an officer at director level. They could supply the strategic view. These were the individuals ultimately responsible for live entertainment at the resort. In most councils there is also a level between the director and the programmer/theatre manager. The title at this level is 'Head of' e.g. Leisure and Operational services, at Scarborough, or Arts and Heritage at Eastbourne. These people are between the strategic and the operational and might provide an interesting 'mix' of views including, perhaps, insight into the 'high' versus 'low' arts debate.

At least one council member i.e. the individual(s) responsible for the relevant (live entertainment) committee would be needed for the 'political' viewpoint. These conditions were met at all seven resorts, and although Hunstanton provided only two

interviewees due to a late withdrawal, one of these 'doubled-up' as the officer formally responsible for both the division (Head of Division) and the programming. Additionally, at Skegness the council structure dictated that the strategic and the operational role of Tourism, Arts (including live entertainment) and Public Relations would be the responsibility of a single individual (see Appendix D for details of interviewees). Twenty-seven interviews were conducted during the spring/summer of 2001. Each interview was planned to be between 45-60 minutes but some overran the hour by as much as 12 or 13 minutes. The shortest was 51 minutes.

The time allowed for each interview reflected the requirement for questions to be open-ended, with occasional probes to explore answers in more depth. Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were particularly appropriate, as recommended by Easterby-Smith et al (1991), in relation to:

'...understanding the construct that the interviewee uses as a basis for his or her opinions and beliefs about a particular matter or situation...the subject matter being confidential or commercially sensitive...the interviewee may be reluctant to be truthful about this issue other than confidentially in a one-to-one situation.'

These conditions particularly applied when discussing the same questions with officers who work in a strict hierarchy, and with members who may have different political agendas.

There was some overlap with regard to different interview typologies (Saunders et al, 1997 p211) but the interviews can be regarded as structured i.e. the questions were pre-determined. The questions to be covered (not the themes) varied from interview to interview according to the (pre-judged) expertise of the interviewee (see Appendix D). Additionally, there was the need to vary the order of questions

depending on the flow of the conversation. This placed the interview technique in the semi-structured category. These types of interviews are recorded by note taking, or tape recording. As a full, accurate record of all conversations was required, tape-recording (with each interviewee's permission), was employed.

The interview questions

Main issues and sub-issues for investigation have been initially identified and then codified within chapter three. Table 3.1, for example, indicated certain issues to be followed up related to the first area of analysis. This process provided the main and sub-issues that would need to be investigated to achieve the aims and objectives of the study. This was further developed by re-visiting the early work of the study e.g. stages one and two produced five main issues across the three key areas of influence (Table 4.1). A further analytical procedure resulted in a more detailed version of Table 4.1, as illustrated in Appendix C.

The next process was to group the main issues (with their sub-issues) into the three main areas of the primary investigation. It was then possible to construct and verify the precise questions to be asked. As noted, the themes and questions for this study had emerged from the literature review and preliminary interviews. These broad areas have been discussed in the early chapters of this study i.e. changes to do with tourists and the seaside; changes to do with cultural activities, including live entertainment; changes relating to central and local government policies and practices. These could be turned into 'broad' questions, applicable to all interviewees (see Appendix E for the actual questions asked).

Each interviewee was asked to respond to all the 'broad questions' in each sector i.e. seven for area one, three for area two, and six for area three. There then

followed a series of supplementary questions (in numbers, seven, eleven and ten respectively for each area) designed to highlight specialist knowledge i.e. certain of these supplementary questions were only asked of a certain level of officer. Not all of these supplementary questions were posed to council members. Many of the supplementary questions had been suggested by the preliminary interviews of 1998. They were the common points that emerged from talking to an individual at a particular officer level and a 'reconciliation' of the major points that emerged from the pioneering work of Hughes and Benn. Additionally, seven related questions (see Appendix E) were asked in a particular format that would allow development and further comment relating to key aspects of the two seminal Hughes and Benn surveys (1994; 1997a). These key aspects had also been highlighted by the respondents in the preliminary 1998 interviews.

Although no council members/portfolio holders had been interviewed in 1998, a judgement was made as to which of the supplementary questions would be suitable for the member/portfolio holder to answer. Nineteen from twenty-eight were selected. Technical/operational matters were the questions that were excluded.

The total number of questions for each area of analysis was roughly the same i.e. 14, 14, and 16. In each of the three areas of analysis, allowance was made for a 'catch-all' question. Additionally, the final question of the interview process (applicable to all) asked 'Do you have any further comments you would like to make?'

The Bournemouth interviews were essentially the 'pilot' although there was confidence in formulating answerable questions due to the questions having partly arisen from, and in response to, earlier (1998) discussions. None of the questions at that time had required much explanation. None of the questions in 2001 needed

to be fundamentally altered. Interviewees did not ask for detailed explanation of the questions (but see below, related to issues surrounding the British Resorts Association benchmark analysis). Four questions for the second area of analysis were usefully amalgamated into three, as two of the original questions appeared to be too similar in the respondent's mind. (This occurred at the Bournemouth 'pilot' but was tested in the same format at the second resort (Margate) to ensure it wasn't a 'Bournemouth problem', before being adjusted. It did not affect the results as the refined model was adopted in the write-up).

Notwithstanding the need to amalgamate two questions, it did seem as if the preliminary interviews of 1998 had helped formulate straightforward questions. Interviewees understood all the questions and freely commented, although there was some ignorance of the British Resorts Association Benchmark figures, particularly amongst members/portfolio holders. This required the researcher to briefly explain the benchmark purpose and interpret the figures. In all cases, this brief explanation then allowed the interviewee to comment.

Analysis of the qualitative data

The interviews were tape-recorded. Permission had been given and the advantages of a permanent, accurate, unbiased record, with the possibility of being able to use direct quotes outweighed the time required to transcribe the tape (Saunders et al 2000 p262). Notes were made during the interview, particularly when the interviewee 'wandered' into associated questions. It was later possible to ensure all questions had been covered, without interrupting the flow. There were no occasions where ethical considerations required the tape to be turned off.

The taped recordings were transcribed verbatim, using Microsoft Word software. The coding and categorisation system adopted is described below but a 'dry run' of a similar system had been used to interpret the preliminary interviews in 1998 and had proven appropriate.

Consideration was given to the use of various computer systems for analysing qualitative data such as NUD.IST. Research of the literature on using computer packages to analyse the data was undertaken (Flick, 2002; Coffey and Atkinson, 1996; Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, 1996), and discussions and demonstrations were held with doctorate level colleagues who had utilised NUD.IST and similar packages. It was estimated that the total time involved in inputting the data and coding and categorising via NUD.IST (for this student) was no more than would be taken up by a verbatim input via Microsoft Word, with which the researcher was familiar. After consideration, the 'advice' of Stanley and Temple quoted in Coffey and Atkinson (1996, p17), in relation to an examination of five dedicated packages, was followed i.e. 'qualitative researchers should consider using a good word processing package as their basic analytic aid, and that only if they want to do something that this package cannot do should they then consider using a dedicated package. That is, for many researchers, the facilities provided in a good word processing package will be sufficient to the analysis required.'

It was also felt important to leave the data in its 'rich' context (not automatic coding and searching) so evolving categories could be used and connected in a free style – both via 'Word' and, literally, free hand. The 'free style' is actually a claimed technique for NUD.IST which 'arranges codes in relation to one another, with orders of generality or specificity...one is therefore simultaneously modifying the structure of interrelated codes...the data is not simply a mechanism for searching and retrieving chunks of data; it is also the conceptual framework indicated by the index

system itself (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996 p178). In this system, the analyst must initially specify the relationship with other codes, but this was felt too rigid for a process that was evolving from resort to resort. In short, the indexing in the (NUD.IST) hierarchical tree structure was considered too rigid to accommodate/display any uniqueness that might be associated with bespoke resort situations.

To avoid any initial prejudices and to keep on top of the mass of data, the comments from each resort were transcribed chronologically in relation to the date(s) of visit, rather than waiting for all interviews to be completed and then transcribing different (resort's) responses to the same question. Being familiar with Word meant any initial significance could be noted, e.g. an instantly constructed diagram that connected various aspects of the data. But this was restricted, at this stage, to the data relating to each resort. Verification and justification of initial thoughts and themes could be substantiated later, in the progressive process adopted in identifying common, but also unique, factors related to responses to particular questions at particular resorts.

The next stage in the analysis of the interview material was designed to highlight issues that were common to the general situation relating to live entertainment at English seaside resorts. However, whilst it was apparent straightaway that there were issues common to all resorts, there were also a number of occasions when a particular issue/point was only mentioned at a particular resort. Given the uniqueness of resorts, excluding such comments might emphasise commonality or not adequately explain the differences. The manual system of coding and categorisation adopted for this study picked this up - in the first instance, paradoxically, via the 'unique' point being connected to a common theme. If they were not connected in some way the amount of unique comments were likely to be

unmanageable. The significance of any unique point would be judged later, in relation to both the general situation relating to all resorts in the survey, and to the particular resort that had mentioned the point.

Following transcription, responses were reduced to key words that reflected their essence. The interview text was then scanned for words or expressions, points/phrases/'chunks' of data that related to these key words. These were emboldened in the text. This process was the initial conceptualisation of the data i.e. 'placing a label on discrete happenings, events, instances of the phenomena' (Strauss and Corbin, 1990 p61). There was no particular attempt at this stage to look for common comments across resorts. However, within each resort it was noted where there were similar (emboldened) responses, i.e. the 'label' had multiple references.

The emboldened words/phrases were then reduced into grouped categories (still within each resort). An example would be **RES / qlty / image / B** i.e. comments on the need for quality, related to the issues surrounding resort image (the first area of influence), at Bournemouth. Open coding had been carried out – labels devised by the author had been given to similar units of data (Saunders et al 2000 p397). A list of codes and categories were attached to the text, and these code labels had been placed into broader, related groupings or categories. This was the process of initial categorisation as suggested by Saunders (2000 p341).

The next stage was to check across all resorts for commonality of tentative categories – essentially, a system of secondary categorisation. This was done question by question, but considering all resorts for each question. At this point it became obvious that initial categorisation could be condensed into a relatively few common, secondary categories. Most responses fitted into the reduced categories

already devised or the response directly reflected the Question. A part of the Question (or the (common) answer) could be used to categorise the response. A check was then made of initial categorisation against the secondary categories, and it became clear that the essential common, and the interesting unique, responses were more easily identified via the refined secondary process.

This refinement (axial coding) had 'allowed the most promising categories for further elaboration...enriched by their fit' (Flick, 1998 p181), to emerge, or be confirmed. To ensure most of the original labels were given due consideration, a brief cross-check was carried out i.e. original labels were noted/related to the new categories by a simple system of devising a grid (see Appendix F). This grid itemised concepts or 'bits' that related to the new categories. These 'bits' could be traced back to the initial conceptualisation. Encouragingly, they were largely the original labels placed by respondents on the 'instances of the phenomena', so there was a high degree of confidence that data originally thought to be important had not been ignored. The main point, however, was that common categories had emerged via secondary categorisation and could be considered 'core' to the study (Strauss, 1987 p68). These would be the key to the write up of the qualitative data i.e. following these themes, and then the 'bits' that made up the themes would give the required structure as well as the detail.

All the qualitative data had been reduced to a number of manageable common categories and the strength of each category had been recognised. At the same time, differences/uniqueness had been noted - on the original transcript but particularly in the 'grid' i.e. the 'bits' column allowed for the component parts of emergent categories to be noted, including 'bits' which were resort-specific. Furthermore, the third column of the grid headed 'Mentioned, but more closely related to' (see Appendix F) could accommodate additional comments not related to

noted emergent categories. These comments could be cross-referenced to other areas of the study and picked up as appropriate e.g. the 'Council as the promoter' was mentioned by a Bournemouth respondent when discussing the first question of the second area of analysis. The 'Council as promoter' was more properly related to the third area of analysis, question three, but interrupting/re-directing the question might have lost the flow of the interviewee's response. When the (final) write up took place, the third, 'Mentioned' column was scanned so as to include these comments, as appropriate. The initial write-up concentrated on the 'category' and 'concepts' columns (see Appendix F).

During the analysis, the approach was designed to discriminate between the levels/types of interviewees e.g. did all the Director-level officers say similar things? Did all the members/portfolio holders concur? It soon became apparent that respondents, at a particular level, in general, perceived the situation in similar ways. Noteworthy, different views were highlighted but there was a useful, general consensus about the main issues at a particular officer, or member level.

Following the initial write-up, the original transcriptions were scanned to check that emboldened words (which had led to emboldened, connected aspects of the research) had been adequately incorporated into the text.

The coding and categorisation system adopted was a combination of methods designed to preserve the appropriate theoretical sensitivity and objectivity of the researcher. There was a need to demonstrate a continuous objective view of the subtleties of the meaning of the data, and to understand the data but not allow professional or personal experience to interfere. The conceptual framework of the study (conceptualising the data to suggest theory) had been preserved by conceptualising/categorising the data via selective transcribing. This would become

a framework for action, perhaps even further research. The main phenomena had been allowed to emerge. The (rich) data had been clearly identified and could be commented on, as appropriate.

In addition to the qualitative material, prior to each visit, each resort had been requested to supply various documents. The documents had to be in the public domain. During the visit to each resort further requests for documents/reports/minutes of meetings were made, usually in response to an interviewee mentioning a particular item of interest. Most requests were fulfilled and a total of over ninety documents were eventually received from the seven resorts. A number of these have been utilised throughout chapters five, six, and seven to substantiate claims made, to negate claims made, and to generally illustrate the contemporary situation relating to live entertainment at particular seaside resorts.

Limitations

While the research approach and chosen methods were regarded as appropriate there are two limitations that warrant comment, plus a point concerning the presentation of the primary research. First, the key primary interviews were (deliberately) with the customers/practitioners of live entertainment, not the ultimate consumers. The interviewees were the local authority officers and members, rather than the actual consumers. The results of the study will be based upon the perceptions of how these officers and members believe live entertainment operates, rather than the actual audience/consumer reality. However, in a period of considerable change, it can be argued that the view from the local government perspective is the vital one, including opinions at both the operational and strategic level. This was achieved by interviewing, as a minimum, the programmers and second tier officers at each selected resort, as well as the member ultimately

responsible for live entertainment. The twenty-seven interviews were a fair representation of all levels of authority, as well as being, for a single researcher, accessible and practical. The study is designed to assess the effects of economic, cultural and political change and the result of these effects and the response, in policy terms, to these effects will most obviously manifest itself with the people who own, control and manage live entertainment at seaside resorts. Additionally, local government bodies are the only groups who *have* to deal with the issue of live entertainment and the only bodies that have a practical, historical and contemporary view that can often be confirmed via documentation. Interviewing the officers responsible for such documentation was thus an additional 'triangulation' opportunity and 'confirmation' of respondent views via local authority documentation is provided throughout the synthesis of the primary research (chapters five, six and seven).

The second limitation of the study regarding methodology concerns the seven resorts selected for investigation. The selection criterion has already been discussed in this chapter but the limitation essentially concerns the transferability of findings to other 'typical' resorts. The study was planned primarily as a qualitative study and was not intended to produce a statistically representative sample. The views of the officers and members should, therefore, be regarded as individual cases that highlight the range of views and opinions at the seven resorts, and inform the live entertainment debate. Some of the qualitative material may be extrapolated for resorts outside the study, but each resort is unique.

A further key point of explanation at this stage of the study is in connection with the presentation of the results of the primary research (Part Two, chapters five, six, and seven). There is a close inter-relationship between cultural tourism and its consequent economic effect. This has meant that respondents' views related to the economic effect on resorts of changing *tourist* cultural attitudes to live entertainment

has been best accommodated in the chapter on the changing economic status and fortunes of resorts (chapter five). Cultural tourism and for example, its effect on the tourist decision-making process, is a reflection of cultural change and could be considered an appropriate topic for chapter six, which looks at the changing cultural trends and attitudes relating to live entertainment. However, it is the economic consequences of such cultural change that are crucial to running seaside live entertainment and thus interviewee responses relating to cultural tourism are included in the chapter focused on the economic fortunes of resorts. This 'cross-over' was anticipated from the start of the study and explained in chapter one, pages ten, eleven and twelve. In addition, it was explicitly catered for by the direct question in the primary research that linked the economic importance of live entertainment to various aspects of the resort product. This direct question was asked as the final question in the first primary research section (the changing economic status and fortunes of seaside resorts, see Appendix E) and so results relating to (any) *economic* influence of live entertainment are, as anticipated, absorbed into chapter five.

As far as research methods and analysis were concerned the main problem was to preserve objectivity, as far as possible. It is felt this has been achieved. Setting up the methodology and the analysis to restrict labels of the phenomena to emerge from respondents, and then to be confirmed by respondents via concepts and sub-categories within the labels generally *suggested by them*, has maintained objectivity. It has allowed the respondents to 'speak for themselves' (within agreed parameters), to generate their view(s) of the properties that make up the richness of the qualitative results they 'invented'. The properties, including their dimensional range, are the work of the interviewees. The first, most important job of the researcher was achieved i.e. to report these findings systematically and accurately, to synthesise the qualitative data without attaching value-judgements.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the methodology and justified the research methods, analysis and synthesis that will provide the qualitative and documentary material to achieve the aim and objectives of the study. The key results of the primary research, related to three critical areas of influence affecting the provision of live entertainment at seven typical English seaside resorts, will provide sufficient detail for an examination of the changing nature and role of live entertainment at the beginning of the twenty-first century, from the view of local government. The three areas of influence are economic changes, including the effects of cultural tourism, further cultural changes, and political changes. The results of the primary research, related to these three areas are now presented respectively, as chapters five, six and seven.

**An analysis of the role of live entertainment
at English seaside resorts, with particular reference
to the 1990s and the beginning of the 21st century**

By

Stephen Mark Hayler, MA

Canterbury Christ Church University College

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for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

PART TWO

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PART TWO

Preamble

The aim of this study is to examine the changing nature of live entertainment at English seaside resorts. Live entertainment was once regarded as an essential part of the 'seaside experience' inexplicably linked to the resort product, particularly the tourist offer and this may still be the case. There are many factors that have been influential in affecting the relative position of live entertainment in the 'mosaic' that makes up the tourist offer at the seaside. Three areas of change have been identified as particularly important in relation to the current and potential significance of live entertainment at English seaside resorts. These are the changing economic status and position of seaside resorts; the changes in cultural trends and attitudes related to live entertainment (particularly of the 'seaside variety'); and changes associated with central and local government – to do with tourism and seaside resorts but also cultural activities, including live entertainment.

These three areas of analysis have been described and discussed in the literature review in the first three chapters of this thesis, which, along with chapter four, provided the conceptual framework for this study. Notwithstanding the lack of continuous, substantive data and information in the available literature (in relation to live entertainment), the review included a focus on the 1990s, a period of considerable economic, social, cultural and political change at English seaside resorts. The literature review confirmed the need for a detailed investigation into the recent and current situation related to the three areas of change.

Chapters five, six and seven provide the primary data to achieve the aim and objectives of this study. These three chapters are each themed around one of the

key areas of analysis identified in the literature review. Together they provide a comprehensive discussion of the current situation regarding live entertainment at English seaside resorts. This discussion is based upon primary, qualitative research via informed-source in-depth interviews with council officers and members at seven typical English seaside resorts, and documentation pertaining to these discussions. The interviewees are the practitioners responsible for programming live entertainment. Quotations from these individuals will be used, although it must be remembered that the respondents are the officers and members responsible for live entertainment at the seaside, not the consumers. Recent council generated documentation will be utilised to illustrate and substantiate the qualitative material but, again, this only presents the 'council' view. Limitations of this study were discussed in the debate on research methods (chapter four), and prospects for further research are highlighted in chapter eight.

Part Two of the study will present respondents' views of the changing economic status and fortunes of seaside resorts, changing cultural trends and attitudes, and the changing political context in which change has operated. The intent will be to include the role of live entertainment in all these changes.

Chapter five will explore changes at the seaside with a focus on the recent changing economic status and fortunes of seaside resorts. Historically, the resort product, including live entertainment, has been centred on the tourist, so it is necessary to investigate more closely the future of tourism at English seaside resorts. Any such investigation needs to explore the current role of live entertainment as part of the tourist offer, and its role in the tourist decision-making process. Relevant to the contemporary role for live entertainment will be whether tourists, particularly those who stay for more than four days – 'core market' tourists - decide to visit a resort because of the live entertainment on offer. This will be discussed. Perhaps live

entertainment is more important once a tourist is already staying in the resort but, in any case, it has been established in the literature review that people expect live entertainment to be available whether or not they patronise the shows.

Included in chapter five will be the wider effect of image and character as aspects of the resort 'offer', and how these may impact on the economic status of resorts. An important aspect of the tourist offer at the seaside is the perceived image and character of the resort. This is likely to affect the economic status of resorts, as by definition, a resort is an area that is primarily reliant upon tourists for its economic well-being. People's perceptions of resorts may be influenced by their perception of the live entertainment offered – either separately, or as part of the package of the range of cultural activities. In this respect live entertainment may be an influential factor in resort image and, as noted above, might affect the tourist decision-making process. It might also influence decisions taken by businesses to (re) locate at the seaside, and decisions by individuals (in the past, particularly retirees) to live by the sea.

Chapter six will investigate cultural changes affecting the performing arts, including changes relating to live entertainment at the seaside. Expectations, fuelled by television, have increased. There is a quality issue relating to live entertainment to be explored. Audiences expect more and do not necessarily adhere to the traditional etiquette associated with attending live entertainment performances. This is a cultural trend that must be accommodated. As the seasonal nature of resort entertainment diminishes and people become more familiar with live entertainment found both in provincial theatres as well as at the seaside, the uniqueness of seaside live entertainment is compromised. These are consequences of changes in cultural expectations which reflect problems in supporting traditional seaside acts during difficult times for resorts. This includes the legacy of too many theatres and

thus too many theatre seats at seaside resorts. There are also difficulties of acquiring sufficient quality product in a live entertainment industry that is consolidating. The demography of resorts is changing. More people, usually quite affluent, are retiring to the seaside. Their cultural tastes and political motives must be considered. These issues of cultural change are also addressed in chapter six.

The third main area of primary research is the political context in which the first two changes have occurred. This is the subject of chapter seven. Local authorities provide the vast majority of live entertainment at English seaside resorts. However, they operate within the various legislative, economic and other on-going directives of central government. It is often left to the local authority to interpret central government policy, and in this respect chapter seven will illustrate the resort-by-resort approach to the local practicalities of providing live entertainment at the English seaside. In this interpretation chapter seven examines the differences and similarities of local government organisation and philosophy, and the place of live entertainment provision within this. This assessment will lead to a judgement regarding the likely future involvement of local government in providing live entertainment at English seaside resorts.

The aim and objectives of this study can be met via a synthesis of the discussions in chapters five, six and seven of the main factors of change that affect live entertainment at the seaside at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Further analysis and synthesis of the primary research material will take place in chapter eight which will also draw conclusions on the study, and speculate on the possibilities for further research. But first the initial area concerning the economic status and fortunes of seaside resorts is explored.

CHAPTER FIVE

Live entertainment and the changing economic status and fortunes of seaside resorts

Preamble

It is clear from the discussion in chapter three, section one, that at the beginning of the twenty-first century, general decline at many seaside resorts has led to recognisable changes in their economic status and fortunes. The future for a *resort* location will, by definition, be dependent upon the level and type of tourism. Changes in a resort's economic status and base will reflect changes in tourism and changes in non-tourist activity such as business re-locations and increases in the resident population – particularly, perhaps, retiree's to the seaside. Nevertheless, tourism remains a key aspect of the economic base of seaside resorts.

The role of tourism in the economy of seaside resorts

At the start of the twenty-first century tourism remains a significant part of the economy of seaside resorts. This is despite a period of continuous decline in the share of domestic tourism nights spent at the seaside by UK residents. One of the key themes to emerge from the data was that tourism continues to be the most important economic factor but that patterns of tourism have changed. This is best illustrated by a quotation from a document on Scarborough, and comments from various respondents in Panel 5.1 (p168)

'Long holidays, the core of Scarborough's tourism product have been in decline nationally for a number of years...the traditional main

markets for Scarborough Borough show little potential for future growth.'

(Scarborough Borough Council 2000, p10,11)

Panel 5.1

"What our business is all about here, number one is tourism – leisure tourism and business tourism."

(BD)

"It's tourism definitely, although some people would say it's not that. But everything stems from tourism, everything else grows from that. If we didn't have tourism, it would be dead in this area."

(SkO)

"(It) depends what you mean by tourism. I think as an economy, it's more a day visitor attraction, small breaks, rather than coming for the traditional two-week holiday."

(WD)

"The English holiday has dropped considerably since I came into the industry 23 years ago – then it was definitely a fortnight. This has changed dramatically. It was at its lowest ever 5/6 years ago, seems to be peaking a bit now, mainly with the advent of a second holiday. The British resort tends to be a second holiday rather than the major one. You always have a holiday abroad, then you have a break in Britain."

(SO)

(For key to respondent identity and position in the local authority, see appendix D).

Tourism is the basic economic activity (but see Margate, below) representing considerable sums of money at the resorts in this study. At Scarborough in 1999 the value of tourism to the Borough was £320 million, of which £220/230 million

related to Scarborough town itself (Scarborough Borough Council, 2000). At Skegness: *"Figures are confusing – district rather than just resort but something like 7 million visitors, a huge business, something like £370 million to the economy every year"* (SkH).

Despite these significant total sums of money, it is clear certain changes have occurred in the patterns and spend of holiday-makers. These changes must be recognised and acted upon. The most obvious change at English seaside resorts is in relation to the length of holiday. At the beginning of the twenty-first century resorts can no longer rely on a regular clientele staying for at least one week, possibly two, except the dwindling numbers of traditionalists. The total number of traditional visitors (often elderly, low-income) is still significant, but not sufficient to ensure a future solid economic base founded on long-stay tourism (4+ nights). Increasingly, tourists (some 'traditionalists' amongst them) are opting for short-break holidays of 1-3 nights, or day trips. They are spending more per head per day than those who stay for a week or more. Additionally, the total number of these short-break holiday breaks per year is increasing. This offers a potential growth area, and so marketing opportunities for the English seaside.

The following comments, resort by resort in order of population size, give interviewee and resort-specific documentary evidence on the different approaches at different resorts to the necessity of retaining existing customers, but also acquiring new ones. They also give an overview on the changing economic status and fortunes of particular resorts so far as it relates to tourists, as well as clues to the likely role for live entertainment in relation to changing tourist trends.

The emphasis on core markets

Bournemouth's core markets are conference delegates (particularly off-season), senior citizens in the shoulder months (pre and late summer) and families between the last two weeks of July and the early weeks of September. Bournemouth's assertion that conferences are a key (business) tourist resource is confirmed by the numbers of bed-nights related to conferences – 280,719 in 1999/2000, representing a total delegate spend of £75 million (Bournemouth Borough Council, 2001 p16). 1999/2000 was a record year. According to the Tourism Marketing Strategy (Bournemouth Borough Council, 2000 pS2) Bournemouth's tourist market is diverse, but a buoyant conference trade is likely to be linked to expansion possibilities, it will help develop a year-round market, and be a 'buffer' against significant decline in numbers of other staying visitors.

"Eastbourne has an image for the elderly" (EM) with a core of older tourists (55+) who are being targeted with a sporting theme. Eastbourne's Tourism Study (Eastbourne Borough Council, 1998) confirms a growth in the proportion of staying visitors (1990-1998) aged 55 or more, and a decline in the average length of stay (5.4 nights compared with 6 in 1990). Holidays of 1-4 nights have increased from 35% of staying visits to 51% and day visitors have grown by 59%. These statistics suggest 'expansion' - visitors in 1998 spent £118 million in Eastbourne, £87 million 1990. Eastbourne, like Bournemouth, has a 'diverse tourism product (holiday, conferences, language schools)...a strength which encourages year round business and protects the resort from short-term market changes' (Eastbourne Borough Council, 1998).

Scarborough has retirees (60+) who tend to arrive on coach trips, particularly during the shoulder months (early and late summer). The resort has families during the

height of the six-week season, and are planning to target conference visitors more closely. Both Eastbourne and Scarborough mentioned their desire to target high spending tourists (Eastbourne Borough Council, 2000; Scarborough Borough Council, 2000). By contrast, Skegness is focussed on the working class family market, mainly from the Midlands area. Day visitors are mentioned as 'core' at Skegness (East Lindsey District Council, 2000). Hunstanton's core market (given as day trippers) are people coming from various areas within reasonable travelling distance e.g. the East Midlands, Cambridgeshire, mostly from the lower income groups (Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk, 1999). Weston-super-Mare's core market was said to be from *"the Midlands, London, South Wales, and [socio-economic] category C"* (WH) and Margate has a core of older generation tourists – *"Still is the older generation" (MO2) "The C1's – people who always came to the seaside, and the elderly, who come in coaches" (MM).*

Generally speaking (with the exception of Margate), the respondents representing the resorts in this study are confident that tourism will remain an essential element for economic well-being – if not necessarily economic rejuvenation.

The case of Margate is somewhat different in that respondents were generally pessimistic about tourism as the basis for economic well being in the future. Documentation confirms this: '32% of staying visitors to the region are 65+...our audience is quite simply dying on us...there is a very low proportion of staying family groups...the high proportion of C2DE's makes Thanet a very down market destination...the perception is that the resorts shut down outside of the peak months of May-October' (Thanet District Council, 1998 p25). However, most resorts in this study are clear about wishing to retain tourism as their main economic benefit. Whether they can or not will depend upon a range of factors discussed throughout this study, including the role of live entertainment.

The influence of business investment and residents

Tourism remains the economic basis for most seaside resorts but, during a period of declining long-stay holidays, there have been some moves to decrease economic reliance on tourists. Resorts have always had a steady stream of people retiring to the seaside but, more recently, some resorts have also tried to attract businesses in order to diversify their economic base and 'adjust' their age profile – new commercial activity brings with it younger people and families. At Bournemouth and Weston-super-Mare, for example, there have been successful attempts to attract businesses, particularly from financial services companies such as Chase Manhattan, albeit these are in addition to the main on-going focus on tourists and/or conference visitors.

As noted, all the resorts in this study (except Margate and, to a lesser extent, Weston-super-Mare, see below) continue to be focused on tourism for their economic survival. *"I don't think that it's going to change. I think our number one economic impact is going to be from tourism, both leisure and business" (BD)*. This focus recognises the direct benefits from tourism but also the considerable multiplier effect tourism has on the local economy. This must be considered when attempting to attract non-tourists to the area. The importance of tourists in as much as they benefit local businesses and (some) residents but within a mixed economy that includes tourism rather than emphasises it, are best articulated by respondents at Scarborough, Skegness and Weston-super-Mare (see Panel 5.2 p173).

Panel 5.2

"(Scarborough) Tourism is the main money spinner because of the knock-on benefit it has. Not just the hotels and the shops and the restaurants, but to the builders, the joiners, the carpet suppliers. If we have a good season, which we are doing this year, I'm hopeful that they'll benefit this winter when people invest more money in their premises."

(SM)

"Skegness (economic dependence) is particularly through tourism, although they use the word visitor because it's much nicer. The population of Skeggy is only 17,000 people, which is amazing for one of our top resorts. Skegness is a village, and yet it's a huge resort. On the back of that, the residents are crucial to us because the council's job is looking after the residents. My job is looking after the residents. So if the tourists are bringing the money in for the residents, I have to be careful how I present the whole picture, 'cause it's all about the residents, actually. To get the residents the best quality of life, protect jobs etc. It's clearly through tourism."

(SkH)

"I don't think it's (the mix) changed in recent years. Weston was traditionally a seaside resort – a very large part of its economy but industry, and defence in particular, have also played a part in the local economy. More and more people are living here...tourism has declined during that period but is still quite an important part of the business in Weston, either directly, or indirectly."

(WM)

In the case of Margate - the one resort in the study that has deliberately moved away from tourism - the strategy of Thanet District Council has been to emphasise the run-down aspects of the area and social problems in order to gain grants for recognised status as a development area for industrial as well as tourism regeneration. The idea is to increase business investment and consequently,

residents to the area. If the tourism infrastructure has to be improved to make the area generally more attractive, this would be in tandem with non-tourism economic development rather than as the catalyst.

Excluding Margate, the most pessimistic comments regarding overall economic prospects related to Weston-super-Mare (a medium size resort) and the most optimistic to Hunstanton (a small resort), see Panel 5.3.

Panel 5.3

<i>"I think it's declining."</i>	(WO)
<i>"I think we've declined and I hope we're at the bottom."</i>	(WH)
<i>"At the moment it's stagnating."</i>	(WM)
<i>"Expanding in a small way, certainly not stagnating."</i>	(HH)
<i>"I would hope it's expanding...it's expanding a lot by the day-trippers."</i>	(HM)

Despite any cautious optimism, most respondents believe that their resort is in the stagnation stage of the Butler (1980) resort life-cycle (resort cycle of evolution, see page 59). Development of non-tourist businesses, and attracting residents (particularly at Bournemouth, Eastbourne, Margate and Weston-super-Mare), would

help prevent the decline stage. Nevertheless, tourists remain the focus of attention for the economic well being of most of the resorts in this study.

Tourists decide whether or not to visit a destination from a set of known or perceived criteria such as the physical make-up of the resort, the facilities and amenities provided and projected. Collectively this 'mosaic' makes up the perceived image and character of a location, the tourist offer. This offer accommodates the particular possibilities of live entertainment as a factor in the tourists decision-making process and will be discussed after a brief comment on responses to the prospects of resorts based on resident population size.

The issue of the size of the resort

As outlined in chapter three, various writers and especially Shaw and Williams (1997), have suggested that it is the large and small resorts that may be in the best position to base their future economic prospects on tourism. This is regardless of resort-specific actions. The middle-size resorts are usually the least distinct and will require particular effort to utilise tourism as the continuing economic base. The medium-size category resorts (Eastbourne, Margate, Scarborough, and Weston-super-Mare in this study) may be where the biggest challenge presents itself. 'Some of these can and will survive principally as resorts with tourism as their main industry; others will have to diversify their economic base but will find that tourism can still form an important component of their economy; a few may need to move away from tourism altogether and consider concentrating on the development of alternative economic activity' (English Tourism Council, 2001 p31).

However, it is probably the case that resorts placed in a somewhat arbitrary 'grouped' category, will nevertheless have different prospects, according to unique

local factors. A Director of Tourism and Leisure Services expresses well the uniqueness of each resort:

"My perception is, generally, seaside tourism will continue to decline but there will be some resorts that will survive, and some that will improve their prosperity. But that will depend on the unique factors of those individual resorts."

(SD)

It is apparent that most resorts, regardless of size, will continue to rely on tourism for their economic well-being, but with varying dependency. Tourism remains a significant part of the seaside economy despite a decline in the traditional long-stay market (8 nights or more). Consequently, there is a need to move away from these traditional two-week holidaymakers and towards short-break and day visitors, but also paradoxically to retain core markets, often the 'traditional tourists, who tend to stay longer than non-traditional tourists. This could be achieved but only if suitable strategies are adopted.

There will be a role for live entertainment as part of strategies related to the seaside offer, for business, residents, and tourists. This role is discussed below, particularly in relation to the tourist decision-making process and the possible effect of live entertainment on resort image. Live entertainment has traditionally been focussed on the tourist, particularly if certain seasons can be identified, but comments below emphasise the need to also consider tourists as a 'lever', sometimes to gain residents 'approval'. In this context, live entertainment provision is a flexible part of the resort offer, including the interesting possibility of being part of a cultural offer that might appeal directly and indirectly to local residents, as well as attracting potential residents and non-tourist businesses to the area.

Key factors influencing the tourist decision-making process

As discussed in the literature review (Hughes and Benn, 1994) live entertainment does not usually feature as an important factor in people's decision to visit the seaside (but see chapter six, where some respondents believe particular acts/shows are the main reason why certain people visit the resort). People/tourists expect live entertainment to be provided so do not generally base their decision-making on the range and type of entertainment available (Hughes and Benn, 1995). They don't generally seek out information on live entertainment, particularly in the summer months when they naturally assume a particular type of seaside live entertainment will be available.

The role of live entertainment in the tourist decision-making process is explored below but firstly linked to a discussion of the main factor influencing the tourist decision-making process. This concerns the image and character of seaside resorts.

Although most resorts have a clear focus on tourism as their main economic activity, and tourism is an industry that depends on creating the appropriate image for its customers, generally, most English seaside resorts do not have a good image (English Tourism Council, 2001 p6). The discussion above regarding markets that might be targeted must be linked to the image of the individual resort. A poor image will not attract high spending tourists. A quality image may well attract all types of tourists, some of them high-spending, some of them low. Of course, the perceived image and character of a seaside resort may not be the reality as it might not match the perception. Both cases might lead to a mis-match and exacerbate any poor image of seaside resorts, and/or frustrate the attempts of planners to attract certain markets. Clearly, in the 1990s the image of resorts suffered.

As noted earlier, a positive image, specialist products and/or a particular hotel chain are considered essentials for survival as a resort, particularly if certain markets are to be targeted e.g. the conference market. Quality accommodation and new hotel investment are considered necessary for a quality image. The overall reality is substantial/poor accommodation and very little new investment. The result is an image at many resorts (often justified) of a location for cheap holidays, often targeted at the elderly, as illustrated, in particular, by respondents from Weston-super-Mare in Panel 5.4.

Panel 5.4

"We've got very poor hotels, a few nice ones but the majority of the accommodation is not good and they haven't changed with the market. We feel we would be better with less accommodation but better accommodation. We're very short of a main hotel chain."

(WH)

"I think Weston does have an image...towards the cheaper end of the market. That's a problem – they don't expect to spend a lot on hotels and accommodation, especially group bookings and things like that."

(WO)

On the other hand, Bournemouth (despite a lack of new build) *"There's been one new-build hotel since I've been here...that's in 33 years"* (BD) consider they have a quality image *"Quality, we are a class resort"* (BD).

On a purely practical point, certain infrastructure must be in place to attract and retain key customers. Quality conference facilities and accommodation would be necessary in order to attract conference business. There would need to be sufficient cheap accommodation for social classes C2, D and E. Thus the image of a resort is restricted and moderated by its infrastructure. At Hunstanton the type of

image that can be promoted is towards family holidays as there are 'Few hotels capable of accommodating groups or conferences' (King's Lynn and West Norfolk Borough Council, 1999 p24). One respondent at Margate suggested that there was *"Less of a hotel base than in the past"* (MH) indicating, as regards visitors, the domination of the day-trip market in the area and perhaps, consequently, a downmarket image.

The situations at Hunstanton and Margate indicate how image is related to infrastructure and this is true of all resorts. Respondents in this study considered the physical infrastructure to be a key part of the image, but image was also an important intangible. A comment from the Programme and Marketing Manager at Weston-super-Mare and a quote from the key (tourism) strategic document relating to Weston typify this.

"I think you need to have the physical infrastructure, the facilities, but also the image that it's safe, it's clean, welcoming, friendly, is very important. People build up a picture in their own mind – if you can't get a good picture in your mind as to what to expect, then you'll back away, so image is very important."

(WO)

In relation to the above comment, visitors to Weston-super-Mare liked the 'friendly and relaxing atmosphere, the sea and beach, the shops, the ease of getting around and the pier and promenade area' (North Somerset Council, 2000 p46). As far as it may relate to the general image of a resort, respondents believe live entertainment is not particularly significant (but see below). However, as far as it might influence the tourist decision to visit some believe live entertainment *can be* a significant and influential factor.

Live entertainment as part of the tourist offer

It is clear that the perceived image and character of a resort will affect the tourist decision-making process. This process depends upon a number of key factors including tourist perception of the resort 'offer'. This offer will include the image and character of the resort, largely based on beliefs about its infrastructure but also perceptions of the reputation of the (resort) location.

Live entertainment is part of the offer, part of the image and character, often a significant part of the infrastructure e.g. Bournemouth, Eastbourne and Scarborough each have three or more theatres (see appendix A1) conveniently located for maximum exposure to prospective clients. Smaller resorts may well have two significant-size theatres. Theatres often occupy a prime site in the resort and, if well maintained, help project an image of quality infrastructure. Significant importance is attached to live entertainment as a part of the holiday offer once a tourist is staying in the resort i.e. as an integral part of the physical/tangible (tourist) offer well after the decision to visit has been made. This is dealt with next.

At most locations respondents believe live entertainment to be an important or fairly important part of the tourist/holiday offer or 'mosaic' when people are already staying in the resort. Live entertainment is seen as a part of the total package, an integral part of the overall product mix, rather than a key factor in its own right (but see 'exceptions' below). The analogy of a hotel with leisure facilities e.g. a swimming pool that people don't use but like to know is available, was applied to live entertainment – people may not go to the theatre but they like to know that live entertainment is on offer. The effect of the weather was linked to live entertainment i.e. inclement weather actually means people use the theatre more. These points are given expression in Panel 5.6.

Panel 5.6

"It (live entertainment) has mattered a tremendous amount and I think it does matter a lot...I think the normal, traditional holidaymaker does like to have entertainment."

(BM2)

"Fairly important. It appears that most people want to see a show. When they come here they want the beach, they also want to entertain themselves, so it's fairly important."

(BH)

"Probably not that important. People arrive in Weston, look at the brochure and think 'We might go to that'."

(WH)

"When the weather is inclement it probably takes on a higher profile – being able to go somewhere, a theatre, I think it does become a priority then."

(SM)

As a part of the tourist product when people are staying in the resort, greater importance was attached to live entertainment at Skegness. It was suggested that Skegness was one of the few resorts where live entertainment was strongly focused on the core visitor market. The live entertainment product directly reflected the majority of the working class holiday-makers and was *"Vital because it fits in with the core market...absolutely crucial in Skegness...there's a handful of resorts, I suppose Blackpool is one where it's (live entertainment) absolutely fundamentally vital"* (SkH). (The respondent is the Head of Tourism Arts and Public Relations, but also carries out most of the live entertainment programming at Skegness, so may have a 'vested interest'). The quotation also reflects the importance of live entertainment in the initial tourist decision making process, see below.

The above comments relate to holidaymakers in general but certain visitors may have other live entertainment priorities:

“Conference delegates don’t normally have time...but if they come here and see there are a few big names advertised for the summer season it would make them aware that this is the time to come back with their families or with partners.”

(BM2)

The importance of live entertainment in the tourist decision-making process

As regards the role of live entertainment in the tourist decision-making process it was generally regarded as influential, but not essential (see Panel 5.7 p183). A particular, noteworthy exception suggesting live entertainment *can* fundamentally influence the decision to visit for staying visitors (but see also the comments relating to Skegness, and Eastbourne, below), was Riverdance at Bournemouth in 1997 – *“Hotels were being booked specifically for people coming down to see Riverdance... so that year the town was busier than normal”* (BH). Certain types of show(s), particularly touring West End musicals were suggested as particularly influential in the tourist decision-making process and may have persuaded people to take the decision to visit. Additionally, some respondents mentioned how a ‘name’ might persuade people to book a longer break – *“Certainly for the Daniel O’Donnell concert some people came for the two nights but booked four”* (MM). Sometimes a show/artiste acquires a ‘cult’ following but it is not obvious how this may influence the decision to visit, and stay, at a seaside resort. Examples would be Jethro the West Country comedian at Weston-super-Mare, Ken Dodd (anywhere!), and the rock and roll show ‘That’ll be the Day’, particularly at Bournemouth.

Promoting shows as a package (with accommodation) was suggested as a means of influencing people's decision to visit: *"If it was packaged like Butlin's – this is a Rock and Roll week-end, you may be able to attract people"* (MH). However, respondents generally believe people tend to book shows after they have arrived, not particularly being influenced beforehand by prior knowledge of a certain show or type of show. Experiences and opinions at Bournemouth are typical of a number of respondent's views (Panel 5.7).

Panel 5.7

"People generally speaking, will book when they get here as opposed to book before they come, unless it's an exceptional show...in 97 we did Riverdance for six and half weeks...people came to Bournemouth because of the show. They took their holidays as a result of having that show. They took three or four days and those people spent money. They spent money on the show, they stayed in decent hotels, and spent a lot of money in the town."

(BD)

"This summer they've got Lord of the Dance on. I still don't think they're going to come down, book a holiday ticket just because we've got Lord of the Dance. I think they'll probably book once they get here, if it's well marketed and promoted, 'Oh look, that's on' but I don't believe they're going to see it in the Sunday newspaper and say 'Oh, we're going to Bournemouth for our holidays'."

(BM1)

"I think it's considered, it's probably not top of the list but it's in the first few. If you had six points as to why they come to a resort, I'd say this is one of them."

(BM2)

Exceptions to this (generally) 'low' belief in the influence of live entertainment were all the respondents at Weston-super-Mare and Skegness, and the 'programmer' at Eastbourne. These interviewee's felt live entertainment *did* (positively) affect the decision to visit. The respondents at Weston-super-Mare felt the town could be judged by what is put on in the theatres and early promotion of 'cult' acts meant advance bookings for the shows would be good. (Again, it was not specified whether these translated into staying visitors – see the previous 'Weston quote' (Panel 5.6) - although this was the implication). Skegness respondents were adamant that live entertainment was 'absolutely crucial', to the point where *"...research has shown that people come to our resort because of all the famous names. When they get here they may not actually go and see them but when they make their choice of holiday it will be one of the 'Skeggy' positive things"* (SkH). The Eastbourne view (one influential respondent, the programmer) was based upon the belief that the four venues in the town created sufficient variety for the type of visitor to Eastbourne to choose it over other resorts that might have only one venue. And the amount and type of live entertainment might be successfully packaged to increase visitor numbers:

"I know people come to Eastbourne as a holiday destination because of the range of live entertainment on offer. In a two week period they can go and see so many different shows in any of the four venues...hotels wanting us to develop even more theatre breaks to Eastbourne."

(EO)

Whether or not tourists decide to visit a resort can be based on the type of live entertainment on offer but also the amount. Perhaps more live entertainment would create a particular impression of a vibrant resort. Increasing the level of live entertainment might result in increasing the range, reflecting greater variety in that

part of the tourist offer. Against such an idea is the established fact that that there has been a decline in long-stay visitors at English seaside resorts. Traditionally, these are the visitors who patronise the theatres. Against *that* is the potential to attract non-staying tourists to the resort e.g. day visitors, by increasing the amount (and perhaps the range) of live entertainment on offer.

The effect on tourists of increasing the amount of live entertainment

Respondents felt that an increase in the amount of live entertainment would not bring in more staying visitors, would not sell more seats and would not significantly affect the decision to visit. Generally, they felt that fewer shows but of a higher quality would result in more seats sold. Even then, quality shows may not increase staying visitor numbers. In any case, at some resorts at the height of the season, according to the comments in Panel 5.8, it was not possible to increase the amount of live entertainment.

Panel 5.8

"If you've got the right shows on once they're here, then they'll book and come and see them."

(BM1)

"(Amount) Wouldn't bring another one through the door."

(ED)

(Increase?) "Don't think it could, for the core 8 weeks of the summer season we provide entertainment 7 nights of the week."

(HH)

Cont.

Panel 5.8 Cont.

"It wouldn't simply because, certainly in the summer, we couldn't we couldn't get any more things in. All 4 venues running certainly 6 nights a week, with constantly changing product...however, if we were to reduce the programme I think we'd have to reduce it quite a lot before it would have an impact on people visiting the town...great in the summer but part of our problem in the winter, we have so many venues."

(EO)

Responses to the amount of live entertainment were related to tourist visitors but of course much entertainment, particularly off-season, will be aimed at residents and people within a reasonable travelling distance.

As noted in the quotations above, the 'amount' issue was linked to seasonality, but also quality - more shows do not necessarily mean more seats sold. ('Amount' is also a reflection of the available (quality) product. Quality product is one of the critical issues in the provision of suitable live entertainment and is discussed in chapter six). Regardless of *when* live entertainment was put on, the inference for any, even a minimal, effect on whether live entertainment could affect the decision to visit, is that the right *quality* product is the key. The Head of Entertainments and Events at Bournemouth provided a particularly apt quotation:

"I think you need less (but) classier shows. To actually have 7/8 on you're going to have the same amount of people just spread over the 7 or 8 shows. We know that. You can put twenty shows on but if you're only having 200 people in each venue, have less shows, and better quality shows."

(BH)

Resorts can only promote the live entertainment they can obtain. The practices of the industry restrict availability of quality product and potentially lessen the effect of any resort image linked to the live entertainment part of the offer. This link is now discussed.

The promotion of live entertainment and its link to resort image

It is generally believed that live entertainment does not materially affect the decision to visit. Therefore, it might be expected that live entertainment is not heavily promoted as part of the image of the resort(s), and this was the case at all locations. Live entertainment was promoted as one part of the overall tourist offer, albeit a more significant part in some resorts than others.

At all resorts the main promotional tool for live entertainment was the resort's Holiday Guide. In addition, in some resorts, particular targeted groups (previous audiences) received a mail shot specifically giving the live entertainment programme. Problems exist regarding the Holiday Guide in as much as it is aimed at the summer season visitor, but many resorts do not have confirmation of their summer shows/acts in time for the first publication of the Guide. This would mitigate against any live entertainment part of the Guide being influential in (particularly summer) tourist's decision making.

"We market it a lot, very much a part of the Bournemouth Guide. The problem is, often you don't get your shows booked early enough to get into the Guide. The first publication, that is always a problem" (BD). This common issue was highlighted by the officer responsible for programming Bournemouth's Pavilion Theatre: *"Sometimes we're scratching around a couple of months before the summer*

season, trying to find product....get it booked far up front you can start promoting it straightaway...it's really down to how much product's out there" (BH).

'Passive' marketing of live entertainment, i.e. the Holiday Guide, was regarded by some as an ineffective promotional tool, unlikely to influence people in their decision to visit. Respondents at Eastbourne, Hunstanton and Weston-super-Mare commented on the need to more obviously link live entertainment to the overall tourism offer. In this respect they were also advocating stronger linkages between the different departments of the local authority, and/or entertainment as part of the tourism department. It was not suggested that any such reorganisation would necessarily lead to a greater number of staying visitors i.e. people deciding to stay based on greater knowledge of the shows/acts.

One respondent, in particular, was scathing about the lack of aggressive marketing (promotion) of live entertainment at English seaside resorts, and a lacklustre approach from venue managers:

"The lack of vision of venue managers and the lack of input themselves. They're just happy to repeat what's happened year on year and let attendances decline without informing the process themselves" (HH). This respondent compared such passive approaches to the pro-active, co-ordinated approach he had recently been part of when helping to launch a new theatre in South Carolina, USA:

"People in a resort...not sure they actively look for it (live entertainment). It has to be presented to them in a way that is attractive, perhaps in a way that we would consider to be aggressively marketed. Presented to them, sold to them, people are almost led by the hand to the venue. The Americans are really good at this and we are dreadful at it...(USA) there will be a person in the resort whose sole job is to book them into the theatres. The theatre markets themselves to these people – to the group booking

organisers through the coach and travel industry. Position their theatres with them so they're first on the list of attractions. In addition, they ensure that everybody in the town who's involved with the hospitality industry – from the taxi drivers to the hoteliers, have seen the show, are offering discounts to people who are staying with them, travelling with them to see the show."

(HH)

This particular interviewee considered inadequate live entertainment promotional activity to be a negative factor in people's decision to not go to live entertainment at the seaside. The respondent was prepared to link such promotional activity to the tourist decision-making process *and* the perceived image of a resort i.e. live entertainment *could be* a positive factor in the decision to visit. The respondent suggested appropriate promotion of resort theatres could lead them to become key players in the tourist industry:

"The whole image of resort-based entertainment, of summer season is tacky, almost an apology, aimed at an audience that is declining in years. Looked on as slightly tired – people almost apologise for doing it...(what's required) a different approach to the way it's marketed, perceived, presented, in line with the way other sectors of the leisure industry have moved forward, such as holiday parks, could help to revive live entertainment in resorts. Get resort theatres to become key players within the tourist industry. We consider ourselves to be out of the tourist industry. Be part of the tourism forums/network, part of the critical mass that makes up the experience of a resort. We'll be able to influence it and get a slice of the market."

(HH)

Generally, live entertainment reflects, but in certain cases promotes, the image of the resort. Within this suggestion there is the issue of whether live entertainment is:

- a) A sufficiently important aspect of the image of a location to persuade people to visit. This then links back to the issue of whether live entertainment is an integral part of the tourist decision-making process.
- b) A necessary part of the offer that people expect, but may not influence their decision-making.
- c) A useful, but not essential element of the tourist offer.

All of the above could potentially affect the economic well being of the location. Generally, respondents in this study believe any influence of live entertainment is closer to b and c, than a. Respondents suggested that image, directly linked to the programming, could reinforce the perceived image and/or promote new images e.g. that of a cultural destination. A number of respondents believed that the live entertainment image of the resort was associated most strongly with 'star' names, and there was a current dearth of such entertainers prepared to perform in seaside resorts. In this respect, entertainment may not be so influential as it used to be in projecting a particular image. This helps confirm the weak link/influence between the live entertainment part of the tourist offer and the decision to visit.

"I think once upon a time...one of the main considerations, who is appearing there for the summer season. We've had a survey done very recently that shows that entertainment's only influenced about 6% of the people who come here for their holidays."

(SM)

Respondents believed that people expect entertainment. Visitors expect a theatre in a tourist destination so, again, its importance as an influential factor in decision-making may be lessened – although, as noted, the projection of a particular image may be a direct reflection of the entertainment provided. This was mentioned particularly at Scarborough:

(Interviewer - Project an image?) *"Yes, it does. Particularly the Spa. We have the Grand Hall, the Spa Orchestra, a genteel side that appeals to the early and late season visitors."*

(SO)

It is thus not universally the case that live entertainment is considered uninfluential in the image of a resort, and so cannot be entirely separated from the tourist decision-making process. Certain respondents expressed a view that the live entertainment image projected is generally important in attracting visitors and can be seen as a tourist resource to be cultivated. Comments from the Head of Tourism, Arts and Public Relations at Skegness and the General Manager, Performing Arts at Eastbourne (Panel 5.9), are typical:

Panel 5.9

"Here, in our Holiday Guide we have a spread on live entertainment centred around the Embassy Centre and the artistes we have...and research has shown that people come to our resort because of all the famous names...that will be part of the decision and I'm sure it's crucial to our image."

(SkH)

"We use the programming to send a message out that Eastbourne isn't just about the over 50's, over 60's and there's no reason why we can't be a cultural destination, maybe for a long week-end...I think people bear it in mind (live entertainment) when deciding to come here rather than go to a similar resort with only one venue."

(EO)

However, the general view is that live entertainment is certainly not a significant, strategic aspect of the tourism offer. Consequently, it may not feature prominently in strategic documentation relating to the future of tourism at English seaside resorts.

A brief discussion related to strategic planning documentation given to the researcher at the time of the interviews generally confirms this.

Live entertainment as a strategic tool

It has been suggested that there is a role for live entertainment in promoting a particular image for seaside resorts. Live entertainment may have the potential to be a significant promotional tool, although the possibilities have apparently not yet been exploited. Promotional activity is a tactic and is most effectively linked to, and stems from, clear strategic objectives. If live entertainment were considered to be a central strand of the resort tourist offer it would have a high profile. It would be mentioned in strategic documentation, be discussed in detail whenever strategic debates on the future of the resort are held and perhaps linked to action plans, particularly of a promotional nature. A review of such documentation at resorts in this study reveals an interesting mix regarding the strategic role given to live entertainment.

At some resorts live entertainment is part of the tourism strategic planning whilst, at others, it is barely mentioned. This latter 'status' would be generally consistent with the (low) perceived importance of live entertainment – from both the visitors' and practitioners' point of view - particularly in relation to the decision to visit. (As already noted, there are exceptions to this, particularly as expressed by certain respondents at Bournemouth, Eastbourne and Skegness).

Live entertainment is considered an essential part of the tourist offer and is provided as an aspect of the product that tourists will utilise, or not, *once they are staying in the resort*. It is not often considered strategic. Bournemouth's Tourism Marketing Strategy (Bournemouth Borough Council, 2000) mentions the need to provide

'cultural opportunities' (S2). As regards visitor products consistent with the required image of 'a high quality resort', the need for new leisure and entertainment facilities are noted, as suggestions for the private sector (S8). However, Objective CO 11 of Bournemouth's Community Plan 2000-2005 is to develop first-class arts, entertainment, recreational and cultural industries (Bournemouth Borough Council, 2000a p3). This objective is to be primarily achieved via proposed major investment in the council-run entertainment facilities, including the Pavilion Theatre (see Appendices A1 and A2), possibly via the Private Finance Initiative (PFI). Potential involvement with PFI is seen as part of a Resort Regeneration package, linked to the resolve to make Bournemouth *the* UK's World Class Resort, able to compete on quality rather than price (Bournemouth Borough Council, 2001a; Appendix 1 p1). According to the Mission Statement of the Bournemouth International Centre/Pavilion Theatre, entertainment has a key role to play in promoting Bournemouth as 'the leading commercial UK destination for conferences, exhibitions, entertainment and leisure activities' (Bournemouth Borough Council, 2001 p5).

Eastbourne's commitment to improving the entertainment on offer is mentioned as one of eighteen specific tourism objectives (Eastbourne Borough Council, 2000a p2). In turn, these are part of moving towards Eastbourne's development as a leading world-class resort. 'This strategy works towards this mission by reinforcing Eastbourne's up-market positioning as a resort with class-leading standards...attracting holiday visitors with a more discerning and active outlook and an appreciation of the finer things in life' (Eastbourne Borough Council, 2000 p5). The same document acknowledges one of the key attractions in Eastbourne to be 'a particular strength in family entertainments'.

Strategic tourism documentation available relating to Margate makes no reference to live entertainment. At Hunstanton, entertainment and theatre(s) are mentioned as an integral part of the tourism product (King's Lynn and West Norfolk Borough Council, 1999 p2), requiring the appropriate quality and value for money – quality of such aspects of the total visitor experience being the 'keynote of any development we undertake'. Policy 17 (p40) of the same document is specifically designed to 'enhance the entertainment offered to visitors and residents', but the only reference to entertainment within the eight strategies suggested in doing this concerns the 'optimum use of the bandstand, with a variety of musical entertainment throughout the season'.

Documentation relating to Weston-super-Mare initially adopts a 'broad brush' approach to 'improving the quality and range of tourist attractions' (North Somerset Council, 2000 p5), not specifically mentioning entertainment, although suggesting that 'interests will change from sunbathing to art, culture and walking' (op cit, p11). Further documentation gives extensive reference to product development but fails to mention entertainment, although the Winter Gardens (which contains a theatre) is noted, but more in terms of its potential for developing the conference trade (Woodspring District Council, 2000 p95, 96).

The recent Tourism Strategy document for East Lindsey District Council (Skegness) includes the need to 'have a district renowned for its quality and range of arts and culture, and seeks to maintain 'improved entertainment venues' (East Lindsey District Council, 2000 p8, 13). The document does not identify live entertainment in the cultural action plan for the strategic development of the area.

Scarborough is the one resort in this study which has generated continuous documentation that suggests entertainment can play a strategic role in the

development and implementation of a tourism strategy (Scarborough Borough Council, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1998a, 2000, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c, 2000d, 2000e, 2000f, 2001). Included in the documentation at Scarborough is the idea that the Entertainment Section will help to achieve the Council's corporate objectives by 'Contributing to economic benefit by attracting staying visitors to the area and increasing the leisure spend' (Scarborough Borough Council, 2000 p4). Within the Mission Statement of the Entertainments Services is a requirement to 'promote the town as a quality provider of shows' (Scarborough Borough Council, 2001 p4). A possible reason for such ambitious objectives could be the unique circumstances at Scarborough relating to the Stephen Joseph theatre which provides a programme of 'elitist' drama and performing arts. The documentation at Scarborough suggests that entertainment – both 'elitist' and entertainment of the 'seaside variety' - has the potential to be an integral part of Scarborough's tourism strategy, and posits a possible direct (positive) economic effect.

Live entertainment as a promotional tactic and potential strategic tool in the 'quest' for tourists has been discussed. The wider role of tourism in changing the economic status of resorts has been debated, along with current and potential economic roles for non-tourist businesses, and residents. A brief comment on attempts at resort development and regeneration, some inspired by central government initiatives, is now given in order to demonstrate that live entertainment does not usually feature in regeneration strategies. This is not to negate the potential (positive) economic effect of providing and promoting live entertainment.

Attempts at resort maintenance, development and regeneration

Although many resort local authorities have commissioned their own research on regeneration, the last few years have seen a more co-ordinated approach from the

centre. This has been largely due to the publication of Tomorrow's Tourism (DCMS, 1999) which required the newly re-constituted English Tourism Council (2000) to act as a catalyst for seaside resort regeneration by setting up a Resort Regeneration Task Force. This Task Force was required to publish a final report in 2001. This deadline was met with the publication of 'Sea Changes: Creating world-class resorts in England'. The immediate precursor to 'Sea Changes' (still within the remit of the Resort's Task Force), was a report to the English Tourist Council entitled 'English Resorts Regeneration: History, Problems and Solutions' (English Tourist Council, 2000). These two 'generic' documents are utilised throughout the analysis relating to this section on resort maintenance, development and regeneration, as the focus of any deliberations concerning specific resort regeneration initiatives. Council involvement, investment and partnerships are suggested as the key to any attempts at development/regeneration. The council is the catalyst. Respondents at Bournemouth, for example, stressed the need for the council to be continuously involved in regeneration. Council initiatives put in place in the 1970s and '80s were particularly stressed, including the importance of the council sponsored Bournemouth International centre (BIC), and attempts by the council to diversify the tourism economic base. Panel 5.10 (p197) gives the views of the Director of the Bournemouth International Centre, and the Vice-Chairman of the BIC/Pavilion Management Committee (a former Mayor).

Panel 5.10

"When the council decided to open this place (BIC), that was the start of it all really...the council have done a lot for this town, there have been a lot of developments, a lot of investment."

(BD)

"During the '70s period, the '80s when I was Mayor...the council made a decision where they no longer wanted to be in a situation where the youth went away to university or college and the only jobs they could come back to were being a chambermaid or waiter...decision to try and attract industry. Insurance and banking are now a very important part of the town. When I was Mayor (1984), I dug the sod for the Chase Manhattan bank, which has three world-wide centres – Tokyo, New York and Bournemouth. They promised they'd bring hundreds of jobs, now they've got thousands of jobs. Overnight it transformed the economy of the town."

(BM2)

Bournemouth believe they are a quality resort. One crucial element of this had been the improvements made to hotel accommodation - where the stock of hotel beds has been reduced due to the addition of en-suite facilities, and the quality therefore increased. Investment in hotels is regarded as an indicator of the health of a resort. At Bournemouth there has only been one new build hotel in the last 35 years (the Rank organisation's Lansdowne hotel) although planning permission was granted in May 2001 for a new 100 bedroom hotel to be built.

Bournemouth Borough Council is committed to being the catalyst for continuous quality development of the resort: 'Bournemouth, already a strong, attractive and vibrant tourism resort serving many different markets, will continue to develop its position as the United Kingdom's premier quality resort, through the partnership of the Borough council, businesses and local residents, to ensure the economic, social

and environmental well-being of the town' (Bournemouth Borough Council, 2000 p6). These aspirations and commitments are in line with suggestions from 'Sea Changes'.

Published documentation at Eastbourne (Eastbourne Borough Council, 2000a) directly reflects the underlying ('Sea Changes') aim of creating world-class resorts in England i.e. 'The Tourism Strategy gives the direction for Eastbourne's development as a "world-class" resort'. Additionally, the Tourism Strategy should also 'serve as a catalyst to galvanise local businesses into joint action with the Council'. It may be that this approach has culminated in the claim that 'positive developments' in the last decade are: improved quality of hotels/more en-suite rooms; increased events/activity (including the International Lawn Tennis Centre), and the development of Sovereign Harbour. The Council has been a contributing, sometimes instrumental, partner in these developments. Comments in Panel 5.11 from the Director of Tourism, Leisure and Amenities and his General Manager, Performing Arts, along with the Council (Member) Spokesperson for Tourism, Leisure and Amenities illustrate this:

Panel 5.11

"...heavy investment of the private sector...it's partnership."

(ED)

(the Council) "are very forward thinking, the creation of the product, the new development of Sovereign Harbour. Only need to walk along the seafront to see how beautifully it's kept."

(EO)

"(Council) £50,000 into the marketing campaign, the hotels are putting in £5 per bed. Got the Chamber of Commerce on side, the industrial society, all chipping in."

(EM)

With reference to the marketing campaign, Eastbourne have a new slogan 'Eastbourne – the Good Life just got better' and claims to be the

"Fastest growing town in the south east. People like it 'round here. Within 3 or 4 years we are going to be average age nationally, quite something."

(ED)

As noted, the recent (2001) 'Good Life' campaign was mentioned as a marketing approach. It can be seen how Eastbourne Council are actively one of the three key players in resort regeneration/rejuvenation (at local level) suggested in 'Sea Changes' (op cit p47) i.e. local businesses, local authorities and local communities.

A key point emerging from primary research documents relating to resort-specific regeneration is that regeneration initiatives are usually instigated and driven by the local authority. Of course, it is difficult to consider who else might take a holistic view. Nevertheless, the generation/development of tourism, indeed, for this study the provision of many cultural activities, are not statutory duties - yet councils spend time and resources on strategic plans, including cultural activities/suggestions, that are often extremely ambitious. Eastbourne, for example, has 18 broad tourism objectives, concerning improvements or increases in performance between 2000 – 2005. Examples include average accommodation occupancy levels up by 6%; real tourism spend up from £118 million to £135 million; local tourism employment from 4,100 to 4,800 (Eastbourne Borough Council, 2000a pages 14 -19). 'Entertainment' is one of the 18 objectives and the 5 sub-objectives within this category are all to do with improvements e.g. 'To provide and market a daily programme of children's entertainment during holiday periods to encourage young children to visit' (op cit p16). This objective will require 'new funding'.

As noted earlier in this study, large resorts (perhaps including Eastbourne, 'officially' classified as medium-size) are likely to be among the survivors, not necessarily 'thrivers', perhaps because they can engineer regeneration initiatives, or, according to a report by Locum Destination Consulting for the English Tourist Council, because:

'Large resorts, with large urban support populations seem to have the muscle to "buy" their way out of decline provided they have, or can develop, a mixed economy and have good access...(however)...the position of middle-sized resorts may be the least tractable...it seems the hard-to-access medium-sized resorts have more problems. They do not have sufficient resources to compete with the big boys...At the same time their problems are too ingrained or broad to be remedied by a single makeover as was achieved by the Tate development at St Ives...the Pleasure Beach at Blackpool is an integral part of Blackpool's attractions, but only part of the reason for the resort's success...A large attraction such as Dreamland cannot pull Margate out of decline on its own.'

(English Tourist Council , 2000 p13)

With regard to Margate, the quote above may be more than 'illustrative'. Margate has certainly seen a decline in tourism and responses to questions on regeneration are likely to be illuminating and instructive. Partly due to the Isle of Thanet being the 'only region in the South East to have full Development Area status giving businesses access to Regional Selective Assistance Grants, awards for capital investment and training assistance in addition to EU grants' (Thanet District Council, 1998 p24), the Council's role has been focussed on industry. This was given expression by, amongst others, the operations manager at the Winter Gardens, Margate:

"Last decade has been concentrating on the industrial side – getting people back in employment. Marketing the resort as a holiday destination has taken a back burner. Some of the big hotels have ensuite rooms but there's not enough of them." (MO1)

Margate respondents recognised, in particular, that they had a problem of image, declining infrastructure and a lack of good wet-weather facilities. Comments from the Managing Director of Thanet Leisure Force, the Head of Tourism and Leisure, and the Portfolio Holder for Tourism and Leisure are given in Panel 5.12.

Panel 5.12

"In 95 we felt we couldn't market particularly well until we got the product right."

(MM)

"Five years ago took the view perhaps the image we were selling wasn't quite the same when people got here. The marketing material can be made to look nice but the real world wasn't quite the same. Take a more holistic view – are the hotels good enough, are the attractions good enough? Is the place clean enough? Is the entertainment programme right?"

(MH)

"If you're here for a day and it rains, besides going to the amusement, you haven't got a lot to do."

(MO1)

"We do need a major attraction, theme park, whatever."

(MD)

"Dreamland had a major investment in 95/96 with grants from the council – I would love to have a roof over Dreamland. We have had people interested in providing new facilities. It's at discussion stage. We definitely need an all-year round facility."

(MM)

Thanet council have recently (2000) spent £200,000 up-grading a swimming pool, are putting together a bid via Sport England to invest in a Leisure Complex, and have spent regeneration money on a Plan of Action to generally improve the infrastructure and appearance of Margate. Interestingly for this study, some respondents see a move towards the high arts: *"We see a move towards arts/heritage"* (MH). *"I'm working with the Kent County Council on the Turner Centre...Tracey Emin has done a lot for Margate – it's cool to be here."* (MM)

Notwithstanding earlier comments regarding an emphasis on industrial/business park developments, these activities, and the comments above, demonstrate the council's active role in (tourism) regeneration. In this case, tourism is an important part of a changing economic mix.

In Hunstanton's case most of the effort is directed at protecting and nurturing the image of a 'small and friendly resort where families and older visitors can feel welcome and unthreatened' with 'A reasonable range of attractions and facilities for a small resort, which have benefited from continued investment: for example...Sea Life Centre...Princess Theatre, Bandstand etc.' (King's Lynn and West Norfolk Borough council, 1999 p26). As a small resort the Princess Theatre (see appendix A1 for details) is singled out for comment. 'The lack of nightlife means that Hunstanton does not attract a younger and potentially disruptive market, but it is important to ensure that enough is being done to attract and keep our core markets; for example, does the Princess Theatre cater for families and young children at the appropriate times, and does it cater for the short-stay market?' (op cit p27). The two Hunstanton respondents (the General Manager, Arts and Entertainment, and the Portfolio Holder for Culture) agreed with the above comments, and emphasised the crucial role of the council in maintaining the fabric of this small resort, with possible small developments (Panel 5.13 below).

Panel 5.13

"Always marketed itself to a family audience. Young family without an emphasis on flashing lights and fish and chip shops. Always remained small, genteel, clean. Not gone into the mass market at all."

(HH)

"We (council) have negotiated for the sea front. We have the Sea Life centre and attached to it is a fairly large piece of land. They now want to use that as a putting green – the type you see in Great Yarmouth. Many things attract people to Hunstanton, we would like to see more investment from the local people as well as the Borough Council. We seem to be the catalyst for change – it seems to be the Borough Council who puts its hands in its pockets for development most of the time. We would like to see more private development, subsidising things."

(HM)

Hunstanton has some interesting promotional 'tools' connected to the perennial issue of parking.

"Local businesses subsidise free coach parking throughout the summer season. We recently met some bus operators from the Midlands and they said this was the only resort they'd been to where there was free coach parking...also attracting local people by use of their Leisure Card which allows them to park free from Monday to Saturday."

(HM)

As noted above, in Weston-super-Mare there has been a recent decline in visitor numbers. The council has both invested directly and acted as a catalyst for development, although council money has decreased. The comments of the cabinet member for Economic Development, Leisure and Marketing and the Tourism and

Entertainments Manager are instructive in suggesting the need for the council to continue to invest in the infrastructure as well as co-ordinate potential private investments (Panel 5.14).

Panel 5.14

"I think it's had a major identity crisis. Constant discussion, are we in/out of tourism? The availability of council money to do things has gone down considerably, particularly since we've become a unitary authority – the money to support leisure and tourism, which of course is an option, has been getting very tight."

(WM)

"The Sea Life centre (private) opened up five years ago, ten years ago they (council) spent five and a half million on the Winter Gardens...private money on the Sovereign Centre."

(WH)

"The re-vamping of the Winter Gardens was the last big thing. Still struggling with the Knightstone, more recently the Tropicana – come back in 12 months...we certainly need an undercover facility that includes a leisure pool with a serious competition pool. Love to have a Casino. For that you need a good hotel and to cater for conferences and conventions. Take it up market."

(WM)

As regards marketing/promotion, interesting comments made by the Programming and Marketing Manager of Weston-super-Mare's Playhouse Theatre suggested that product/facilities are crucial in any campaign:

"In terms of marketing the town, it's very hard to market something if you don't have the products in it. It's rather like having a theatre but not having many shows – you're limiting greatly the attraction of what you're offering to people. That's the fundamental problem, if you

market a town, you build up a picture for people. Somewhat restricted by the lack of facilities.”

(WO)

Like many other resorts the Borough of Scarborough publishes a Tourism Strategy (Scarborough Borough Council, 2000c) which sets out the strategic priorities such as creating new market demand, rationalising and improving the quality of the existing tourism product, developing new tourism products, and ensuring a high quality environment. The council generally accepts the role of instigator and controller of any partnership arrangements - ‘Scarborough Borough Council will, as a lead organisation in the implementation of the strategy, produce a series of short term Tourism Action Plans’ (Scarborough Borough Council, 2000c p15). The council also commits itself to a range of promotional activities e.g. direct mailing, promotion to the travel trade, developing and marketing a programme of special events, and providing advance information, particularly relating to conferences etc. (op cit p9).

This pro-active stance towards development of the tourist product is reinforced by various (Scarborough) respondents comments (Panel 5.15), and particularly those of the Director of Tourism and Leisure Services (Panel 5.16 p206).

Panel 5.15

“We realised over the last ten years that the holiday trade was declining. We started major promotions in Europe to bring European travellers here. We had major influences with the Sea Life centre in the North Bay. We haven’t stood still.”

(SO)

Cont.

Panel 5.15 Cont.

"We've been able to put packages together, such things as the seafront. Got all new lighting down there, period lighting – that's been done with the County Council. We're spending about £600,000 on St Nicholas Gardens. Primarily targeted at the tourist but the residents also benefit as well."

(SM)

However, the real problems of not continually investing, and local authorities not having both sufficient money and influence, are well illustrated by the first, extensive quotation in Panel 5.16. The same respondent then elaborated on a 'philosophy' that suggested councils cannot directly impact on the tourism market, but indirectly, might nevertheless be the catalyst for inward (private) investment, illustrated by the second quotation in Panel 5.16.

Panel 5.16

"This council chose not to invest significantly in the late 70s and early 80s...we haven't said 'Right, what are the needs, what do we need, and do we build new?' We actually can't cope with tackling the infrastructure, dereliction we've got at the moment. That's why money gets spent in that particular way (maintenance, rather than investment)...I believe local authorities do not have sufficient clout in terms of resources – particularly for marketing and product development, to really make a significant impact in the market place...therefore we can only, to some extent, co-ordinate and co-operate with others to facilitate improvements...I think local authorities have a key role, a huge role in creating the confidence for the private sector to invest and re-invest in an area."

(SD)

Cont.

Panel 5.16 Cont.

"How could we, as a council, make an impact on the tourism market? I decided we couldn't really do a lot with the domestic holidaymaker. Not really – we don't control the product in terms of accommodation, we don't control the price...but where we have impact is on the conference market."

(SD)

The Director of Tourism and Leisure Services at Scarborough suggested that a 'push' for the conference market, including the setting up of a conference bureau in collaboration with the private sector, had led to considerable (private) investment in the bed stock i.e. sufficient quality for conference delegates. The council was committed to improving the single venue in the town capable of hosting conferences, the Spa Complex. Other respondents at Scarborough were more focused on the need for good all-weather facilities, an umbrella complex, possibly with shopping facilities. The proposed Zenith scheme for the North Bay would meet these requirements (Panel 5.17).

Panel 5.17

"Definitely umbrella, somewhere they can go when it rains...the Zenith project would certainly help. Some form of indoor leisure, indoor swimming. With an entertainment complex possibly, attached to it."

(SO)

"The Zenith proposal was launched in '98. We changed our preferred developer and they came up with...major leisure/water, all the sort of things you would see in a Center Parcs arrangement, with accommodation around it as well. The idea is to have its own critical mass, and more retail."

(SH)

Skegness has been the subject of considerable investment in recent years – some of it matched funding, organised by the council, as illustrated by comments in Panel 5.18 which emphasise once more the central role for local authorities in inward infrastructure investment.

Panel 5.18

“The council have known they need to do things, they’ve had European money/grants...where we’re sitting now, the Embassy Complex, there’s been £5 million invested over the last three or four years. Big chunk of that was European money but a good £2 million was from the council. So they’ve kept investing and the seafront here looks great. And of course...we have a really strong partnership with the private sector.”

(SkH)

“The idea is that we invested what we could in the hope that private investment would then come in after us and that’s started to a small degree...we’re well aware that the council is limited in finances. It’s got to be either in partnership or a private investor who comes in to do it.”

(SkO)

When asked the supplementary question ‘In an ideal world, what additional tourist-related facilities would you like to see in the resort?’ interviewees at Skegness (as in all other locations in this study) were unanimous about the need for all weather attractions (Panel 5.19 p209):

Panel 5.19

"A large indoor facility, all weather, possibly with a retractable roof."

(SkM)

"Very much need, it's a necessity, more covered attractions in Skegness."

(SkH)

"Obviously, the main problem with any seaside resort is the weather and that's the one thing you can't do anything about. So the main thing would be all-weather attractions. Something families can go in with children, spending a rainy afternoon."

(SkO)

Comments in this chapter have demonstrated the commitment of the local authority in acting as the lead body in proposed protection, development and regeneration of their resort. Councils usually act as the catalyst in some form of partnership. Comments have reflected the need for a clear focus if promotional activity is to be effective. Live entertainment venues have been mentioned occasionally, mainly as part of any maintenance programmes. However, such venues, and the general area of live entertainment, are not seen as significant in major regeneration initiatives or indeed, in general promotional activity related to development of resorts.

It is the local authorities who will decide the strategic direction of their resort, suggesting (partnership) investment in quality infrastructure, particularly accommodation, but also the need for wet weather facilities. English Tourist Council documentation confirms this lead role: 'They are strategically placed to bring all the parties together at a local level into a meaningful partnership and are responsible for much of the key infrastructure and support services upon which resorts depend' (English Tourist Council, 2001 p55). As far as this statement relates to the live entertainment part of the 'key infrastructure and support services', a final comment is now given on the economic effect of providing live entertainment at English

seaside resorts. This is set within the fact that there have been changes in tourist behaviour and changes in the demography of seaside locations.

The economic effect of providing live entertainment

Firstly, it should be noted that the 'economic' issue in this brief section is not concerned with the day-to-day economics of running a seaside theatre (see chapter seven for issues surrounding any future for seaside entertainment venues based purely on running costs). Exceptionally, one respondent (the Managing Director of Thanet Leisure Force, Margate) *did* identify the economic consequences of live entertainment as being directly related to the theatre operations i.e. there would be no economic impact to the region of reducing the operation, due to the small numbers of people directly employed in the industry. All other respondents discussed the (resort) economic effects in terms of direct and indirect benefits of people patronising the theatre(s). In any case, none of the respondents advocated getting rid of live entertainment entirely and it must be assumed that the net economic, but also social and cultural effect, however quantified, out-weighs the tens of thousands of pounds subsidy given to English seaside theatres by their local authorities. Councils could certainly save money by closing their theatres, but many local authority theatres are clearly not provided in order to make an operating surplus (see chapter seven). Live entertainment is subsidised by the local council in the belief that (a) it is an essential part of the tourist offer; (b) it has a positive association with image, and may attract tourists; and (c) live entertainment adds to the cultural 'rounding' of the local citizens.

With regard to the last 'criteria' (local citizens), primary research for this study, plus quantitative data from the British Resorts Association Benchmarking exercise (chapter six and Appendix A2) reveals that live entertainment at English seaside

resorts is increasingly being provided for a 52 week culture i.e. mainly for residents and people within a reasonable travelling distance, but with certain products, particularly in the summer months, that appeal to non-local visitors. It is thus culturally and socially important, year round, particularly in relation to the local population. However, with regard to economic considerations of providing live entertainment, the issue, essentially, relates to the possible economic benefits to the resort(s) or, perhaps, more significantly, the (negative) economic consequences of *not* having live entertainment. The most obvious economic benefit is stated as being non-residents i.e. visitors/tourists, patronising the theatre(s). *"Theatre does other things than just theatre. Eat here, have an experience...using the buildings"* (ED). These patrons would effectively be staying in, or visiting the resort before/after attending the show(s). Staying visitors who attend shows provide an indirect economic benefit via hotel beds occupied, shopping expenditure, restaurant meals taken etc. However, as certain types of tourism have declined at seaside resorts, e.g. the number of long-stay visitors has declined, the total consequent economic benefits have changed – but even staying visitors, who do not attend shows, may still expect live entertainment to be provided – as a part of the 'mosaic' that makes up the total tourist offer.

As noted, many resorts are now relying on non-tourists, particularly residents and people within a 45 – 60 minute drive time, to help fill theatre seats. This has affected programming, alongside the 'homogenisation' of the cultural offer previously noted, where the traditional distinctiveness of seaside theatre is becoming 'blurred'. This is due partly to the need to appeal to non-traditional markets but other issues are also at work here, including the lack of suitable product and the previously noted need to increase quality and spectacle (see chapter six).

Live entertainment at seaside resorts may be a negative drain on resources i.e. there is financial cost over and above a definable economic benefit. This may or, may not, include the multiplier effect described above where providing entertainment leads to further income e.g. visitors spend money in hotels and on various leisure activities. It may not include further removed less obvious indirect benefits to the local economy e.g. the work provided for local builders and decorators when the hotel needs refurbishing. It may or may not include positive income to local businesses from people permanently relocating to the seaside i.e. new residents. By definition, it does not include the considerable social and cultural benefits, so the 'economics' of live entertainment provision is not a simple cost/benefit of the basic operation. This crucial facet of live entertainment at the seaside is discussed in more detail in chapters seven and eight.

It has been noted in this chapter that tourists/visitors expect to see a programme of live entertainment at the seaside theatre(s), even if they don't patronise it, so seaside theatre venues and live entertainment clearly support and enhance the tourist offer, regardless of any subsidy needed to maintain it. *"Supporting the tourism infrastructure with theatres" (HH)* is the reverse of how many people think, i.e. that most theatres are a net 'drain'. But retaining and maintaining live entertainment venues at the seaside can be a significant, positive aspect of the tourism/cultural offer *"live entertainment goes with leisure tourism" (BD)*. *"If a seaside resort didn't have a theatre, what would a seaside resort be, apart from the beach? You've got to keep it, it's very important" (MO2)*.

The general consensus from respondents at typical English seaside resorts is that live entertainment should continue as a general part of the tourism offer (including cultural tourism, see also chapter six), but increasingly, as part of a cultural offer to residents and locals.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the changing economic status and fortunes of English seaside resorts, including the role of live entertainment in this. A number of resorts have continued to invest in their infrastructure and image and are confident in an economic future reliant upon tourism. Others are in a relatively poor condition and it is likely that tourism will become less important in their economic survival, although local authorities are not generally pessimistic about the *potential* for tourism as a major factor in the local economy. In either case, decision-makers are actively considering the economic benefits associated with residents and commercial activity. Tourism remains a significant part of the economic activity at English resorts but its significance is changing. However, this varies from resort to resort. It seems the 'middle-sized' resorts are the least well equipped to maintain tourism as a major part of their economic activity. In any case, attention must be given to the (core) markets that generate most of the tourism business.

Resorts not well placed to maintain tourism are those affected by a poor image. The influence of live entertainment on image varies from resort to resort. Some locations are well known for their live entertainment provision but despite this, live entertainment does not seem to be a significant part of the tourist's decision to visit. However, it is important when visitors stay. Varying the amount of live entertainment does not materially affect its influence - it is more important to improve the quality. Live entertainment is not heavily or effectively promoted and therefore any potential linkages towards influencing the tourist decision-making process, or improving the image of the resort, are not exploited.

People expect live entertainment to be provided even though they may not use it. This 'tactical' approach reflects the lack of live entertainment as a strategic tool.

This is despite the belief of some respondents in the potential use of live entertainment in regeneration strategies. In any case, improved quality of live entertainment, and more investment in live entertainment facilities, would be required for it to have a long-term effect. Local authorities control the live entertainment venues in the resorts covered by this study and hence the position of such venues in, for example, regeneration proposals. Local authorities can decide the priority to be given to live entertainment and thus its potential economic effect on tourism. The local authority perspective is dealt with in more detail in chapter seven, linked to central government policy that may influence cultural policy, including live entertainment.

Before this discussion, however, it will be necessary to investigate influential changing cultural trends and attitudes, and changes within the live entertainment industry itself, and this will be addressed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER SIX

Live entertainment and changing cultural trends and attitudes

Preamble

Cultural change sets the cultural context within which all resorts must operate. Cultural change in relation to the live entertainment part of cultural tourism, including the importance of live entertainment in the decision to visit the seaside, has been mentioned in chapter five. The focus in this chapter is on cultural attitudes towards the performing arts, but particularly, live entertainment* of the 'seaside variety'. It will also be necessary to discuss changes within the live entertainment industry, particularly as a prelude to the political context in which these operate (chapter seven).

*Respondents did not request definitions or explanations of 'performing arts' and 'live entertainment', so quoted responses can be assumed to 'blur' any perceived differences between (performance) 'art' and (live) 'entertainment'.

The cultural changes that have taken place, certainly in recent times, may be influential in the running of the council owned and managed seaside theatres in this study but appear only rarely in any council-generated documentation, apart from such documents utilised in chapter five. In building a picture of cultural changes and attitudes affecting performing arts of the 'seaside variety', and influential changes within the live entertainment industry, this chapter will therefore rely almost entirely on the responses of the so-called practitioners.

The broad cultural changes and pressures are those identified in the earlier discussions on the cultural context. The influence of television in raising people's expectations of the quality now expected of live performance will be discussed. Television's 'conditioning' of people to expect the familiar, and reduced audience attention spans and etiquette have been previously identified and will be evaluated. As seen in chapter five, respondents believe that the live entertainment they provide is a major part of the cultural and social life of their resorts, and that they are continuing to provide a worthwhile live entertainment experience within a difficult and changing cultural and industry situation. This is taken further in this chapter by a deeper investigation into cultural and live entertainment industry changes. Chapter seven will then discuss the changing role of central and local government as far as this relates to the provision of (performing arts) cultural activities at the seaside, particularly live entertainment.

Changing cultural attitudes towards live entertainment, particularly of the 'seaside variety'

It can be argued that live entertainment, like tourism, is not an essential part of people's cultural lives – they can live without it. People go to the theatre because they want to and significant numbers of people continue to attend live entertainment performances at the seaside, so there is clearly something about such experiences that continues to attract audiences, including particular tourists. One respondent refers to this as follows:

"The thing that amazes me is that live entertainment is still going on. They're still coming to see live shows. In theory, there's no need to go to a theatre because you can sit in your front room and watch your telly. So they're not coming to watch the artistes – they're coming to watch the artistes in a live atmosphere, an environment. They're

coming for a night out, an atmosphere, to see the artistes live. So there's something fundamentally lasting about that, appealing."

(SkH)

The key issue for providers of live entertainment at English seaside resorts is to continually consider what people expect in terms of live entertainment. Traditional variety may be suitable for some but others believe West End musicals should be provided i.e. top quality 'spectacle', or that the majority of stars appearing at seaside locations should be those well known from exposure on television. Additionally, people (audiences) have a perception of the total experience of attending live entertainment events that will include the etiquette associated with live performance, which may be changing. Nowadays, for example, some people expect to be able to take their drinks into the auditorium, or they may consider there is no particular dress code. People may arrive late and expect to be admitted. Certain types of audiences now have a reduced attention span, the '30 minute pantomime' (see Panel 6.3 p223). Within the unique experience of live performance, providers must try to accommodate any heightened expectations and etiquette changes. In order to do this they must be aware of changing cultural trends, attitudes and expectations, both for their traditional clientele as well as for new and emerging audiences. People's expectations have increased, their choices have increased, and they expect more for their money. They expect to see well-known names, usually from television exposure (see Panel 6.1 p218) and they expect more accessibility and less elitism. Respondents emphasise the need for live entertainment to be of a high standard (Panel 6.2 p222). Today, people demand quality and spectacle, influenced by their experiences at other live entertainment events e.g. concerts at Wembley Arena or attendance at West End musicals. Consistent with many of their everyday purchases, they are looking for added value – the visit is more than the performance itself. In such ways changing cultural trends and attitudes are affecting the live

entertainment being provided at English seaside resorts. The most commonly quoted and most significant cultural influence is television, and this is discussed first.

Respondents in general but particularly the Theatre Manager at Bournemouth, the Tourism and Entertainments Manager at Weston-super-Mare (see Panel 6.1) and the Head of Tourism, Arts and Public Relations at Skegness, believe television to be the main factor in influencing people's views and attitudes to live entertainment at the seaside. When the stars of the seaside shows were regularly on television (Morecombe and Wise, Freddie Starr, Michael Barrymore) audiences could more readily identify with them. It was also possible to transfer the feeling of the television show to the stage, as audiences would be familiar with the format. They would then have the added bonus of the 'magic' of live performance. Audiences, particularly tourists, expected to see the television stars at seaside theatres, particularly during the summer season. When there were regular variety shows on television, people understood the format of a variety show at the seaside (see below), including the expectation that there would be a nationally recognised (from television) top-of-the-bill.

Panel 6.1

"If a show's popular on television then people come from miles around to see it."

(BO)

"If you're talking about culture and the general population, with TV and TV personalities, people are less likely to take something familiar they don't know of before. They much prefer to go for a known name than think 'I wonder what that is'."

(WH)

Although a number of television stars of today do occasionally appear at seaside theatre (Ruby Wax, Graham Norton) they can earn far more from television *“television could pay them more for a night than for a season here and why should they work for six to eight weeks away from home?”* (BM2). In any case, these television stars are simply not prepared to commit themselves to a summer run, particularly in one location. Additionally, they will not generally play venues of less than a certain capacity (about 1500 seats) because many of the deals are percentage arrangements and there is far more money for an artiste in for example, the Wembley Arena, than a traditional seaside theatre.

The ‘old’ television stars are still touring - Ken Dodd, Des O’Connor and Val Doonican. They may no longer be on television, but they still have a loyal following. They are performing ‘one-nighters’ on a prescribed circuit which includes seaside venues. This is where the tradition of a known television personality touring seaside theatre is continued but they are not playing an eight-week run in one location. They are touring with a different location each night, perhaps repeating particular locations every two or three weeks. These ‘star’ names once performed for a sixteen-week summer season in one location, and ‘sold out’ most nights, often as the top-of-the-bill in a variety show. Their reputation to achieve ‘sold out’ notices was based on popular television shows. Today, they are not usually part of a (variety) show – they appear as individual acts with usually a single support act. Also, they are no longer exclusively ‘seaside’ entertainers, as they also play inland theatres on their circuits – as do, occasionally, the likes of modern day television personalities such as Graham Norton and Ruby Wax, in the larger theatres.

People like acts with which they are familiar. This helps explain the current phenomena of tribute bands (see Appendix A2), but even these shows are often polarised around the personalities, such as ‘Alan Clarke’s Hollies’, ‘Mike Pender’s

Searchers' or when Hank Marvin tours as the last remaining member of the Shadows.

"They need to see a face, a figure on the bill to have some sort of trust in it, quality."

(WO)

Acts at seaside theatres that are familiar to the likely audience will have had exposure on television, or be of the 'old school'. Today this includes names from the music of the sixties, seventies and eighties. However, most of these are not front-line acts. The headliners are actors who have been on television e.g. in the 'soaps' (although this is changing, see the next quotation, but not for pantomime, where soap stars are prominent), or they are sporting stars, particularly for pantomime, such as Frank Bruno and Ian Botham.

"Tommy Cooper, Frankie Vaughan...replaced by people who were in soaps...nowadays it's changed because the household names in the soaps aren't coming."

(BM2)

In such ways, the 'cult/culture' of television has affected the availability, format and structure of live entertainment at the seaside. Television has a particular influence in determining the popularity of certain individuals. Sufficient exposure on television leads to more theatre seats sold. Television's ability to create realism and effect has been part of a trend that has increased peoples' expectations of an entertainment experience. This has led to a need for live entertainment at the seaside to be 'bigger and better', with the consequent spectacle condensed into shorter performances. Much of the live entertainment that does not meet these quality criteria will not be patronised. Many of today's audiences have travelled widely and

have considerable experience of the lavish and 'extravagant' possibilities of performance art. Particular examples that have raised expectations were quoted as the Irish dance phenomenon of the mid-to late 1990s (Riverdance, Lord of the Dance), and West End Musicals. Technically, however, many of these productions cannot be accommodated at a lot of seaside venues and in any case, such venues do not have enough seats to generate sufficient income. Exceptions to this would be the Bournemouth International Centre and, to a lesser extent, the 1686 seater Congress Theatre in Eastbourne. (Both of these originally built with the conference market in mind).

"The shows are now just bigger and better...when Phantom toured it had seven acts, a whole spectacle. Riverdance – there's 120 people, huge sets, a stage 120 feet by 60 feet, our capacity was cut to 2,200 to put the show on. As it took a lot of money it didn't matter. Those shows are spectacular. People come and see it, get a feel-good factor and tell their friends. The old variety shows are a bit boring in comparison to these spectacles."

(BH)

The effect of such cultural changes and attitudes is most acutely felt in relation to providing a recognisable *quality* product that 'meets the quality expectations of our future visitors to the Borough' (Scarborough Borough Council, 1998). Quality is the most important factor for programmers of live entertainment at seaside theatres. Alongside quality, providers must take account of changing audience attitudes to the products that can be provided, and the continuing reason why people go to the theatre i.e. to experience the unique effect of live performance. This reinforces most respondents' conviction that quality is the key to survival. This quality then translates to the total experience/spectacle including the ambience of the venue, as described in Panel 6.2 (p222) by respondents from both the largest and the smallest resort in the study, Bournemouth and Hunstanton, respectively.

Panel 6.2

"People demand quality nowadays in every aspect of life. You demand quality in a hotel, in a restaurant. You demand quality when you go to see a show...you demand quality with regard to the actual theatre."

(BD)

"I think people demand and expect a much better quality provision...in 1990 they were happy if the artiste was high profile and not too expensive. Now there are so many factors that contribute to the experience – the ambience of the venue, style of the management, the toilets and physical state of the building, the comfort of the seats. All contributory factors to the experience, and that's moved on in the last ten years."

(HH)

Quality related to audience expectations (in this case, to some extent, their expectations of live entertainment of the 'seaside variety', see below) and their expectation to see a 'star' remains the most important concern of providers of live entertainment at the seaside. On the specific point of providing a variety show, it may no longer be possible to build shows around 'star' names, so production values, perhaps themes, are seen as more important than previously. These must be strong enough to mitigate against changing audience attitudes such as diminishing attention spans - suggested by some interviewees as a consequence of the ability with television to immediately change channels if something doesn't appeal and linked, in general, to changing audience behaviour.

Although, in general, audience attitudes are changing, there may still be a different audience etiquette between 'elitist' performing arts and live entertainment of the seaside variety:

"At one time if the audience was late, they had to wait for the interval. They won't stand for that anymore, not in a summer show. Still get away with it in ballet and opera, the upper class market. You won't with general shows."

(BO)

Audience etiquette was explored via a supplementary question and responses can be considered to relate to the many forms of live entertainment now provided at seaside theatre i.e. both 'traditional' and non-traditional seaside entertainments. Generally, audiences have become less reverential during the last decade and less prepared to sit through two hours of live entertainment, even with an interval. The Programme and Marketing Manager at Weston-super-Mare and the General Manager, Performing Arts at Eastbourne, in particular, succinctly expressed this issue (Panel 6.3).

Panel 6.3

"Audiences more recently are a lot more fidgety, a lot more intolerant, a lot more impatient at times. And they can't understand why they can't have their mobile 'phone on. And they're not as respectful of other people's space. And if they don't like something they'll walk out, go to the bar, or demand their money back. Even though they've seen two thirds of the show. The parameters, the behaviour patterns are very different. Don't want to paint too much of a negative picture but there is amongst my generation (aged 30-35), a more unforgiving quality to their viewing."

(WO)

"Their concentration spans seem to be getting shorter, TV influence, commercials influence...I'm not suggesting we should have a 30 minute pantomime but we should be condensing them, making them relevant to a live theatre experience, rather than a re-hash of something they do much better on the telly anyway."

(EO)

The product must take part of the 'blame'. If audiences today expect the spectacular, and television and West End production values are anticipated, then the live entertainment on offer must adapt to these changes, as far as possible.

The issues explored so far in this chapter have demonstrated certain, general changing cultural trends and attitudes towards live entertainment at seaside resorts. However, for many people, including strategic planners and programmers of seaside live entertainment but particularly the actual and potential audience(s), the expression 'seaside variety' conjures up certain images. At the beginning of the twenty-first century this potentially significant image may still prevail and requires further investigation. (The reader is reminded that quotations are the perceptions of council officers and members, who are *not* the consumers, but that documentary evidence is often based on consumer surveys).

One of the few council documents to refer to 'seaside variety' was the Best Value Review, Entertainments Services at Scarborough (2001) 'very few theatres operating variety shows have capacity audiences...service providers are moving away from old Music Hall/End of Pier type entertainment...the artiste and shows/concerts vary throughout the week with a range of entertainment being provided on different nights' (Scarborough Borough Council, 2001 p27). It seems continuous variety shows are almost extinct – yet 'seaside variety' exists as an expression, and as a type of live entertainment in people's minds. However, 'seaside variety' means different things to different people.

To explore possible confusion surrounding the image/perception of seaside variety, a supplementary question was asked at interview: 'What is the future for traditional seaside variety?' Responses are deliberately arranged to initially explain some confusion relating to the expression/genre 'traditional seaside variety'; then to

discuss respondents' views on what might constitute 'modern variety'. There follows a comment on whether or not such types of live entertainment, given changing cultural trends and attitudes, are particularly appropriate to the seaside at the start of the twentieth-first century.

'Variety' could literally be interpreted as a range/variety of different types of live performance over a period of time, or it could refer to a particular type of individual show, or series of shows, or both. In fact, a number of the resorts in this study run a season (usually in the summer) when they alternate different types of shows, sometimes including a variety show, each week (Appendix A2). The Resorts and Entertainments Officer at Scarborough illustrates these possible combinations:

"At the moment we're operating 7 days a week variety – 3 days of the Krankies, 2 days of the 50's/60's variety show, we're doing one day of a (summer) pantomime and one day of a straight variety show, Show Time."

(SO)

However, the generally accepted view of a traditional seaside variety show would probably have 6 to 8 acts, with a chorus of dancers. There would be a reducing bill, with a top-of-the bill act. A traditional show such as this might also be called an end-of-the-pier show. It is steeped in seaside history and linked to music hall in some respects e.g. via a top-of-the-bill and by a generally agreed format that is based on earlier, for example 1930s, variety shows. Two quotations in Panel 6.4 (p226) illustrate this:

Panel 6.4

"It goes back to the 1930s. It means different acts, basically, linked by a host, comedian. Dancing girls."

(SO)

"Have to define variety. I had this conversation at a meeting when Equity made a deputation about variety. We're talking about variety that is still being done at the Hippodrome¹...very elderly market that are harping back."

(EO)

One respondent mentioned Music Hall as variety *"We do a Good Old Days show, which is a typical variety show"* (SkO), so there is possibly some confusion, and a number of respondents had various views regarding the expression 'modern variety'. Some felt it might be a stand up comedian with a support act, or perhaps a 60's retro group. (This would be the general pattern of a show that had a top-of-the-bill, perhaps not appearing until the second half). Others felt, by definition, there had to be sufficient 'variety' e.g. an aspiring singer, a speciality or visual act, perhaps a second/warm-up comic, but then a top-of-the-bill, often a comedian. Nobody disagreed that it did not mean watching one individual for, say, two hours:

"...there is still evidence that style of show still exists and gets bookings, oddly enough. And occasionally gets an audience too! But variety should mean not going to the theatre and experiencing a comedian for two hours, watching dancers for two hours...but experiencing snatches of genres which make up a varied package of entertainment."

(HH)

¹ 'Oh, What a Show' (April to October, 2001, Eastbourne Hippodrome, Matpro Productions – A top-of-the-bill comedian (Paul Eastwood from the Des O'Connor and Michael Barrymore television shows), Adam Daye (star of LWT's Who Do You Do), vocalists from West End musicals, and the Natalie Dowling Dancers.

The most famous exponent of traditional variety still touring is Ken Dodd. However, apart from when he appears in Music Hall as the top-of-the bill, Ken performs a first 'half' with a *single* support act feature, then a longer second half (often two hours or more!) *on his own*. Ken regularly tours the theatres at the seaside and sells out every time, although his show is not 'reducing bill' traditional variety.

Many felt that the end-of-the-pier-show type of variety had not developed beyond its 1930s conception, and suggested a themed show as the new 'variety' for the twenty-first century. Typically, these would be based on Hollywood films/musicals, or a particular era e.g. Rock and Roll, or 50s/60s. These shows tend to be strongly choreographed with no obvious links and flows and no speciality acts, although there may be a semi-star.

"It runs for two, one hour slots...if you're looking at the modern variety show, I would say it is a themed show, not a variety show."

(SO)

Responses as to whether variety, excluding Music Hall, would be likely to continue were mixed. Certainly it would need the quality production values discussed above if it were to attract new audiences. Variety as an art form needed to evolve. In its traditional format it was felt that variety had a limited future. Two respondents' comments in Panel 6.5 (p228) illustrate the on-going difficulties of trying to 'pigeon-hole' seaside variety.

Panel 6.5

"There are people putting on variety shows and trying to get you interested in them. My desk is full of them, but it tends to be going against that...it tends to be 40's/50's/60's Forever in Blue Jeans, it tends to be a show that is linked to a particular theme. Rather than traditional variety."

(SO)

"...the younger families, their idea of a variety show, Cannon and Ball and a support, maybe the Nolans and a comedian. Whereas you get two or three on a show that nobody's ever heard of, that could be quite as good as the Cannon and Ball but because people don't know the names they don't want to pay the money."

(SkO)

It can be seen that during the 1990s, changing cultural trends and attitudes towards live entertainment associated with the seaside have resulted in the need for managers of resort theatres to consider more closely the type and quality of the product provided. They also have to consider 'added value' beyond just the performance - for example, being able to take drinks in to the auditorium, or being admitted to the performance even when arriving late. Managers need to monitor and anticipate audience attitudes and responses, particularly towards products traditionally associated with live entertainment at the seaside. As noted, some of these products, particularly those associated with the expression 'seaside variety' will have to change to meet more demanding audience criteria, particularly amongst the younger generation. The type of product traditionally known as 'seaside variety' is becoming less distinct, less easily recognisable as a discrete product. As traditional seaside/seasonal entertainment changes, variety and other forms of seaside entertainment may become part of the year-long cultural programme at resort locations but will need to improve in production values/quality. The

importance of live entertainment in the year-round social and cultural life of a seaside resort is now discussed.

The role of live entertainment in the social and cultural life of resorts

Performing arts and live entertainment may traditionally have been perceived as poles apart – the former elitist, the latter popularist - but they may be moving closer together. The following quotation from the General Manager, Performing Arts at Eastbourne, illustrates the potential crossover in relation to target audiences which are increasingly focused on the local population:

“Arts and entertainment are very different...lots of people look at art and see it as elitist...then you suddenly put seaside entertainment in front of people and somehow that seems to dumb it down, way past the middle ground and ‘No-one would go to that, tacky and low-brow’...for a seaside town’s entertainment offer to survive it has to programme for a 52 week culture. Our summer entertainment is obviously geared around our visitors but not to the exclusion of our residents. That’s the key. You have a big show. Dr Doolittle coming here for three weeks in the summer but it won’t just be the visitors that are coming to see it. The whole region will be coming to see it. Appeal to both sets in the summer, our residents throughout the year.”

(EO)

There are clearly cultural changes relating to seaside entertainment that has affected the programming of seaside theatre and thus its economic, social and cultural importance. There have also been a number of changes in the live entertainment industry (see below). Regardless of any discernible economic benefit, or even a perceived negative (direct) economic deficit of providing live entertainment for tourists or non-residents, or both, respondents attached

considerable importance to the provision of live entertainment in terms of its social and cultural value, particularly in relation to the resident and local population. The General Manager, Arts and Entertainment at Hunstanton expressed this:

“...the theatre is fairly vital to the social fabric of the town. Out of season we also provide live entertainment Saturday and Sunday...It’s also home to the Princess Theatre Club, so it’s got that social aspect to it. Youth theatre and Children’s Club too. In a small resort it’s very important to the social and cultural fabric of the resort – it plays host to the Festival of Arts before the summer season as well.”

(HH)

Even respondents at Skegness, who knew they would not sell many seats for the “better class of music” (SkM), were sure that the theatre was a cultural/social centre for example, for occasional ‘elitist’ performing arts, or for local amateur performing arts groups. It was also providing a social centre for the local population, another meeting place, although most references from respondents to the social/cultural importance of theatre activities referred to the (unquantified) cultural value of ‘elitist’ performing arts e.g. opera and ballet. Sometimes there is a broader cultural offering as an integral part of the holiday offer but more often symphonies, opera, ballet etc. are programmed with residents/local people in mind and are particularly useful in providing live entertainment during the shoulder months (spring/late autumn). Many of the ‘elitist’ performing arts products will lose money at the box office but can be regarded as necessary in order to provide a ‘rounded’ programme i.e. both ‘low’ and ‘high’ culture. Some entertainment e.g. tea dances are provided purely as a social gathering and will make little, or no, money (see Appendix A2). Additionally, they may be provided in order to demonstrate full use of the theatre facility. These social events are mainly for the local population and feature more heavily during the off-season.

The significance of live entertainment in the life of the town can thus be extended to include (generally unquantifiable) indirect social and cultural benefits, as well as any economic benefits associated with providing traditional seaside entertainment. The economics of providing a 'balanced' live entertainment programme are considered (Eastbourne Borough Council, 1999 p3; Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk, 2000 p4; Scarborough Borough Council, 2001 p12) but are not the priority. The most obvious example of a balanced programme in this study relates to the subsidies provided by Scarborough Borough Council, firstly, to the 'Alan Ayckbourne' Stephen Joseph Theatre for 'quality' performing arts, and also to the private operator Apollo/SFX to help retain traditional seaside entertainment. Then, Scarborough's involvement in amateur community theatre (YMCA) and also their financial commitment to the retention of the last Municipal Orchestra in the country, at the Spa Complex. However, the economic argument is never far away, as noted by the Scarborough Director of Tourism and Leisure Services:

"Live entertainment is a social good. It is something that we ought to provide because it is highly motivating from an educational and social point of view. Not to say that traditional seaside entertainment necessarily does that. But live entertainment in different forms is a critical component of living today for all age groups. But again it comes down to economics because most live entertainment, particularly live entertainment that is off mainstream is usually quite expensive to produce. People aren't necessarily prepared to pay for the cost of it."

(SD)

Where a resort is attempting to attract business to the area many potential investors will enquire about the amount and type of cultural activities available. Respondents at Weston-super-Mare, in particular, mentioned this and commented, once again, that although people (including the employees of businesses relocating to the area)

may not visit a theatre, they require one to be available. *“when our Economic Development Unit are attracting businesses to the town, people ask the question ‘Is there a theatre?’ They might not be going to use it but their perception of the town, it’s got a theatre, it’s got a cinema, it’s part of the package”*(WH). This is further evidence for considering theatre as part of a cultural package, not necessarily to make an operating surplus but to provide the opportunity for a fulfilling cultural experience – in this case, for newly relocated residents.

With regard to the specific type of live entertainment provided, claimed to be socially and culturally valuable, all resorts have some form of summer season with a programme designed to basically appeal to tourists, but also day visitors and residents. Even where a location is very much focused on tourism for its economic survival, for example, Skegness, the summer programme will still be suitable for residents and local people within a forty-five minute drive time. Such programming is an obvious attempt to help sell seats and ‘subsidise’ summer season-type shows and again, demonstrates the need to attract markets other than the traditional summer season holidaymaker. There is a definite attempt by most programmers to provide entertainment that will appeal to residents and people in the hinterland, as well as non-residents, in the summer, but also throughout the year, usefully illustrated by a sample of the many quotations on this topic in Panel 6.6.

Panel 6.6

“All aimed at the residents...I just have to make sure that in the summer it is something that is particularly going to appeal to the visitors as well.”

(EO)

Cont.

Panel 6.6 Cont.

"More and more residents are going now, where it was 80% tourists, we're talking a 50/50 mix now."

(BH)

"We programme the theatre purely and simply for the local people. They have to be the bedrock of what is on in the theatre – in my view, the holidaymakers and the visitors are very important, but (just) a big bonus."

(WO)

It seems that the programming of the live entertainment provided is changing due to the pressure of various cultural changes and a focus on the needs of the local population. As noted, one significant change concerns the 'weakening' of the summer season, expressed by, amongst others, the Managing Director of Thanet Leisure Force, in relation to the Winter Gardens at Margate:

"Look at our budget - where June to September might have been 60% of our take, now it's more like 50%. So the summer's shifting into autumn and winter months. Winter holds up well from single night events."

(MD)

A specific, supplementary question was asked regarding the type and amount of entertainment provided, linked to statistics available for the year March to April 2000/01. (Interviews were being conducted in the summer of 2001). This question could reveal relationships between types of entertainment provided, and anticipated audiences for those categories. Respondents were shown the analysis of 2000/01 data and were asked to comment on their level of satisfaction with the programme mix i.e. the types of live entertainment put on in their resort during the latest financial year. Responses to the type and amount of live entertainment provided extended

into issues concerning the target markets aimed for (see Appendix G), the quality and scarcity of product available, and performance related to the agreed Performance Indicators (PI's) of theatres in the British Resorts Association benchmarking exercise that had generated the data (Appendix A2).

The type of entertainment provided is a crucial part of this study as it is the most obvious pointer regarding who the providers of live entertainment are aiming at. It is closely linked to respondents' perceptions of the effect of cultural change, and the recognition by them of the social and cultural value of live entertainment to tourists and the local population. As noted, particular details of the types of live entertainment (categories) provided at the resort theatres in this study are provided in Appendices A2 and G. Appendix A2 gives straightforward quantitative data i.e. the precise type and amount of live entertainment but Appendix G gives a resort-by-resort analysis that includes comments on the relationship between the type and amount of live entertainment programmed and the target markets aimed for. Crucially, the discussion in Appendix G allows responses from interviewees to be related to the programme of live entertainment provided and the particular circumstances at a particular resort location. This illustrates both the inter-related nature (economics/tourism, culture, and politics), of this study, and the previously discussed issue of common factors of change being dealt with, perhaps differently, in relation to each resort's circumstances. Methodologically, in relation to linkages across the three areas of change of the study, 'core/target' markets (see Appendix G) were a direct question related to the first area of (tourist) change; whilst 'Who is the entertainment aimed at?' was a question from the second area. However, these are usefully discussed together in Appendix G.

As a summative general comment on the amount and type of live entertainment provided, most respondents are satisfied with the programme mix, conscious of the

need to provide a balance of activities as well as a reasonable financial outcome, as expressed by the General Manager, Arts and Entertainment, at Hunstanton:

"The programme is determined by the core age of the audience, the size of the theatre and the margins associated with certain types of shows. I'm satisfied we've introduced some things to balance the programme and still make it financially viable."

(HH)

A further general comment, applicable to all resorts (but see Appendix G for resort by resort detail), is that programmers of live entertainment at seaside resorts are clear about their key target markets (see also chapter five) and attempt to provide an appropriate live entertainment offer. This does not mean that they consequently sell a sufficient number of seats as there are problems of obtaining appropriate acts as well as issues relating to providing some live entertainment e.g. 'high' culture, which is deemed necessary for the 'cultural' image of the location, but is known to lose money. This approach reinforces the generally held view (above) succinctly articulated by the General Manager, Arts and Entertainment, at Hunstanton i.e. the balance of the programme needs to reflect various perceived cultural requirements but related to known financial parameters. Good examples of this would be pantomime and 'amateur' (see below). Pantomime is programmed at all seven resorts in the study, except Margate, (Eastbourne's is at the Devonshire Park Theatre so does not appear in Appendix A2). The pantomime runs for well over 40 performances at each of Bournemouth, Hunstanton and Weston-super-Mare. This suggests a large number of residents are attending. The pantomime season at Scarborough and Skegness is less than half this (21 and 18 respectively) suggesting much smaller numbers of local people attending. All resorts provide for amateur productions (Scarborough's is not at the Spa Theatre so does not appear in the statistics). The 'amateur' categories are provided for residents and people within

a reasonable drive time. At Eastbourne's Congress Theatre 'amateur' is the joint highest category and suggests considerable importance is attached to providing a 'professional' live entertainment venue for local amateur operatic and theatrical societies. This is also the case at Weston-super-Mare. 'Amateur' rates as the second highest category at Hunstanton but not particularly highly at Bournemouth, Margate or Skegness. Note: Amateur performances are generally well attended (by local residents) and always result in a positive net contribution to the venue, due to the deal.

In total, and related to live entertainment's role in the social and cultural life of resorts in this study, there is generally a high all-year usage of the theatres in this study i.e. an average of 207 performances per year, per theatre (Appendix A2). The lowest amount is at Scarborough (150) which is partly due to there being four other venues for live entertainment in the resort. The second lowest figure is at Skegness (180), where most live entertainment is concentrated in the summer months. Scarborough, Skegness and Bournemouth concentrate their (non-pantomime) live entertainment in the summer months (June, July and August) but also have a good amount during the 'shoulder' months' of April and the last part of September. Live entertainment events are most evenly spread throughout the year at Weston-super-Mare (255) which has the highest number of performances of any of the resort theatres in the study. This suggests attention to the live entertainment needs of the local population, partly borne out by the high amount of amateur productions.

As noted, programming is within the known constraints of a distinct lack of affordable new product and discussing the programme mix led to comments on the difficulties of obtaining suitable product. Specific types of live entertainment mentioned that managers would like to be more available/affordable were musical theatre, big-name one-night acts, including 'named' TV comedians such as Frank

Skinner, and *good* new drama including stage versions of TV 'soaps' e.g. Coronation Street or Eastenders, "*If a show's popular on telly, then people come from miles around to see it live*" (BO). The last comment, of course, reflects earlier suggestions that television can be a significant influence in influencing types of theatre performance.

The industry is increasingly product driven and respondents elaborated on further changes taking place which were causing difficulties in obtaining product and thus influencing the amount and categories of quality live entertainment available – both in relation to tourists, and local people.

Changes within the live entertainment industry that impact on seaside theatres

One of the key comments being reported in this chapter concerns changes that have resulted in increased difficulties in obtaining the right amount and type of quality product. A major consideration in this respect was consolidation within the supply side of the industry i.e. a number of agents/producers have been taken over by a few large organisations. The most frequently mentioned example was the American SFX/Clear Channel organisation that had acquired the UK's Apollo leisure operation in August 1999. At the time, Apollo already had control of a lot of product. If the product is tied to Apollo, it is generally not available for individual seaside theatres.

With regard to booking acts, respondents see the main problem as obtaining the right quality product at the right time and thereby providing an appropriately balanced programme. Consolidation on the agency and managing agency side of the business has meant fewer agents to deal with. There are still very many independent agents but it is increasingly difficult to obtain particular acts because

they are tied to large-scale agents, such as Apollo. Many respondents were concerned about the effect of this development in affecting the availability of suitable product, and the potential for large organisations to influence whether certain venues can continue to provide live entertainment of the required quality and distinctiveness. Three typical comments can be seen in Panel 6.7. (The Managing Director of Apollo had been one of the 1998 preliminary interviewees during the setting up of the study and had confirmed Apollo's predatory, commercial attitude – see Appendix B).

Panel 6.7

“Apollo are very much sealing it all up. They want a few places to close down and they'll have the monopoly. Certainly some of the theatres they're taking on are too small. I can see them actually closing some of those down.”

(MO1)

“I have huge concerns about the onslaught of Apollo/SFX and the impact that has on the product that's available in the industry.”

(HH)

“So the more local authority theatres that Apollo control the more homogenised the programme is going to be. It's gonna be like M and S in the high street.”

(EH)

Booking the appropriate quality act(s) is the key to the survival of seaside theatre - economically and also, increasingly, as a continuing location for popular (both 'high' and 'low') social/cultural live entertainment activities. Given the increased power of the agents, and a scarcity of quality product, deals to secure performers have subsequently changed. This was a significant change in the modus operandi of the

industry. It was causing considerable problems for managers trying to programme a year-round quality product, and provide a box-office profit. Deals were much tighter, in favour of the promoter. The deals were product-led; a scarce quality product meant a tight deal. A product that was not likely to sell enough seats meant pressure from the agent to obtain a guarantee, as described in Panel 6.8.

Panel 6.8

"Deals have definitely changed. When I first came here the promoters on some shows were up to 50/50. Now it's not unusual for us to take 20%, they take 80. I've actually done (Diana Ross for a couple of nights) a 10/90 deal. Unheard of twenty years ago, but it still brought us in £20,000."

(BH)

"The agents are turning, they want more guarantees...I think the type of show they're supplying, they're not selling. The theatres lose. They (agents) still pay their artistes, their crew."

(MO2)

With the last quotation in mind, some respondents felt their colleagues were not active enough in pressurising agents. However, it was agreed that there was considerable freedom for managers to negotiate their own deals and, to that extent, scarce products could be offered lucrative terms by programmers. It was more usual for 'high culture' products (ballet, orchestral) to require a guarantee and this was more likely to be allowed in order to provide a wide range of cultural activities:

"Minority audiences will never pay for itself, so it's the balance again. The pop concert that will pay for a little chamber orchestra."

(ED)

Some respondents wanted to 'grow their own talent' and, in the case of Eastbourne and Hunstanton, had the personnel who could self-produce, i.e. employ the cast directly, self-direct and promote the show. As a means of reducing costs and controlling quality, this would be an option for a venue with the appropriate production skills. This was an interesting new development in managing change at seaside theatre and almost goes back to the days when local impresarios put on shows year after year, sometimes with the same personnel.

A further supply problem is that artistes only tour at certain times, best expressed by the General Manager, Arts and Entertainment, at Hunstanton:

"Artistes only tour at certain times. So you'll have an act like Elkie Brooks who'll be out for a three month tour November to January. If you're a resort theatre then you're looking to put on a high quality of entertainment over that 8 or 12 week summer, you're not going to get these artistes if they're not touring, so you only have the ability to get the acts that are generally available anyway. Who might not be the highest profile acts or the style that you want."

(HH)

Nevertheless, the most consistently reported problem continued to be the lack of available *quality* acts. Most respondents mentioned the need to provide better quality, if seaside theatre were to effectively compete for the 'leisure pound'. However, they were pessimistic as to whether such quality was available. Some respondents felt the theatre should not be opened unless good quality could be provided. The counter argument to not opening the theatre unless quality product is available relates to the costs of operation. If the deal is right it is better to be open than closed:

"If the deal is right with the promoter of the show and you are covering your staff costs and overhead costs, better to be open and be playing to an audience of 200 in a 1500 seater, as long as they're enjoying it and you're covering your costs."

(EO)

A further and perhaps, more fundamental point, inexplicably linked to general cultural change and changing cultural preferences, is whether the acts booked continue to sell enough seats – be they 'quality' or not. If practitioners are satisfied with their programme mix it suggests they are satisfied with the percentage of seats sold. Most managers and councillors are reasonably satisfied with the amount of seats sold per category (see Appendix A2 for quantitative data and Appendix G for resort-by-resort comments). However, many of the respondents mentioned the issue of 'too many seats'. The basic problem here, (apart from the fact that there might be three or four theatres in large resorts), is that seaside theatres were often built on a large scale - around 1400 seats. This suited the 'hey-days', when tourists flocked to the seaside. Conversely (paradoxically), small theatres (e.g. Hunstanton and Weston-super-Mare in this study), with well under 1000 seats, are not big enough to attract many of the top names and cannot accommodate large touring productions. However, small theatres like these can usually demonstrate a reasonably high 'percentage of seats sold' – they simply don't have as many to sell, whilst a seaside theatre with much more than 1000 seats, running a full programme, is going to have difficulty selling a high percentage of seats. The days when resorts could rely on 'full house' notices for all (seasonal) shows are long gone and, as noted, there is perceived to be a dearth of popular, quality product that would fill any excess capacity. Thus, apart from problems of getting the right type of act, there are issues concerning the *amount* of live entertainment (accommodating earlier comments regarding providing a year-round programme), connected to being able to sell the available seats.

'Percentage seats sold' is a basic Performance Indicator (PI) - see Appendix A2 for PI's for theatres in this study. Logically, more seats could be sold per event if fewer events were put on, although linked to size of theatre and 52-week programming is the issue of the number of theatres i.e. total seats at any one resort. Thus, the quality and type (category), and consequently the amount of live entertainment, related to the percentage of seats sold, in turn, related to the number and size of venue(s) at a particular location, are the important issues in attempting to assess the impact of changes within the live entertainment industry on seaside theatres. Economically, too many theatres, too many (unsold) seats are costly. Socially and culturally, too few activities might be detrimental. Clearly, a balance is needed, and this must come from the available product, in terms of amount, quality and cost. Although, as noted, respondents were generally satisfied with their programmes (particularly with respect to tourists), in order to provide a broader picture the following supplementary questions were asked: 'Should the level/amount of entertainment be increased/decreased, stay about the same?' and '...types of live entertainment provided, how satisfied are you with the eventual programme mix?'

Responses by individual resort are instructive in this study. One of the key themes, key points, emerging from this research is that all the resorts in the study are not equally affected by the common factors of change, although there *may be* common agreement on particular aspects. Nevertheless, there are resort-specific situations that must be considered in attempting to recognise universal, as well as local issues, and, consequently, local means of dealing with any such issues. The amount of live entertainment provided, and any linkage, for example, to economic, social and cultural aspects of the location, might well distinguish resorts one from another, and are briefly noted in relation to comments regarding the amount of live entertainment provided.

Respondents at Bournemouth felt that they have too many venues (four) with too many seats, as expressed by the Director of the Bournemouth International Centre (responsible for the Pavilion Theatre) *"I'm responsible for four venues, I have one too many, I have two too many"*(BD). However, they saw live entertainment as important to the town – economically, socially and culturally, and this affects the amount they put on. Comments in Panel 6.9 from the (same) Director of the Bournemouth International Centre and the Vice-Chairman of the BIC/Pavilion Management Committee are illustrative of the situation at Bournemouth relating to an appropriate balance between the economics, and the cultural value, of providing live entertainment.

Panel 6.9

"You have to educate people, to entertain them, to provide a service. It's part of a package you offer to your residents and your tourists."
(BD)

"(without live theatre)...it certainly would hurt the economy of the town. Either they'll come and stay because we've got theatre or they'll come for a night or even a week-end, some of these one-man shows, international names, they get booked up by their fan clubs and people come from all over the country and stay here. Same with the pantomime."
(BM2)

Eastbourne respondents (four venues, three council run), seemed generally satisfied with the amount of live entertainment they provide, given their desire to programme a broad cultural offering throughout the year. This offer is basically aimed at residents *"Everything I programme in my theatres is aimed at the residents...I just have to make sure that in the summer it is something that is particularly going to appeal to the visitors as well."* (EO)

Margate, *"I don't actually put anything on specially for holidaymakers except the summer show"* (MO1) has one major theatre to programme, where they offer a venue for social gathering but it is also a mixed venue - catering operations accounting for approximately three-quarters of the turnover. In this respect, the amount of (live entertainment) seats sold may be less important.

Hunstanton have one small theatre (474 seats) so selling a high proportion of seats might be possible. *"Sixty per cent of our audience are local residents, even during the summer season"* (HH), and this local importance is reflected in the following extensive comment from the same respondent:

"In Hunstanton the theatre is fairly vital to the social fabric of the town...it's home to the Princess Theatre club, so it's got that social aspect...youth theatre and children's club too. In a small resort like Hunstanton I think it's very important to the social and cultural fabric of the resort – it plays host to a Festival of Arts before the summer season...in larger resorts (Blackpool and Eastbourne) clearly they're taking in the larger touring theatrical product which is what a small resort theatre can't take in. If you look back at the Grand Theatre, Blackpool over the last 5/6 years it's re-positioned itself because it started to take on the mainstream touring product and less of the one-night stands – and that's something a theatre can do to a town."

(HH)

Comments such as the above (not strictly to do with the question being asked) nevertheless help explain the reasons for the types, and thus the amount of certain types of live entertainment being provided. Unusually, perhaps because of the focus on local people, or, conjecturally, success with the 'shoulder months', Hunstanton was looking to extend its season *"[Amount]...we're about right. We may need to look at the length of the season. Seasons are extending and we're trying to*

keep people coming in longer. I think the full programme we put on now is about right.” (HH)

It has been noted how respondents at Weston-super-Mare regarded live entertainment as an integral (cultural) part of the ‘selling’ of the town to prospective businesses. This was mentioned again when discussing the amount of live entertainment provided. Interviewees suggested they would not increase the amount of live entertainment unless they could obtain the appropriate quality. With regard to types/categories of live entertainment at Scarborough, the council programmed Spa Theatre is in danger of clashing similar acts (traditional seaside entertainment) with the council sponsored but privately managed (Apollo/SFX) Futurist Theatre. As noted already, Scarborough respondents saw live entertainment as a ‘social good’, as well as an economic benefit. They were prepared to subsidise it for the time being (but see the debate on ‘subsidy at Scarborough’ in chapter seven), although they anticipate less live entertainment in the future. This may not be a surprising comment, given the five theatres currently open, which are all run, or subsidised in part, by the council.

Skegness, heavily reliant on tourism, with a full summer season of shows in the one council-run theatre, was seeking to put more shows on in the winter. These would be for the local operatic, arts and drama groups. With regard to the amount of entertainment provided, *“In the summer we have a show every night so that’s fine. The winter we’ve steadily increased, we used to put on very little. I think it’s about right.” (SkO)*

Non-council run live entertainment, particularly in-hotel live entertainment

There were other issues relating to live entertainment at the seaside that had been identified in preliminary work for this study and were commented on by respondents at this point in the primary research stage. The issue of hotels, pub/club and in-house live entertainment (particularly identified as a developing trend by Hughes and Benn in their survey of 1994) was explored in relation to possible effects on council-run live entertainment. It is accepted as a fairly recent phenomenon that resort hotels have been providing live entertainment in order to keep their patrons in the hotel, spending money at the bar. Respondents generally felt that hotel entertainment did not materially affect the entertainment programmed in the theatre(s). Two exceptions related to the particular circumstances prevalent at Hunstanton, and Skegness, and are briefly discussed. Hunstanton is surrounded by caravan sites and some of these (5000+ vans) have full theatre facilities, with live entertainment provided seven nights a week. Hunstanton programmers were working in a spirit of co-operation with the caravan operators. Skegness also has many caravan sites but the most important 'competition' was the very large Butlin's complex. Skegness operators were conscious of the potential effect of Butlin's on their programming, as expressed by the Head of Tourism, Arts and Public relations at Skegness:

"(Live entertainment in-house, hotels, etc.)...It's absolutely crucial. It's part of the tourism product. Butlin's is massively important to us...in terms of what I put on it tends to be the same as they put on but that's because we've got a huge market of family people."

(SkH)

Most resorts were attempting to work with the hotels by, for example, placing their theatre publicity material with the hoteliers, perhaps arranging for discounts for hotel

guests at the theatre on certain nights. They often arrange complimentary tickets for the hoteliers themselves, particularly pre-season. Degrees of co-operation varied but it was felt that the council had to provide live entertainment, whereas the hoteliers could choose whether, or not, to do so. Issues surrounding the future of live entertainment at English seaside resorts was asked as a broad question at the end of the study, but there were a number of relevant comments for this chapter. These, sometimes reinforcing earlier statements in relation to cultural changes and changes within the live entertainment industry, are categorised and emphasised below, starting with a common issue but with comments as to how this manifests itself at certain resorts. The analysis continues with some particular points mentioned only at particular resorts.

Further significant issues, some resort-specific, mainly to do with obtaining suitable product but emphasising how each resort has particular priorities

Unsurprisingly, the issue of difficulty in obtaining quality product was consistently repeated at all locations. Clearly, the problem of supply was a significant change influencing live entertainment provided at the resort(s), particularly during the last decade. Respondents naturally focused on it. There were a number of points to emerge that were significantly different, but connected, to the responses to particular supplementary questions (booking acts/deals etc.). One general concern was the need for more quality musicals. Of course, quality is subjective and a Rock 'n Roll musical show such as 'That'll be the Day' might be quality to one respondent, but not to another who might be thinking in terms of West End (musical) production values. In any case, a number of seaside theatres, and certainly those with capacities under 1500, could not afford large or expensive travelling productions from the West End, nor have the technical capabilities or stage size to accommodate them. The common issue of lack of quality product was linked to the

need for affordable, quality ballet and opera. Good quality reputable 'cultural' performing arts often required a guarantee, although this did not necessarily mean they would not be booked. Bournemouth respondents for example, were anticipating putting on more 'elitist' performing arts, as were Eastbourne. Scarborough Borough Council already subsidises 'quality' drama at the Stephen Joseph theatre, as well as classical music from the Spa Orchestra.

Specific issues not commonly mentioned at every resort are interesting in building a picture of concerns that might eventually affect all resorts. The key people at each resort are the managers who programme the theatre(s) so, for the sake of consistency, their individual views will be considered first. There will then be a brief section on further issues mentioned by other respondents.

According to the programmer at Eastbourne, the biggest issue was the lack of quality, weekly-touring drama. This is because their Devonshire Park Theatre is traditionally a Playhouse. To protect the quality of the plays, the Eastbourne programmer (who comes from a production and performer's background) was going to self-produce the plays. Eastbourne also perceived that they were not a particularly good location for children's entertainment, regardless of the quality: *"Problem we have, maybe it's to do with being a resort town, children's entertainment. Whether it's good or poor, people don't come to Eastbourne to see it. Postman Pat's, Sooty's, Chuckle Brothers – all reasonable quality, little support. Surprised and a bit nonplussed as to how we approach that one. We are failing on our children's development – nothing for a family audience apart from our pantomime."* (EO)

The two Margate programmers saw children's shows as a growth area. Additionally, their market research suggested people wanted to see young comedians (Graham

Norton etc.) but these were difficult to get. People wanted to see familiar faces, particularly the big names from television. In any case, Margate programmers were heavily restricted by the Apollo/SFX-run Lees Cliff Hall in Folkestone. It was felt that certain acts were programmed at the Lees Cliff to directly affect Margate audiences: *"We had the Levellers here but they had them in the Lees Cliff two weeks before. Halved our audience."* (MO2) Additionally, certain acts 'tied' to Apollo were not available to Margate e.g. Victoria Wood is with a particular agency that placed her at the Lees Cliff Hall, *"Certainly, they're putting on acts at the Lees Cliff (about 1000 seater) that normally they would not be able to afford."* (MO1) Note: Many performers will not appear at a venue below a certain capacity e.g. Billy Connolly, 3000 seats minimum. It is surprising that Victoria Wood is prepared to play the 1000 seater Lees Cliff except that this small theatre is one of many on a tour of perhaps, twenty five venues, most of which have strong links with, or are run by, Apollo. As far as artistes or their agents are concerned the large theatres compensate for the small, but the package is the key. An individual resort theatre will have difficulty breaking into that circuit for a one-off appearance (but see comments from the Scarborough programmer, in particular, below, on working with the private sector).

The General Manager, Arts and Entertainment (also the programmer) at Hunstanton was the most forceful in suggesting there needed to be an industry forum/debate on the potential decline of smaller theatres. He suggested that the Apollo/SFX 'onslaught' was restricting the availability of quality product and so was detrimental to the whole live entertainment industry:

"We're talking about entertainment per se...the industry has got to be more open in its approach to doing business. Unless we do, it's going to be pretty much the death of the industry...unless you are responsible for something over 12/1400 seats then, pretty much it's on the decline...Paradoxically, I can't substantiate that because the

venues I manage are actually on the increase – year-on-year attendance's are increasing and we're generating more income. But that's against a background of declining availability of product, both resort theatres and other mainstream venues."

(HH)

The Hunstanton respondent repeated the problem of not being able to get good quality 'elitist' performing art. Using ballet as an example, he was adamant that guarantees should be paid for quality ballet. It was known that ballet was a minority interest and it was therefore not realistic to expect a good ballet company to accept a percentage deal. He felt there was a 'machismo' as well as sometimes a (tacit) council policy against paying a guarantee. However, the point was a balanced programme rather than policy restriction and he elaborated on the 'freedom to deal' approach of council policy:

"No policy within the council at all. The operating policy is to get the best possible position at the end of the year. If you look at it on a black and white basis you could say for three months they did all percentages, they did well. Another three months they did all guarantees, they did poorly'. At the end of the year you're looking at the bottom line – the net contribution of all of the events you have staged."

(HH)

The Programme and Marketing Manager at Weston-super-Mare perceived a problem in the lack of product with regard to replacing the current fad of tribute bands. He agreed there was a current culture of not giving guarantees but elaborated on the consequences of this approach: *"We also found the more one offers a guarantee, usually the less support one receives from the promoter – to supply merchandise, have people available for interview, supply print and so forth."*

(WO)

The Scarborough Resorts and Entertainments Officer repeated the problem of being unable to get quality product, but with particular reference to the lack of big production shows. As a single buyer he felt it was difficult to get advantageous deals and suggested working in conjunction with the large managing agents in the private sector, believing that many of the small promoters will 'go to the wall'. He agreed with a suggestion that the resorts might act as a consortia "[to increase buying power] Yes, it would, without a shadow of a doubt." (SO)

At Skegness the view from the Head of Tourism, Arts and Public Relations (also the programmer) was that, despite a lack of new product, people were still attending in numbers that made traditional resort entertainment viable. The deal was the vital element in say, having only 300 people in for the Good Old Days, in the 1168 seater theatre. However, live entertainment needed to change: *"The scary possibility is live entertainment is dying – that it is old-fashioned, that people are going high-tech. That's my fear but it's not being upheld...we're putting on traditional shows but I don't budget for a sell-out."* (SkH)

Further issues mentioned by other respondents (non-programmers) clustered around the general topic of the future likely development of live entertainment at English seaside resorts (but see also chapter seven). It was felt councils should further encourage amateur performances. These demonstrated a 'social' side to the council and possibly the development of new talent. Two respondents mentioned the influence of the growth of cruises. On the one hand, it took talent away from the theatres but on the other, offered a training ground for new talent. Otherwise, comments were consistent with those of the programmers.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored notable cultural and industry changes during the last decade that have directly influenced the live entertainment provided at a number of English seaside resorts. In one respect, not much has changed since the 1980s; there continues to be a lack of quality product available to perform at seaside theatres, so many of the old traditional acts are still employed. Additionally, there is a dwindling audience for these acts. There are general problems of supply. These affect 'seaside entertainment' but are most acute in the 'elitist' arts category such as ballet and good quality drama. To compound the problem of a lack of available quality, audience expectations have increased, largely influenced by television but also by West End production values. The touring productions of West End shows are not generally available, financially, or technically, to seaside theatres. Television creates the stars but many of them can earn much more on television than by touring. If they do tour it will not be for a traditional summer season and normally not in the size of theatre available at the seaside.

Audience etiquette has changed but, speculatively, if the right quality product could be provided perhaps the problems of short attention span and general etiquette would be negated. The quality and type of acts available is directly related to seats sold. There are too many available seats and too low a percentage of seats sold to be economically healthy, although the true impact of the total cost of recent changes is masked by the fact that all theatres in the study make a box office profit. They are also well supported and subsidised by their council, including a consistent policy of 'freedom to deal' for programmers at all resorts. The problem of too many seats is not so acute at the small theatres.

There is a growing trend of programming mainly for residents with a 52 week per year approach. This is moving performing arts and live entertainment closer together as the summer season 'weakens' and the social and cultural needs of the local population increases. Resort theatres may or may not be important to the economics of the region but are regarded as essential to the social and cultural life of the resort, especially in relation to the need to develop Local Cultural Strategies (as discussed in the following chapter). Too few performances of appropriate live entertainment is equivalent to social/cultural 'deprivation', too many could be economic suicide, but are not yet perceived as such. As regards summer shows, there is confusion in the industry as to what 'variety' means. Consequently, various types of shows are billed as Variety – from Music Hall to themed Rock 'N Roll shows such as 'That'll be the Day'. However, it is likely that an agreed format of modern variety will eventually emerge as the life-cycle of live entertainment moves on and terminology is agreed.

Consistent with the universal problem of a lack of quality product, each resort has a unique approach to the common problems, be they in-hotel or holiday camp competition, or a dearth of suitable acts. This illustrates once more one of the crucial findings to emerge from this chapter i.e. that live entertainment at English seaside resorts is dealt with differently at each location, according to local priorities and culture. It is clear that each resort deals with the problems of cultural and industry change, and particularly the lack of quality acts, in their own way. This is according to the beliefs of their practitioners in relation to the effect of their live entertainment policies on the economic, social and cultural life of the resort.

There have also been changes influenced and directed by the requirements and priorities of central and local government. During the last decade there have been numerous government initiatives that have forced local authorities to look more

closely at their cultural offering and, within that, the live entertainment they provide at their venues. The consequences of such initiatives for council-run theatre operators, and their reaction to such initiatives, are now investigated as the third major area of change affecting the provision of live entertainment at English seaside resorts at the beginning of the 21st century.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Live entertainment and the changing nature of government

Preamble

Chapters five and six have provided an analysis of the recent changing economic status and fortunes of resorts and changing cultural trends and attitudes, particularly those affecting live entertainment at seaside resorts. It has been established that it is local government practitioners that have to deal with such changes. National government sets parameters and recommends actions but local government enacts policy. Local politics and circumstances determine the particular local policy and consequent local actions. This is particularly true for the provision of non-statutory live entertainment, where it has been the case that each situation is resort-specific, and actions and attitudes towards live entertainment are a result of the political, economic, social and cultural history of the location. There are universal forces at work, but also significant local circumstances that determine the role, position and influence of live entertainment in the economic, social and cultural life of a particular seaside locality. This role is reflected in the relative importance attached to live entertainment by local authority members and officers, both as a part of the overall package on offer to tourists, but also as part of the social and cultural life of residents at the particular seaside location.

This chapter will consider the effects of changing central, and thereby local, government policy related to seaside resorts as far as it affects the activities and action of local government with regard to tourism and related cultural activities. Central government has put in place a range of initiatives, documents and quangos and the effect of these on live entertainment at the seaside will be discussed.

Central government legislation to re-organise local authorities may or may not materially affect the position of live entertainment in the local authority hierarchy or the amount or type of live entertainment being programmed. An analysis of the political operation of the seven key resorts in this study will seek to establish similarities and differences in live entertainment programmes as influenced by recent *local* government re-structuring. The degree of local autonomy, particularly related to cultural activities, including live entertainment, is the reality of the political context in which live entertainment operates, and will be commented on. The obligation to provide a Local Cultural Strategy is likely to be focusing the minds of local government officers and members on the need to provide a suitable cultural product, balanced in relation to the economic, social and cultural needs of the location. Chapter five has demonstrated how respondents believe there is a positive future for council run live entertainment at the English seaside, but any optimism must be tempered in relation to general cultural attitudes and changes (chapter six). This optimism must also operate within political restrictions, as discussed in this chapter.

It has been consistently suggested that local authorities are the key lead body in the provision of live entertainment at the seaside. They have to operate Best Value and provide a Local Cultural Strategy within an appropriate cultural offer that caters for the economic, social and cultural needs of their resort. This chapter discusses how government and local authority changes have affected, and are affecting, the live entertainment part of that offer. This political context is now discussed from the perspective of the providers of the vast majority of live entertainment, that is, the officers and members of local authorities at the seaside.

The influence of central government on local government tourism policy at seaside resorts

All respondents believe central government has little effect on tourism at seaside resorts and currently little effect on the cultural activities provided, including live entertainment. This lack of effect emphasises the autonomy of local government to deal with matters related to tourism and this will be discussed first.

Central government has been reluctant to directly dictate tourism policy. It deals with policy matters by devolving responsibility to bodies such as the English Tourism Council or regional bodies. If political pressure requires a government response, it comes from recommendations of the relevant quango. Alongside this approach, the government has its own general philosophy and policies, usually set out in its election manifesto. With regard to tourism (and cultural activities) New Labour and recent Conservative governments have been fundamentally similar, although the current government's stated philosophy is more obviously to devolve power away from the centre, and towards local and regional agencies/councils.

The main agency through which tourism policy is articulated is the English Tourism Council (ETC). As noted earlier in this study the ETC was tasked by the Government (Department of Culture, Media and Sport) to investigate the tourism situation at resorts. Their report 'Sea Changes' appeared in 2001 and as already noted, suggested tourism could be the vehicle for resort regeneration but that this was more likely in the very large resorts, as the small resorts could create a particular, discrete image. Regeneration via tourism depended upon 'how much effort the resorts themselves are willing to invest in order to create an experience the tourist will want (op cit, 2001, p30). The expression "the resorts themselves" can only mean the local authorities. As explained earlier in this work, these are the only

bodies that can effectively maintain an ongoing focus for resort maintenance/regeneration. At the end of the day no amount of government money or government initiatives will regenerate resorts without some catalyst to turn words and money into action at the local level. This would have to be the local authority.

'Sea Changes' suggested a range of key partners who would have to work together to create effective change/regeneration at local, regional and national levels. The key players at the local level were local businesses, local authorities and local communities (English Tourist Council, 2001 p47). It has been suggested throughout this study that the local authorities are the catalysts to activate changes at seaside resorts. It is now further suggested that the local authorities would have to be significant 'players' in links to government agencies and quangos set up by New Labour. Some of these, such as Regional Development Agencies (RDAs), and Regional Cultural Consortiums (RCCs) are New Labour's attempt to devolve regional policy, responsibility (and money) to the regions. RDAs are under the 'umbrella' of the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) - by definition a government department promoting regional bodies making decisions related to the needs of the region. DETR money was available for regional allocation according to national government criteria for example, for assisted areas, coastal areas, within the Single Regeneration Budget scheme, Neighbourhood Renewal Funds etc. These 'assisted area/deprived area' sources would benefit those resorts that were classified as amongst the most deprived in the country. These were not identified in Sea Changes but, in any case, none of the local government members and officers interviewed for this study believed central government agencies or money had materially affected tourism in their locality. This view reflects the lack of effect of supposed links to various government bodies associated with tourism (see also links to cultural activities, below). Central government initiatives have been at best neutral (for tourism), and in some cases

have resulted in less money for non-statutory services such as leisure provision (Panel 7.1).

Panel 7.1

"I can't see how central government has done anything to help us promote seaside resorts."

(HM)

"The government, other than publishing a strategy have done nothing to help resorts...it's just been words. It has not come through in terms of any funding, or opportunities to actually promote tourism."

(SD)

"New Labour haven't made any difference at all, haven't pumped any more money in. They've allowed local government to control it. Things that are not statutory services they have cut back on and unfortunately leisure is one of them."

(MO1)

There is some belief that tourism at seaside resorts has 'risen up the central government agenda', but according to the Head of Tourism and Leisure at Thanet District Council (Margate) and the Cabinet Member, Tourism and Leisure Services at Scarborough (see Panel 7.2 p260), the inference is that this has not yet turned into usable, practical help.

Panel 7.2

"A recognition from central government in recent years about the benefits of tourism. Foot and mouth really highlighted the importance of tourism. There has been a recognition of grant aid and various documents to do with regenerating seaside resorts. (New Labour), yes, I think there is a recognition of the importance of tourism."

(MH)

"I think we have seen more interest being taken by the government in seaside resorts...we've had two tourism ministers up here...I think government's realised that seaside resorts do have a role to play in terms of job creations and boosting economies."

(SM)

Central government cultural initiatives that may affect local government cultural activities, including live entertainment

As noted above, central government has approved the creation of Regional Cultural Consortia. It has also issued a requirement that local authorities produce a Local Cultural Strategy (LCS) by 2002 (DCMS, 1999a, 1999b, 2000). It is likely that LCS's will be linked to regional cultural activities in the future. However, at the time of writing there is no prescriptive method for this and each seaside local authority is free to pursue its own methods of developing and articulating a Local Cultural Strategy, including any actual or proposed links to other government agencies.

By definition, 'cultural activities' would be included in a Local Cultural Strategy, but as discussed previously in this work such activities do not explicitly include live entertainment. Certainly, live entertainment traditionally associated with the seaside is not generally regarded as a 'cultural' activity although, as noted earlier, it has been an important part of popular culture. 'Culture' tends to relate to the high/elitist

arts and this is generally how seaside resorts see cultural links with government agencies i.e. through the elitist Arts Council and its Regional Arts Boards, where any advice or money is related to the 'high' arts. In this respect central government policy might influence elitist performance art at the seaside but only if such activities were part of the local performing arts history, or part of actual and proposed LCS's. In fact, there is currently very little central government support for performance art at seaside theatres whether or not it is elitist, and whether or not it is specified, or likely to be specified, in the local cultural policy. *"These theatres, a commercial product, are not attractive, in terms of funding a lot of partnerships with the government (arts) agencies."* (EO) This may change due to various central government initiatives designed to include more people in performance art; *"central government agenda for things like social inclusion, education, (might) filter their way down in terms of funding that the Arts Council and Regional Arts Boards (RABs) manage."* (EH) In such a situation RABs might have to agree a 'blurring' of the line between elitist and popularist performance art, including live entertainment.

In general, respondents believe arts/entertainment could be one significant route towards resort regeneration, thus potentially linking particular government cultural initiatives to tourism. This is a point of view endorsed by the Head of Tourism and Leisure for the Margate area: *"The idea of bringing together the built environment, arts and sports, we've moved into that so the regeneration part picks up arts, sports development."* (MH) (It must be remembered that Thanet District Council made a conscious decision to widen their economic base away from tourism, so perhaps this 'enthusiasm' is more directed at the resident population). However, interviewees consider that, such regeneration activities, via the live entertainment offered at their resort theatres, could result in the resorts taking the strategic lead in cultural relationships with government funded arts agencies. Despite this, most respondents nevertheless believe that resort entertainment is not taken seriously

enough, both at resort and central government level, in order for the actions of central government agencies to fundamentally affect the impact of live entertainment at the seaside - but it could be. This is best expressed by the General Manager, Arts and Entertainment at Hunstanton:

"(strategic role)...If the resort takes entertainment and the provision of entertainment seriously enough to give it credibility in terms of conversations with government agencies. But it's almost seen as if resort theatre issues are seen as a joke – so it's not given the credibility to be debated. We're going through a re-organisation here and I'm very keen to ensure that arts and entertainment comes within a regeneration directorate...I truly believe that what we do has an effect on the economic and social regeneration of a region."

(HH)

Despite the above comment (and as noted in chapter five), there is no evidence to suggest live entertainment at seaside resorts is currently instrumental in resort regeneration, either for tourism or for local residents. In relation to the political context in which live entertainment operates, there is little evidence to suggest central government policy/agencies in the area of cultural activities are having any significant effect on local authorities at seaside resorts, except to require the authority to develop a written Local Cultural Strategy. The key regional agencies, Regional Arts Councils and Regional Cultural Consortia, are either generally ineffective/seen as 'talking shops', or unknown at the local (seaside resort) level. Answers from respondents were sufficiently brief on this point that responses could be amalgamated with those relating to central government initiatives on tourism (see Appendix F(iii) where answers to Questions 1 and 2 are combined). The fullest answer was from the Head of Arts and Heritage at Eastbourne, who notably, had had career experience in Arts Management:

"They (RCC) are out there...no secretariat, no grant aid. It's a discussion number as far as I can work out...the jury's out on how useful they might be – it might get tied up with the eventual regional government agenda, 'cause they're co-terminus with the RDA areas."

(EH)

In this study, there are two particular exceptions to the lack of connection between live entertainment at the seaside and cultural arts bodies, both of which relate to high arts. Firstly, the 'serious' Stephen Joseph Theatre at Scarborough. This theatre is crucially linked to Yorkshire Arts (one of the Arts Council's regional agencies), and then to the proposed development of a regional cultural strategy, although once again, regional initiatives are having little local effect. The Director of Tourism and Leisure Services at Scarborough expresses this as follows: *"We work hand in hand with Yorkshire Arts – 'cause they're the main funder for the Stephen Joseph Theatre which we've got an interest in – we spend about £200,000 per year as a subsidy – which is well above what we spend on our own shows and entertainments. We're not represented on the Cultural Consortia other than through other bodies such as Yorkshire Arts...at the moment they haven't produced any strategy document that is practical in terms of making any changes to people's lives in the Borough."* (SD)

The second exception concerns the government agency support (Arts Council money and Lottery money) for Poole Arts Centre – actually a key competitor to Bournemouth's cultural offer. This was mentioned by Bournemouth respondents so must be considered alongside Bournemouth's cultural activities *"Southern Arts all say Poole is the theatre we're going to support because it's arty...£5 million has gone to Poole recently; we haven't had a penny."* (BM2) It is also the case that with the support and encouragement of the Arts Council and its agents, many seaside authorities are employing Arts Development Officers in anticipation and expectation of funded arts activities moving up the political agenda. However, it is not anticipated that bodies dispersing any such monies would fund live entertainment at the seaside, unless perhaps, they recognised the wider definition of live entertainment adopted in this thesis.

It seems that local cultural strategy is largely a local matter and, in the case of live entertainment, free from central government (agencies) influence. This illustrates the high degree of autonomy enjoyed by local authorities in the provision of cultural activities, particularly live entertainment which is not a statutory obligation and may therefore be provided as the local authority determines. However, central government has been instrumental in the fundamental re-structuring of local government. This *does* have possible ramifications for the importance of live entertainment in the economic, social and cultural life, of seaside resorts.

The position of live entertainment in relation to local government structure and philosophy at English seaside resorts

The structure of local government has been fundamentally affected by changes brought about by New Labour during the late 1990s (see chapter three, section three). All the resorts in this study have adopted the Cabinet system of governance i.e. they have a Cabinet Member/Spokesperson/Portfolio Holder reporting to Cabinet for a range of council activities. One collective group of these activities, usually within Tourism and Leisure (Marketing and Leisure at Weston-super-Mare), will include live entertainment. At Bournemouth Borough Council there is a separate Management Committee that specifically deals with issues relating to the Bournemouth International Centre (BIC) and the Pavilion Theatre. This is due to the importance attached by Bournemouth to their conference business – major conferences are held in the BIC, with strong links to the Pavilion Theatre.

The contemporary role for live entertainment is likely to be affected by its position in the local government structure. Live entertainment is not included in the title of any of the senior (council member) posts that ultimately control live entertainment at the seaside resorts in this study. It is subsumed under tourism and leisure/marketing

and leisure in six of the seven subject resorts. (The BIC/Pavilion committee at Bournemouth is within the Leisure and Tourism Directorate). Additionally, live entertainment sits under the single title 'Culture' in one resort (Hunstanton). In two resorts, Weston-super-Mare and Skegness, live entertainment sits within a tourism/marketing and leisure portfolio that links to economic development/policy. These differences demonstrate the lack of a common approach to the political position of live entertainment at the resorts in this study. However, all the members ultimately responsible for live entertainment were supportive of their officers. All officers believe their portfolio holders fundamentally appreciated the importance of live entertainment in the economic, social and cultural life of the resorts, and worked towards that end in cabinet (etc.) discussions. There was an appreciation as to how the new structures would work *"For live entertainment in the cabinet model it depends if you've got a member to champion it."* (WD)

The strongest 'claim' for the relative importance of live entertainment in the local government hierarchy (albeit ultimately related to tourism) was made by the Spokesperson for Tourism, Leisure and Amenities at Eastbourne. *"My job is to push to my cabinet friends anything we want to do on the theatre side...five cabinet members...leader has overall responsibility. Deputy tends to do economic development. Then tourism, the next one down, then housing and residential services, then transport and roads. Tourism is well placed."* (EM) Perhaps as a consequence of this approach, Eastbourne also has the most graphic example of strong support between officers and members, illustrated by the fact that the General Manager, Performing Arts (also the programmer) is permitted to self-produce plays at the Devonshire Park Theatre. He has also been permitted to set up a separate company to tour the (self-produced) product, thus creating extra revenue towards the trading account of Eastbourne theatres. When 'pushed' by the interviewer (see the next quote), he graphically illustrated the desire to control the

quality of the product provided, but crucially, demonstrated the autonomy of local officer decision making, regardless of the (new) political structures:

"I get to make all the decisions over who's directing it, who's going to be in it, how/where we're going to market it. [Interviewer – Is this your job?] You sound like the Leader of the Council! Yes, because it's my job to ensure we've got quality product going in there, giving us the best value for money...taking our destiny in our own hands."

(EO)

The self-producing approach is not suited to all resorts as they would need particular producing skills, but Eastbourne's initiative does illustrate the general confidence placed in council officers by the members within the basic 'control' of the 'bottom line'. This requires a reasonable return on the trading account (box office income minus the deal). These arrangements confirm the autonomy of seaside councils to arrange their tourism/leisure/cultural activities as they see fit. Any final arrangements could also be interpreted as a reflection of the importance attached to cultural activities (including live entertainment) at specified seaside resorts. Live entertainment, a non-statutory requirement, is generally 'moderate' priority, or less, in organisational terms - whether or not it is perceived as particularly important by the practitioners. This can be illustrated from the officer and member viewpoints, where there is wide agreement across the respondents in this study. Panel 7.3 (p267) gives representative views, from the Chairman of the BIC/Pavilion Management Committee at Bournemouth and the Operations Manager at the Winter Gardens in Margate.

Panel 7.3

"(Live entertainment)...not very high on anybody's agenda. Social Services, Education sits high. Overall leisure services, yes, but not entertainment. It's not very high up at all in this town."

(BM1)

"When I first joined it had a much higher profile – councillors would come in and see the shows, meet the big names and whatever. Now they're not interested."

(MO1)

Note: These comments are directed at the role of live entertainment within the general *cultural* activities of the location, not specifically tourism.

Regardless of who the live entertainment is for, but perhaps reflecting the importance of live entertainment in the tourism history of seaside resorts, it was once the case that resorts would have had an individual with the title 'Entertainments Manager'. This individual would specifically look after and programme live entertainment. This was largely an autonomous role as the manager would book the acts, usually independent of councillors' interference although, due to high numbers of regular staying visitors, the members would naturally expect frequent 'Full House' signs. None of the resorts in this study (all recently restructured at local government level) employed anyone with the title 'Entertainments Manager'. The nearest to such a title was the 'Resorts and Entertainments Officer' at Scarborough: *"We used to have an exclusive Entertainments Manager, which we no longer have."* (SD)

However, regardless of official titles, the people employed to programme the theatre(s) are allowed, as noted, virtual autonomy in relation to booking the live

entertainment programme, provided they stay within a defined ‘bottom line’ i.e. work within agreed financial (and consequently, programming) parameters. *“No, no policy within the council at all. The operating policy is to get the best possible position at the end of the year...at the end of the year you’re looking at the bottom line – the net contribution of all of the events you staged.” (HH)* In this respect, in practical terms, nothing much has changed except titles and, of course, increased pressure to sell seats during a time in which traditional markets have substantially decreased and seating capacities have not substantially altered. The expanded role, away from just being the ‘Entertainments Manager’, is reflected in the current job titles, as shown in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1 Job titles of council officers programming live entertainment at seven English seaside resorts

Bournemouth:	Head of Entertainments and Events
Eastbourne:	General Manager, Performing Arts
Hunstanton:	General Manager, Arts and Entertainment
Margate:	Operations Manager, Winter Gardens and Box Office and Marketing Manager, Winter Gardens
Scarborough:	Resorts and Entertainments Officer
Skegness:	Head of Tourism, Arts and Public Relations
Weston-super-Mare:	Programme and Marketing Manager, Playhouse Theatre

The titles and the ‘official’ position of live entertainment practitioners in the local government hierarchy have had little effect on the autonomy of managers to run and programme the live entertainment venue(s). This has always been the case with council-run seaside theatres and remains the underlying philosophy behind the provision of live entertainment at seaside resorts at the beginning of the twenty-first century. This philosophy perpetuates more recent thinking that managing and

programming live entertainment at seaside resorts is increasingly seen as a general management skill. This involves managing scarce resources within prescribed financial parameters. Additionally, views already expressed (Chapter Six) indicate the homogenisation of the live entertainment product and the problems of quality supply “...live entertainment's produced in a canned form by the private sector...it's all bought in now, basically.” (SD) This suggests management skills, including control of costs and expenditure, and marketing, has to some extent replaced intuitive and personal skills such as knowing the industry, knowing how to network and personally knowing the artistes. Notwithstanding attempts to self-produce and thus control quality, seeing live entertainment as ‘canned’ might tend to equate it more with management ‘speak’ than cultural ‘value’ (but see also the comments below on how further versions of LCSs may moderate this).

The provision of live entertainment at seaside resorts may need to adapt to changes within the industry, and ‘loose’ central government directives such as the requirement for a LCS, but this simply gives credibility to allowing officers freedom and flexibility, providing basic criteria are met. Currently, this is the ‘bottom line’. In the future it may be more closely linked to prescribed use of the theatre e.g. to meet aspirations expressed in LCSs to provide improved “quality of life for communities and individuals” (Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk, 2001 p4). At a local level such changes may, or may not, be influenced by the need to provide a wide-ranging Local Cultural Strategy within potentially tighter financial controls and reducing budgets. This might depend upon which aspects of culture are articulated/prioritised within any such documents and/or any particular locality. Many seaside resorts are part of a wider local government region. Skegness for example, is part of East Lindsey District Council, where any central government influenced performing arts activities are under the ‘umbrella’ of the East Midlands Regional Arts Board policy. It is not yet clear how LCSs may directly influence

actual policy/programming at regional level (via RCCs), let alone individual resort level, especially if the resort is part of a composite LCS for a geographical area that simply includes the resort's problems and priorities, rather than emphasises them.

Changes brought about by initiatives such as the need to prepare a LCS may, or may not include prioritising performing arts. However, the essential decision making, including the range and quality of product offered remains with the programmers of the theatres: *"I'm not bound by having to take a certain quota, a certain number of ballets/orchestral concerts per year."* (EO) This was provided the 'bottom line' was achieved. In this respect Local Cultural Strategies (resort-specific, or not) expressly mentioning live entertainment, or not, may have little impact on the live entertainment provided, unless the programmers are more closely monitored. Programming and operational management decisions are not with the Directorate, Senior Managers, or Members. This attitude is not affected by recent changes to local government structures and was articulated at all officer levels, and by the members. An example of a Director-level response, and a typical member response can be seen in Panel 7.4.

Panel 7.4

"I don't need to know anything about theatres. I actually manage highways. I have no training. And that is the modern management style. I rely on the second tier underneath to be that professional person, and that's how it should work."

(ED - Director of Tourism, Leisure and Amenities)

Cont.

Panel 7.4 Cont.

"The system of culture and leisure could work just as well without a councillor. If it was just a management role it would work. We (Members) only tinker around policies, and we tinker around the financial field. While we have people like [Programming Officer] the quality won't suffer – they're the people who provide it, not members."

The speaker reinforced the 'freedom to deal': "No changes [to programming autonomy] unless the manager who's programming feels he needs some guidance."

(HM)

The interviewee programmers confirmed the autonomy they enjoyed, regardless of the political colour or re-structuring of the council, so changes to local government structures, including strategic initiatives discussed as a result of the need to produce a LCS, have not fundamentally affected programming decisions. However, it is claimed that changes have improved the *speed* at which decisions can be made. The main change, the removal of numerous committees, can improve the speed at which strategic and operational decisions can be made. Increased speed in decision-making (whether or not it affects live entertainment) is the most frequently mentioned 'claim' for the recent changes in local government structures. This aspect of changes in structure and any consequent effect on live entertainment are best summed up by the Director of Tourism and Leisure Services at Scarborough:

"I don't think the structure of the department's made any change. But what has been a big change is a move towards a cabinet system. We no longer have a committee with fourteen members on tourism and leisure. I have one cabinet member with a range, includes live entertainment. He's one out of a cabinet of ten...in that way there are

a lot fewer councillors involved in entertainment than there used to be."

(SD)

The same respondent echoes the views of many interviewees that even if procedures for discussion are speeded up, they are rarely utilised: *"I am responsible to reporting to an Overview and Scrutiny Committee...I don't anticipate (them) scrutinising live entertainments. Given increased delegation and increased centralisation, there will be fewer opportunities for individual councillors to scrutinise what's happening in terms of live entertainment."*

Persistent scrutiny of decisions to do with programming live entertainment, particularly via a bespoke entertainment committee, perhaps with a particular individual who wants to 'interfere' e.g. on moral grounds, is largely a thing of the past. Scrutiny itself is rare, provided the bottom line is achieved. However, this may change in the prevailing mood towards reducing council subsidies to seaside theatres (see below). This may result in more 'investigations' into the financial performance of the theatre operations and a better 'testing' of a restructured council in relation to some 'checks and balances' of its live entertainment provision. This approach would be consistent with Best Value requirements and suggests the possibility of the Best Value/Benchmarking central government initiative being influential in decisions taken in relation to live entertainment provision.

Nevertheless, recent local government structural changes have generally meant 'little change' in the day-to-day running of live entertainment at seaside theatres. There is a continuation of the historical philosophy of the wide autonomy of officers to programme live entertainment at English seaside resorts, although decisions and the consequences of decisions can be more speedily dealt with. This 'freedom to

deal' may not necessarily raise the profile of live entertainment within strategic documents, or within council structures, but it does reflect the importance of live entertainment in practical terms. However, as indicated, achieving the 'bottom line' (a box-office profit) is the key to continued autonomy regarding the live entertainment at seaside theatres. This may become more difficult if Local Cultural Strategies 'force' local authorities to provide live entertainment that they might otherwise choose not to programme e.g. due to difficulties of obtaining the right quality product/deal, perhaps for a minority audience. On the other hand, a LCS might create the conditions for a consistent strategic vision across all the resort's activities, and thus suggest an appropriate, perhaps clearer, place for live entertainment in the overall cultural offer.

Seaside resorts, live entertainment, and Local Cultural Strategies

As noted earlier in this chapter, central government recommended that all local authorities produce a Local Cultural Strategy by 2002. By implication, this would link to regional strategies in respect of both cultural and economic development, with some ongoing linkage to national strategy; for example, social inclusion in the performing arts, or regeneration strategies for the seaside. Respondents demonstrated a lack of knowledge of the *actual* role to be played by live entertainment but *are* knowledgeable about a great deal of activity regarding its potential role in relation to LCS's at the seaside "*[LCS]...live entertainment fits in...difficult to comment at the moment but live entertainment does fit in.*" (SO) Of course, live entertainment policy may be articulated in other strategic and operational papers. With regard to LCSs three typical comments are included in Panel 7.5 (p274), with further details on these comments in Panel 7.6 (p274).

Panel 7.5

"There isn't one (LCS). Although there's a pretence of one."

(MD)

"We're having a planning meeting to get one up."

(WH)

"We're actually working on it now."

(SkH)

These typical comments belie the underlying work and 'manoeuvring' that is needed to develop a LCS, including how it is necessarily interlinked to other strategic initiatives. In relation to the three quotations in Panel 7.5, representing three different resorts, further details are given, respectively, in Panel 7.6.

Panel 7.6

"There are two or three major documents in place, combining the Arts and Sports Development Strategy. Both the Arts and Sports Development Officers report to the person who is effectively the link between SRB funding, economic regeneration, ERDF, sorry, European Development Fund, and other agencies that have funds. This is the gobbledegook they talk, it's their justification for combining them."

(MD)

"The Blue Skies Tourism Strategy took priority. The cultural strategy is the next one."

(WH)

Cont.

Panel 7.6 cont.

"I've managed to get that within my section...now include sports and parks, I decided although it's work, to bid for that. [Live entertainment] It's just one strand ...it's no more important than parks or countryside, which are all part of the cultural strategy. Although it's part of what I do I've got to be seen to be sensible in looking at the whole picture and I don't want people to think that the cultural strategy is just about the arts because I think that would be extremely negative...as I say, this 'culture' word, this 'arts' word is a turn-off, big-time."

(SkH)

It might be argued that the requirement to produce a LCS is a means of formalising strategies for live entertainment at the seaside. However, as noted, and as will be demonstrated, even if a resort's local authority has, or proposes a cultural strategy, live entertainment is not always prominent within it, nor does it have to be. At the time of writing, most resorts in this study were 'just starting' or 'working on' their Local Cultural Strategy. A notable exception, i.e. a completed and (cabinet) approved LCS, was at Hunstanton, where the resort's Princess Theatre was included in the completed draft LCS for the Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk. Most resorts were not going to formalise their LCS until they had completed other underpinning documentation such as Tourism Strategy, and Arts Strategy. This demonstrates the interlocking and strategic nature of the thinking (see Panel 7.6) especially if funding is being sought. Furthermore, care must be used in discussing the breadth of culture as it obviously has different connotations in different seaside locations.

A graphic example of a developed LCS, that is inter-linked and ready for discussion by cabinet, is at Eastbourne, where three divisions (Culture; Sports, Recreation and Leisure; and Tourism Development) worked together to produce firstly, summary

documents for each Division, then a composite LCS (Eastbourne Borough Council, 2000, 2000b). Again, live entertainment is not specifically mentioned in Eastbourne's LCS - it is subsumed within the category 'Performing and Visual Arts' (Eastbourne Borough Council, 2000 p2). Although not a completed document, the fact that Eastbourne Council had "undertaken substantial work in the development of its LCS was a major factor in securing the recent Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) Round 6 award of £5 million. In addition, the existence of a LCS is already an Audit Commission Performance Indicator" (Eastbourne Borough Council, 2000). This demonstrates the requirements and potential of a well-justified LCS, alongside the anticipation of central government monitoring, but also the consequent confidence of, in this case, the senior manager at Eastbourne in the potential 'power' of cultural activities, as shown in the following quotation:

"We're spending, hopefully, seven and a half million on a Culture Centre. Rather than closing theatres, we're giving them a face-lift, a new image to attract a new public. Two million from English Heritage, two million from the Arts Council, two million from local government – not us, regional government. That is a vehicle to move theatres into the new century. Our 'secret' in performing arts puts us back on the map and a major contributor."

(ED)

Here is a clear belief that cultural activities, including 'modern' theatre, can be central to the economic, social and cultural life of the locality, and additionally, can be a catalyst for joint funding.

The resort in this study that had prepared the most, and the most comprehensive documentation specifically on live entertainment (not a Local Cultural Strategy) is Scarborough. Four comprehensive strategic documents (Scarborough Borough Council, 1998; 2000a; 2000b; 2001) and numerous internal reports were specifically

and uniquely related to live entertainment provision. This focus on, and justification of, live entertainment reflects Scarborough Borough Council's partnerships with Yorkshire Arts at the Stephen Joseph Theatre and their agreement to subsidise the private operator Apollo/SFX to run and manage the council owned Futurist Theatre – situated in a prime location on the South Bay. It may be assumed that the forthcoming Local Cultural Strategy for Scarborough - *"The Tourism and Leisure Department is at the moment putting that together"* (SM) - will emphasise live entertainment in a way that no other resort documentation has yet done.

Notwithstanding the actual position of live entertainment in the local government hierarchy at seaside resorts, or the lack of a mention in actual and developing LCSs, it is the 'freedom to deal' which suggests all resorts regard live entertainment as an important on-going part of their cultural offer that must be allowed flexibility. This freedom has a historical precedence that continues at the beginning of the 21st century and is a key point relating to the immediate future of live entertainment at the seaside.

It continues to be allowed by the relevant Directorate and is officially or tacitly approved by the Members, provided, generally, the 'bottom line' (see below) is being achieved. This is the 'micro' view of what is currently happening. The 'macro' view suggest that regardless of any central or local government policy that might *eventually* affect live entertainment at the seaside, there are currently two major consequences of wider cultural change that fundamentally affect political decisions related to the economic running of seaside theatres. One of these relates to the decline in traditional tourism at English seaside resorts; the other is cultural change which particularly affects live entertainment of the seaside variety, and the associated live entertainment industry. These have been explored in the two previous chapters. Their relevance is briefly repeated here, but within a political

context, in order to underline the effect of recent political changes on the normal, established industry practices of seaside live entertainment.

The political and economic context and consequences of tourism and cultural changes on the provision of live entertainment

A continuous, sometimes dramatic decline in the numbers of staying visitors at English seaside resorts is largely the result of changes in the holiday preferences of domestic tourists. Changes in the cultural preferences of audiences alongside fundamental changes in the control of the available product have exaggerated this development and left seaside resorts with too many theatre seats, and not enough quality product. The current political approach and context in relation to dealing with these consequences is to continue to allow practitioners the freedom to programme the live entertainment cultural offer, provided certain financial parameters, within subsidy, are met. Despite this freedom, there are deliberate moves afoot to reduce the available seats, and the overall subsidy. All resorts have looked at reducing or relinquishing local authority ownership, control and management of their theatres, and are dealing with such issues in ways that suit the local economic, social, cultural and political situation (see below). At the present time local government philosophy towards live entertainment at seaside resorts (the 'bottom line') reflects the economics of the (total) cultural offer, or as one respondent expresses it "*Grease will pay for Clockwork Orange.*" (EO)

Most Senior Officers and Portfolio Holders will permit particular shows to lose money as "*long as the bottom line is hit at the end of the year.*" (EO) The 'bottom line' relates to the subsidy provided to run seaside theatre but most obviously manifests itself in achieving a box-office profit. This includes shows that lose money. These tend to be the 'elitist' opera, ballet/contemporary dance, or 'arty'

productions, but could also increasingly include some forms of traditional seaside variety. The reason for a ballet to lose money would be the need to provide a high guarantee for a scarce product. It may then lose money because it is elitist, or because, being scarce, people will only attend a known quality. The same would apply to orchestral performances at the seaside - people may attend only when it is, for example, the (prestigious) London Philharmonic Orchestra. Even then they may not attend in sufficient numbers to cover the high guarantee. The reason for traditional variety to lose money would relate to a lack of staying seasonal visitors as well as problems of a lack of available star names. There are only a few 'bankers' in the industry, prepared to work seaside theatres that can guarantee a 'full house' e.g. Ken Dodd, Jethro, Hank Marvin.

In fact, all the theatres in this study achieve a box office surplus across their year-round live entertainment programme (see Appendix A2), whatever the nature and extent of the live entertainment activities. However, balancing the bottom line related to an appropriate programme mix is difficult, with different attitudes at different locations. Two comments are illustrative and are given in Panel 7.7 (p280). The Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Leisure and Marketing at Weston-super-Mare is (amongst wider considerations) shown to be focusing on the needs of minorities. The Head of Tourism, Arts and Public Relations at Skegness has a clear commercial focus – perhaps because Skegness is unusually dependent upon tourists for its economic survival.

Panel 7.7

"I think there's a requirement for a facility that's run by the council to actually do things for minorities. You get that balance. The ratepayer is subsidising to a certain extent. Opera, ballet may be sometimes a minority but if it's marketed right you might get people going to it who've never been before and appreciating it."

(WM)

"I do have to be careful because I have a budget to keep...so my arts range is very cautious...which means that I have to be commercially minded in any show I book."

(SkH)

Despite the preceding comment, any subsidies are effectively for the running of the building and generally do not fundamentally affect the overall diversity of the cultural offer. *"When we look at box office against artistes costs, there's a surplus. The £400,000 is basically to subsidise the building."* (MO1)

There are other (political) forces at work that could affect the bottom line. One of these is the social inclusion agenda, e.g. subsidised tickets, or subsidised use of the performing arts space(s), likely to be included in Local Cultural Strategies. However, there is no evidence to suggest this is currently affecting programming. Nevertheless, there is a recognition of the need for a general programming approach that is broad based but increasingly related to the needs of the local population. The future role for live entertainment is related to the total cultural offer, for both tourists and residents. The cultural offer should reflect the local distinctiveness of the resort and will therefore vary from resort to resort according to perceptions of the local image, or, as noted, as expressed by the Head of Arts and Heritage at Eastbourne *"Are you in Waitrose or are you in Asda?"* (EH) But the cultural offer will also reflect local politics, particularly the priorities given to tourists

and/or residents. There may be a conscious lessening of the importance of the resort as a tourist destination and consequently greater importance attached to a year-round offer, as discussed in chapter five in relation to programming for tourists, including the 52-week agenda. *"I'm not sure the 'resortness of the resorts' is as important as we in the resorts might think it is. Should we be thinking of ourselves as a location which has an active culture 52 weeks of the year?" (EH)* In this way, the overall live entertainment offer is likely to be more geared to the resident than the visitor.

The degree of autonomy given to the professionals running live entertainment at seaside theatres will be determined by the willingness of the politicians to continue to financially support a cultural activity (live entertainment) that is achieving a surplus at the box office, but a deficit in overall operational costs. In many cases this non-statutory provision is a considerable drain on the finances of the locality and exercises the minds of the ratepayers and the local press. Subsidising something that most obviously benefits tourists is a local political 'hot potato'. Each resort is dealing with this issue in its own way, but one fundamental decision has to concern the (total) live entertainment offer in as much as it relates to the image and needs of the locality. For professionals this means the development of an appropriate audience development strategy. In the end, it is such strategies that will influence the political (funding) decisions. The two following comments, both from the Head of Arts and Heritage at Eastbourne illustrate this, as well as pointing out, once more, the inter-related nature of this study i.e. live entertainment programmes are a balanced mix of culture, economics and politics:

"The future of live entertainment in the resort is ultimately bound up with political will. If you're looking at an audience development strategy and a broad based programme, contemporary dance is not necessarily going to earn its bread and butter...just because

contemporary dance doesn't put bums on seats, it may fulfil a range of other agendas – theatre in education, outreach work, and how it goes towards the overall setting of the tone of the theatres and the location. You can tell upmarket/downmarket from the product mix.

The same respondent continues:

A programmer that's trying to build audiences will be looking at a year-end position. It's a philosophical, artistic and technical exercise that comes together. What tone you want to set for your building. As professionals we have to make the case for the programming and seek endorsements from the Members."

(EH)

At the same time there is clear evidence of a deliberate policy of managing a reduction in seats - the 'technical' side. This has led to fundamental changes in the built structure at seaside resorts, changes in the 'tone' of the theatres, and suggestions regarding creating a consortium of resorts to challenge the increasing dominance of certain private operators in relation to the control of appropriate/quality product. At the English seaside, there are too many theatre seats unsold (see Appendix A2). This means theatre managers cannot generate sufficient income to significantly off-set the substantial overall running costs of (older) buildings that require large sums of money for maintenance and improvement. Policies to reduce the numbers of seats require dramatic action and are largely in the hands of the politicians, although council officers, particularly at Director and second-tier level, are generally in favour of such reductions. It means they would have less buildings to maintain/less seats to sell. Recent 'solutions' include the proposal to sell the under-utilised Winter Gardens at Bournemouth, and the decision to allow private operators to run (but not acquire the freehold of) the Eastbourne Hippodrome, and the Futurist Theatre at Scarborough. It is interesting to note that the 'gentleman's agreement' to allow Apollo/SFX to run the Futurist offers the possibility of the private

sector building a theatre on the site, which the Council believe will not be taken up. Illustrative comments on these 'solutions' are shown in Panel 7.8.

Panel 7.8

"(Winter Gardens) It's very difficult to run something for two months in the year and make a profit – you just wouldn't do it. Always lost money and it always will. What they've got to do is spend money on that place over there [Pavilion]."

(BD)

"(Commercial approach to theatre operations) Constantly looking at it. Already done that with the Hippodrome. Shut it, keep it going, it's election time so it got political."

(ED)

"There are issues around buildings like the Futurist, near the end of its life, probably needs about a million pounds spending on it...the plan is to actively market the Futurist site. I don't think the private sector are going to come in and build a new theatre because they won't get the returns. There are too many theatre seats in Scarborough and, therefore, if and when the Futurist goes the larger acts will go into the Spa and that will sustain the Spa Theatre."

(SH)

Note: The council-run Spa Complex at Scarborough contains two fixed seat theatres. Senior Officers see a future whereby the Council co-ordinate rather than manage live entertainment at Scarborough (see below).

The days of new theatre building, or major adaptation to existing buildings are not necessarily over. Changes in the 'tone' of the theatre, mentioned above, in relation to resorts in this study, are best demonstrated by actions at the Embassy Centre

(not 'Theatre') at Skegness. Closure of two of the three council-run live entertainment venues at Skegness led to the development of the remaining theatre as a much more flexible building. The policy was to reduce available (fixed) seats to create a multi-purpose venue that would cater for the live entertainment needs of tourists and residents, including social and wider cultural needs. Practically speaking, it means the space does not allow flying, so the larger theatrical touring productions cannot be accommodated. This type of compromise is probably something all resorts will have to consider, depending upon their live entertainment priorities, although the Head of Tourism, Arts and Public relations at Skegness, also the principal programmer, is satisfied with the arrangement:

(The Embassy Centre) "...a compromise, I'm happy with that because it's the only way to achieve anything. The Embassy Centre is designed as a conference centre which is why it hasn't got flying. In an ideal world we would fly again tomorrow, but in the real world when it was first done which was 1983 – the Embassy's been here since 1956 but the auditorium was 1983. There was limited budget so we built a lovely auditorium, then the money's gone...we made it a multi-purpose centre, which is its strength."

(SKH)

Two separate, subtly different, comments from the Skegness Portfolio Holder (Chairman of the Economic Policy Forum) illustrate the problems of compromise at Skegness:

"We've revamped the Embassy, made it more disabled-friendly, user-friendly, more flexible in its lettings...made the whole complex hopefully more viable. Unfortunately, we can't afford to have a theatre so we got the second best thing, which was a compromise. Which is the Embassy, which is a show stage, very wide, not too deep, quite high but has dead spots within the proscenium. It's not ideal but we can't have exactly what we want, but given what we want

it to do – for conferences, exhibitions and everything else I think it's fine, a really good venue. But it misses out slightly when you want true theatre or the benefits of a really good show stage. It suits us very well, the flexibility is what we need and so we've got to make the best of that."

(SkM)

The Skegness Member, lamenting the passing of a 'proper' theatre, made a distinction between performing art and music and suggested that each resort should have a theatre in order to provide for the performing arts:

"Generally, I think there must be a theatre. Too many venues now are like the venues that are in caravan sites – music only, no performing art to speak of. Which is a shame, but they're targeting an audience and they're certainly profit lead so I think it is left to only the councils to prop up the rest of the performing arts, if you will."

(SkM)

Comments in the previous section, including recent initiatives concerned with the physical structures of seaside theatre, naturally lead into a discussion regarding the continued involvement of the local authority in providing seaside live entertainment.

The likely future involvement of local authorities in seaside live entertainment

It was the general feeling that the local authority should, and would, continue to subsidise the performing arts although, perceptually, any money for the arts is not necessarily money for live entertainment at the seaside. Providing any (negative) subsidy for live entertainment can be justified as part of an identifiable, overall strategy, and/or if it is a development area, it will continue to be funded by the local council. In these days of financial stringency there may be little point trying to sustain seaside live entertainment by claiming it is a worthy part of the nation's

performing arts or cultural heritage, worth keeping for its artistic value. It needs to be justified in each resort-specific situation, related to tourism and the cultural strategy of the location. This is happening as theatre operations in resorts become increasingly subject to Best Value analysis and scrutiny. This process has not yet created a substantial case for either retaining or relinquishing council controlled seaside theatre, either as an 'art' form, or as a part of the essential cultural fabric of English seaside resort related, or not, to tourism.

Respondents in this study are confident that there is an important role to be played by seaside local authorities in the future provision of live entertainment. At coastal resorts this means a subsidy for each theatre venue and, as noted, such subsidies are subject to closer scrutiny since the introduction of Best Value. This has led to methods of measuring local performance and a means of comparison between similar resorts. Respondents were asked questions concerning this on-going Benchmarking exercise (Appendix A2). There was a general lack of awareness concerning the available statistics and no reasonable comparative conclusions could be drawn, except the potential problems in trying to compare very different situations. This was best expressed by the General Manager, Arts and Entertainment, at Hunstanton:

"It's possibly going to produce a league table without taking into account what the theatre is there to do (very much determined by the size of the building and the product that's available to them), or the geography of the theatre. [Researcher – A statistical system of weighting factors that relate to a particular location?]]. Yea, you're the researcher, I'm not sure how you'd do that. You'd have to take on not just the people who live in the area, but the people who come in and the geography – it could work. But you couldn't take on within that local authority's aims and objectives...what we're saying is if it's making a large contribution, that's crucial. What we're saying, there

are a number of (other) factors that make up a resort theatre's provision."

(HH)

Discussions concerning the fairness or awareness of comparison statistics have not stopped members from attempting to reduce the subsidy to resort theatres. The subsidy is the (usually substantial) 'global' figure in the theatre accounts that can be seized on, particularly by local politicians and newspapers. At Weston-super-Mare, for example, according to the Assistant Director, Marketing and Leisure, the subsidy to the Playhouse Theatre is to be reduced from £350,000 to £150,000 over a four-year period. Reducing subsidies is the current trend although there has also been some substantial capital invested in seaside theatre¹ e.g. in Hunstanton *"The Borough Council are pleased with the provision and the level of funding and they've invested heavily in the fabric of the building (Princess Theatre) – some £500,000 over the last five years."* (HH) There are other proposed investments such as the Cultural Hub at Eastbourne mentioned earlier.

Theatre operations at seaside resorts are being more closely monitored than ever before, with initiatives that can make some reasonable comparisons. Officers and members are increasingly aware of the need to justify the spend on seaside theatre but also appreciate that if local authorities are to continue to run the theatres, it is not just a question of cost. This is noted via two comments in Panel 7.9 (p288) from the Head of Arts, Tourism and Public Relations at Skegness.

¹ Dependant on the local authority accounting practices and conventions, capital expenditure may, or may not, be included in any subsidy figure.

Panel 7.9

"The local government pound you have to spend more carefully than ever, which is not a criticism. Because everything's checked and that's the way it should be. I haven't got a problem with that, the commercial side of local government is a positive, I think. As long as you don't forget what local government is, which is providing facilities for the people."

(SkH)

"Making money is not what we're all about, the private sector can do that."

(SkH)

Recent approaches regarding management control have led to questions relating to the ownership, management and control of seaside theatre. All resorts have looked at the possibility of allowing the private sector to manage their theatre(s). This is often in response to an approach from the Apollo/SFX group who manage the resort theatres at Felixstowe, Folkestone, Southport, Torquay and, as discussed, the Futurist Theatre at Scarborough. Any proposed arrangement would be a management contract whereby the local authority pays an annual fee (subsidy) to the private operator to provide the live entertainment. The contract might stipulate the amount/type of entertainment, precisely or loosely. It might include some concessions for council use and might include some basic maintenance by the hirer. There may be restrictions on usage. The freehold is usually retained by the council. The attraction from the council's point of view concerns a reduced annual subsidy, usually considerably less than the previous subsidy, and the politics of having off-loaded the theatre - often seen as a local problem. The council, however, depending on the specific arrangements, would have handed over control of the programming. This could mean entirely commercial programming by the private operator, that is, only those live entertainment activities that are likely to make

money. Issues linked to this approach are expressed by the Head of Arts and Heritage at Eastbourne, as follows:

"The Apollo/SFX offering is very much driven by the bottom line figure. Members would have to decide whether that was where their priority was, or whether they wanted to control the local distinctiveness of the offering."

(EH)

It is not clear whether increased profits (it is not clear there would be increased profits) for the private operator would result in decreased subsidy, available to be spent on other 'good causes'. Private operators, Apollo included, are not allowed by the Benchmarking Group Members to participate in any local authority benchmarking exercise. In any case, 'seats sold' or the deals done in an Apollo-run local authority seaside theatre would be classed as commercially sensitive information.

There are options other than straightforward agreements to allow private operators to run the theatres. These usually concern the legal status of the theatre. The resorts in this study have considered these, or are planning to consider them. The only resort to convert so far has been Margate, where the Winter Gardens has become an Independent Provident Society, and has been granted Charitable Status. This has resulted in tax advantages such as a mandatory and discretionary rebate of 80% and 20% respectively on any Council Tax payable. It allows any profits to be re-invested in the theatre. The control of programming is with the Board of Trustees, including two representatives from Thanet District Council ('arm's-length' council control), which continues to subsidise the Winter Gardens: *"The £400,000 is basically to subsidise the building...when we look at box office against artiste's costs, there's a surplus."* (MO1) A change in legal status need not dramatically

affect the programming as the council could still be involved as part of the Management Board. However, apart from the Winter Gardens at Margate, the theatres in this study remain council owned, managed and controlled. The respondents in this study, both officers and members, believe there is a good and positive future for council owned and managed live entertainment at English seaside resorts, and, with the exception of some of those at Scarborough (see below), wish to retain council control (Panel 7.10)

Panel 7.10

"(Council run) Live entertainment in a resort has got a good future."

(WH)

"Future is very bright...the acceptance of the provision of quality entertainment for the region, in a seaside town, so our visitors can enjoy it."

(EO)

"Live entertainment is secure. The Borough council are pleased with the provision and the level of funding and they've invested heavily in the fabric of the building."

(HH)

"If I in particular, and the team in general, and the council keep doing it well the future is ok. The minute we start doing a bad job I don't think it will be around very long. Because we all know the commercial sector is out there and are quite happy to come in, as long as the council pays them loads of money."

(SkH)

At Scarborough it is anticipated that the role for the council will be less direct. This is most strongly expressed by one particular (potentially very influential) individual, the Director of Tourism and Leisure Services (see below). Others at the location

see a continued direct role, particularly in running the Spa Theatre, due to the importance of the Spa Complex to the conference business. All Scarborough respondents believe there will always be a role for live entertainment in the 'offer' of the town.

"I think live entertainment is on the decline. I think the council's involvement is on the wane as well. In twenty years time I don't see them involved at all...there might be a council role in terms of co-ordinating and co-operating to have a kind of joint approach to live entertainment. I don't think the council will be involved in subsidising other than a grant scheme that is actually servicing the charitable side, like the Stephen Joseph Theatre."

(SD)

There is interest in changing the legal status of resort theatres but fundamentally (and regardless of political 'colour') the consensus is to continue to resist the approaches of private operators, at least for the time being. Councils of various political persuasions run the resort theatres in this study. These details are given in Appendix A1. It is sufficient to comment at this point that political 'colour' is not a precise predictor of council policy. The local (non-elected) political atmosphere is more important e.g. whether the theatre(s) are perceived as costing too much subsidy, or whether the programming favours tourists. These conditions vary from resort to resort and are considered in particular, in the analysis and discussion of this study (chapter eight). A comment from the Head of Entertainments and Events at Bournemouth illustrates this: *"I believe the council want to keep involved. We went from Tory to Lib Dem, the Tories definitely wanted to hang on to it. The Lib Dems had a wider picture."* (BH)

It remains that the primary reason for retaining local authority control of seaside theatre is the perceived need to allow officers to provide a varied live entertainment programme that caters for the needs of tourists and residents alike, regardless of whether it turns in a profit. Comments in Panel 7.11 illustrate this.

Panel 7.11

"The council would be wrong to relinquish control because it could end up being completely commercial, forgetting its commitment to local people, social inclusion, schools, amateur dramatic groups etc. At the end of the day councils are there to provide a service...at a price."

(WH)

(Interviewer - Will the council continue to tolerate a (negative) subsidy?) "No problem at all. The Borough Council are enlightened enough to know that they have to provide a balanced form of arts and entertainment that appeals to a lot of people."

(HH)

It should be remembered that one fundamental reason for particular councils to take on running seaside theatres *from* the commercial sector e.g. at Bournemouth, was the belief that such venues were a fundamental part of the economic, social and cultural fabric of the location – whether they were profitable or not - "[Why did the local authority take over the (Bournemouth) theatres in the first place?] *Because private enterprise was going bust on them.*" (BH) This history helps support the positive attitude of officers and members towards live entertainment at seaside resorts.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the responses of local government practitioners to the changing political circumstances in which they are operating. Documentary evidence has further illustrated the political context and the consequent actions of local authority officers and members. According to the respondents, changing central government policy and attitudes to tourism, and changes in tourism at seaside resorts, have not materially affected the action they take, or are able to take. This relates to tourism in general but particularly the cultural activities provided, including live entertainment.

Regardless of any changing political circumstances, live entertainment is generally not considered instrumental in resort regeneration, but it is important in the economic, social and cultural life of the resorts, particularly in relation to residents. At the local level, political changes towards a cabinet system of local government have continued the 1990s trend whereby live entertainment is part of a larger directorate. In this respect, live entertainment at the beginning of the twenty-first century is generally no more, and no less, significant in the local government hierarchy than in recent times, although changes to local political structures have resulted in quicker decision-making. There is a large degree of autonomy afforded to programmers provided they stay within the 'bottom line', but Best Value and benchmarking initiatives mean there are methods of comparison with other resort theatres, not yet fully developed. Local Cultural Strategies, where proposed or developed, have not materially affected live entertainment provision which continues to be a 'given' in the seaside offer. However, the need to demonstrate an inclusive LCS is a significant factor in local authorities wanting to retain control over their cultural offer, including live entertainment.

There are too many seats at seaside theatres and councils are looking at ways of reducing these, or working with the private sector to reduce expenditure and risk. However, it remains current thinking that local authorities at the seaside should generally retain control over the live entertainment offer. Respondents have demonstrated how this is inextricably linked to the cultural offer. Inherently, this offer relates to both tourists and residents. The fact that the resorts in this study have commissioned market research reports on matters concerning the economics of live entertainment at English seaside resorts, and the occasional strategic report, but have decided to continue with council control and management of theatres, reinforces the view that profit is currently not the most important consideration in providing the cultural offer. However, profit or, more accurately, a reducing 'loss' is becoming a focal point with regard to the debate on the contemporary role for councils in relation to the provision of live entertainment at English seaside resorts. This is despite the fact that local authorities are prepared to offer a range of live entertainment, some of which make a box office profit, and some which lose money. With the exception of Scarborough, the resorts in this study anticipate a positive future for council owned and controlled live entertainment at seaside resorts. (At Margate, this approach operates at 'arms-length').

Chapters five, six and seven have provided a contemporary view of the changing nature and role of live entertainment at English seaside resorts in relation to the economic, cultural and political changes influencing policy making at the seaside. They have added 'richness' and given insight into the earlier chapters and provided the material and key points that will enable analysis, synthesis and discussion to take place in chapter eight to achieve the aim and objectives of this study.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Shaping a new understanding of live entertainment at English seaside resorts

Preamble

The central research aim of this study was to examine the changing nature and role of live entertainment provision at English seaside resorts, with particular reference to the 1990s and the beginning of the 21st century. To achieve this aim it was necessary to meet two objectives i.e.

- To identify the changing character and management of live entertainment provision at English seaside resorts, with particular reference to the 1990s and the beginning of the 21st century, and
- To establish the extent to which, and the ways in which, key factors have influenced this change.

Five research questions provided a focus and direction to fulfil the aim and objectives:

1. What is the historical nature of the provision of live entertainment at English seaside resorts?
2. What are the recent key factors of change affecting the provision of live entertainment at English seaside resorts?
3. How are the key factors (and associated underlying factors) influencing the operation, nature and control of live entertainment at English seaside resorts, and to what extent are these factors unique, or part of a wider phenomenon?

4. Is there evidence of commonality in provision, not only in terms of common issues but also in terms of practices?
5. What is the *effect* of three key factors of change on the contemporary role of live entertainment at English seaside resorts?

These five questions have helped to establish the changing character and management of live entertainment and the effect of particular key factors on such change. The study has utilised these five questions in order to move from an initial descriptive stage, through analysis and on to synthesis, including the discussion in this final chapter.

Chapter 2 answered the first research question. Based on a review of existing literature, it offered insights into significant historical factors of change. Chapter 3 concerned an analysis of more recent times via triangulation of, particularly, key recent literature, but also preliminary interviews with industry practitioners. This combination confirmed the relevance of a deeper investigation of three significant change factors. Chapter 3 also revealed how local authorities continued to be crucial 'players' in an examination of the changing nature and role of live entertainment provision at English seaside resorts; it answered the second research question but also directed the focus of the study towards the providers of the majority of live entertainment i.e. local government officers and members. Consequently, chapters 5, 6, and 7 sought to clarify the influence of three particular factors of change on the provision of live entertainment (research questions three and four), from the local government perspective, as well as the degree of commonality of any such influence across particular, typical cases (resorts). Included in this clarification and accommodated in the synthesis throughout these chapters is the fact that different individuals at the *same* resort may hold different views. This may be related to their perceived or actual position/importance in

relation to the hierarchy and politics of their authority, in turn, related to their appreciation of the actual *effect* of three key factors of change on the contemporary role of live entertainment at 'their' seaside resort. Chapters 5, 6, and 7 have gone a considerable way to answering the third and fourth research questions but also confirmed the need to further synthesise the primary research material. This would be necessary to answer the fifth research question, which would be crucial in attempting to achieve the aim and objectives of the study. As regards the key conclusions to the study, including the *effect* of key aspects of change, such synthesis is accommodated in this final chapter. In order to do this, the final chapter is divided into three areas which discuss the critical findings and implications of those findings.

Section one of this final chapter provides a discussion of the key points that have emerged from this thesis, including how far these points are common to the resorts in this study. In particular, section one discusses the crucial role of local authorities in shaping any new understanding of live entertainment. Constant change has produced tensions in the delivery of the non-discretionary service of live entertainment and this is explored in the context of the current 'guardians' of such services.

Section two considers the policy implications of the study. Although not an original objective of this work, the findings, nevertheless, can suggest practical possibilities in relation to future planning and policy-making in the area of live entertainment at the seaside, particularly related to any role for local authorities. The policy-making comments of section two lead naturally into a discussion in the final section of this chapter, section three, regarding this study's contribution to knowledge, and connections and relevance to wider academic enquiry.

Section One: Key points from the study

System-wide factors influencing live entertainment at English seaside resorts

It is clear from the findings of this study that live entertainment continues to represent a significant part of the popular holiday culture at English seaside resorts but does not generally affect people's decision to holiday at the seaside. Certain types of live entertainment that are no longer particularly fashionable are nevertheless provided in the belief that holidaymakers expect them. It does not materially matter whether the live entertainment on offer affects the decision to visit, or the ultimate enjoyment of their stay. Indeed, live entertainment is not sufficiently well promoted to significantly influence the decision to visit, nor need it be in most cases because, as suggested, generally, staying visitors to English seaside resorts are not significantly influenced by the live entertainment part of the seaside product offer. One reason why the non-hotel live entertainment part of the tourist offer may not be particularly relevant in influencing potential customers is the lack of available quality product.

All of these opening points are consistent with the findings of Hughes (2000) and Hughes and Benn (1995, 1996, 1997, 1997a, 1998, 1998a), discussed in Part One of this study and developed as seven specific questions in Part Two, and confirm that live entertainment is not a significant tourist resource in persuading people to visit seaside resorts. However, live entertainment continues to be provided. People expect a certain amount and type of live entertainment and whether they attend or not, or whether or not it influences their decision to visit the resort, has become a financial issue concerned with the running of the theatres rather than an economic consequence of tourism per se. But in any case, local authority subsidies for seaside theatres continue to be provided. Of course, if certain resorts strategically

move away from tourism, for example, towards other business development, or to attract retirees, they would need to adjust their cultural offer, including the live entertainment element. This is despite the fact that live entertainment has not traditionally been associated with strategic initiatives such as the regeneration of an area via tourist or, indeed, non-tourist activities. However, if planners decide to focus more on, for example, residents and people within a reasonable drive-time, the relative importance of live entertainment in the non-tourist cultural offer, and the type of live entertainment to be offered, would need careful consideration.

Currently, at the beginning of the 21st century, in any future vision for seaside resorts there is a role for live entertainment in relation to the perceived image, status and character of the location and, at every location in this study, there is continued support for the provision of a varied live entertainment programme. This does not mean that there is any particular consistency, even across similar size resorts, regarding the understanding and role of live entertainment in the economic and cultural life of the resort, but that there is a universal, tacit understanding that it should continue. Particular live entertainment provision is resort-specific and the importance of the *local* context will be discussed further, below. Nevertheless, the most significant system-wide factors that support the proposition that live entertainment will continue to be supported can be categorised and will now be discussed in relation to changes in tourism, changes in cultural attitudes, and changes within the live entertainment industry. The national, but particularly the local, political context will then be discussed as a further, crucial system-wide factor in the future provision and position of live entertainment at English seaside resorts.

Changes in tourism, cultural attitudes and the live entertainment industry affecting live entertainment at English seaside resorts

Changes in patterns of tourism at English seaside resorts have had a significant effect on the economic status and fortunes of resorts, with some consequences for the live entertainment offered. English seaside resorts are increasingly used for short-breaks and second holidays and they continue to be magnets for significant numbers of day-trippers. Tourism remains a significant economic factor and respondents in this study were optimistic about the future for tourism, but at the same time there is some increased emphasis on non-tourist business, including retirees. The economic future of a resort dependent upon tourism will vary according to local circumstances, but predictions for resorts 'in trouble' usually mention those medium-size resorts that cannot create a distinctive image. The large resorts will survive, perhaps with more of an emphasis on day-trippers, and small resorts that can create a defensible niche are well positioned economically. Despite predictions of the demise of certain categories of seaside resorts, tourism continues to be the main economic 'driver' at all resorts in this study except Margate. At the same time, at *all* resorts in this study, there is a recognition of the need to cater for the live entertainment requirements of non-tourists, including residents, and some role for live entertainment in relation to this, and the perceived image of the resort.

According to Laws et al (2002) the main factors related to the critical image of destinations are 'the activities that may influence consumer choice, and the attributes of the destination itself'. But this may not be so significant in relation to the continued provision of live entertainment at the seaside because, generally, live entertainment is still seen as a 'given', necessary part of the 'mosaic' of a resort that helps promote a particular image, rather than a significant determinant of image.

Issues of the image of seaside resorts are also, significantly, a general reflection of prevailing cultural attitudes, related to the perceived importance of cultural factors in the (total) seaside destination experience (Murphy et al, 2000). As far as this study is concerned, this partially relates to how far seaside tourism is itself a reflection of 'cultural capital' i.e. cultural tourism, and then in relation to general attitudes towards providing cultural activities, including live entertainment, and any particular expectations of live performance that might influence (seaside) tourist decision-making. This informs the debate about the importance of cultural motives in the decision to visit a destination, and would reinforce the need to understand the role of the traditional activity generically known as seaside entertainment as a particular attribute of the location, but with strong links to cultural perceptions.

As suggested above, this study has demonstrated the strong relationship between general cultural attitudes and (potentially consequential) *cultural* tourism choices. But at seaside resorts much of the tourism is based on 'low' culture, which would not attract the cultural tourist. There will be some cultural tourists where the desire to engage in cultural tourism forms the main reason to visit a seaside destination, but for many more the actual cultural attributes and activities on offer play little or no role in choosing the English seaside, or a particular seaside resort. In these cases, the provision of 'high' or 'low' live entertainment will not significantly affect the decision to visit. The image, as portrayed by the activities and attributes within a particular cultural offer is generally not crucial (but see the comments, below, and Appendix G, in relation to specific live entertainment provision at particular resorts in this study). Conjecturally, (not proven in this study), it could be that 'low' culture live entertainment of the seaside variety reinforces the belief that 'high' culture is more significant in attracting tourists. This study suggests that the traditional seaside resort continues to be suited to particular groups of people who have common cultural aspirations. They do not seem to be significantly persuaded, or dissuaded,

from visiting by reports of the image of resorts as reflected by the cultural part of the seaside 'offer', let alone the specific live entertainment programme. This proposition is generally true for tourists but may be less so for some increasingly influential groups who may find 21st century seaside locations attractive, such as businesses, retirees and the 'affluent middle-aged' (Morgan and Pritchard, 1999). These groups are likely to look more closely and critically at the cultural offer, including, perhaps, as suggested, non-traditional aspects of seaside live entertainment, as represented by the 'high' (performing) arts categories of, for example, opera, orchestral music, and ballet. This is bringing about a more mixed 'high' and 'low' culture live entertainment programme in particular locations.

One of the significant consequences for this study of changes in patterns of tourism, particularly fewer long-stay visitors, and changes in the economic basis of resorts such as an increase in retirees, include a 'weakening' of the summer season and a greater emphasis on the 'shoulder' months. Resorts are increasingly seen as all-year destinations. This change is recognised by the respondents in this study, but its significance is not yet fully reflected in the scope and amount of live entertainment on offer. This is not necessarily the 'fault' of the theatre programmers because their choice of type and, crucially, *quality* of live entertainment is restricted by changes in the live entertainment industry beyond their control that have generally worked against them. This has been happening alongside general cultural trends and attitudes that have increased people's expectations of the live entertainment experience. Notwithstanding problems of definition already discussed in this work, the 52-week culture is moving 'performing arts' and 'live entertainment' closer together. There is a blurring of provincial/West End/seaside entertainment, best illustrated by touring musicals. Along with the desire to see familiar TV faces, reduced attention spans, 'slackening' theatre etiquette, people's increased expectations of a theatrical experience, and, at resorts, confusion as to what

constitutes 'Variety', there is a consistent need to provide *quality* in any live entertainment offer. This brings the expectation of seaside live entertainment closer to people's normal, non-holiday live entertainment experiences. The implication is that visitors to, and residents at, the seaside, are increasingly reluctant to patronise live entertainment that they do not regard as familiar, and/or, of sufficient perceived quality.

However, sufficient quality product at the right price is not readily available. The effect of changes in the *modus operandi* of the live entertainment industry, principally the control of quality product by a few large agents/managements, but also the fact that today's TV stars rarely tour seaside venues, has led to a lack of quality/popular product and tighter deals. This finding confirms the problems of the lack of quality supply of product identified in the 1990s work of Hughes and Benn, and demonstrates that giving theatre programmers freedom to negotiate is not sufficient to mitigate against such industry-wide practices, and do not necessarily help sell more seats at seaside theatres.

The system-wide changes relating to tourism, culture, and the workings of the live entertainment industry described above affect all the resorts in this study. However, one major finding of this work is that the effect can vary, (not always significantly, and not necessarily according to categorisation of resorts, for example, by size), from resort to resort. This study has shown how the particular situation for live entertainment at each of seven resorts is a consequence of the universal factors at play, but also significant resort-specific factors. However, unique resort-specific factors have not fundamentally affected the general local authority approach to live entertainment at the seaside (see below).

The single, most significant resort-specific factor identified in this study is the perceived image of the location, as seen from the perspective of the practitioners and programmers of live entertainment, and, to some extent, the artistes and their agents. The local political perspective is the most influential factor in projecting a particular image and the local political context, including any influence of the national political agenda, is summarised in section two of this final chapter but now commented on as a system-wide factor that, interestingly, can illustrate different, or some similar, policies and attitudes resort-by-resort. Local political imperatives cannot be ignored in relation to a discussion as to the relative importance of any common factors at particular resorts e.g. by size, or political colour, and the presumed consequential political response. However, this study has demonstrated that, as a result of wishing to have some control over the image of a location, and in relation to any perceived influence of the live entertainment offer, most of the local authorities in this study, regardless of their size, or economic or political make-up, are planning to continue to own, manage and control the majority of the live entertainment part of their cultural offer. This is a key, common response across unique seaside resorts. Local authorities recognise the difficulties of this approach and have considered other options, but remain keen to manage their theatres in the belief that this provides an appropriate part of the cultural offer – for tourists, residents, or both, as part of a particular image that projects a particular tourist destination experience. In such ways it is likely that the tradition of close local authority association with live entertainment will generally continue i.e. local authorities believe live entertainment is one of the cultural factors that provides a 'positive experience with elements of the service infrastructure' (Murphy et al, 2000 p46).

The proposed exception to continued close council involvement is Scarborough where council control is likely to be less 'hands-on', but this is still, arguably, a

'positive experience' which will 'positively affect perceptions of trip quality' (Murphy et al 2000 p46) because Scarborough's approach is focussed on 'high' culture. In all cases in this study, however, the management of the theatres is accompanied by a financial commitment that recognises the value of the cultural offer (mainly related to tourism) over and above any financial imperative (but see also section two, below). In relation to the role of performing arts as a part of the cultural offer, this is illustrated by the 'extreme' cases in this study i.e. Margate, and Scarborough.

All resorts, except Margate, were planning to continue to rely on tourism for their economic survival. Even at Margate, the decision to create an Independent Provident Society at its main 'low' culture live entertainment venue – essentially an 'arm's-length' council approach - could be argued as being consistent with the proposition that resorts wish to influence (mainly tourist) image via live entertainment i.e. the Margate Winter Gardens remain dependent upon the local council for subsidy and support. At Scarborough the 'arms length' proposals are premised on a belief that council-run live entertainment cannot significantly influence tourist perceptions of the location, *but* only as applied to 'low' culture. Scarborough's continued, expressed close involvement with the 'high arts' Stephen Joseph theatre indicates a belief that such non-traditional seaside live entertainment has a lot more 'cultural capital' than traditional forms, and this is more likely to bring economic benefit to the town. This approach does not accommodate the possible *total* effect of culture of the seaside live entertainment type. But it has been noted how programme choices are limited and the deliberate distinction between 'high' and 'low' culture on the 'Scarborough model' could be a useful method of catering for different target markets as cultural attitudes change. However, such distinctions are not always obvious, or practical, as now discussed in a brief resort-by-resort analysis.

The similarity of the live entertainment offer at particular seaside resorts

This study has identified differences, albeit subtle differences, in the live entertainment offer at English seaside resorts. This suggests that although practitioners and programmers consider their resort as unique and without direct competition, they generally do not, or cannot, exploit that uniqueness via their live entertainment offer. Additionally, common to all resorts but exaggerated at particular locations, there are too many theatre seats. Any reluctance or lack of political will to reduce the seats (the 'amount' of the offer) can be interpreted as a recognition of the continued perceived need for a 'full' live entertainment programme, but within a distinct, local context. Bournemouth, for example, has too many venues but currently supports them in the belief that live entertainment is important to the economic, social and cultural life of the location and helps project a 'classy' image. Higher than average ticket prices support this. A resort-by-resort analysis of particular approaches to the live entertainment offer is given in Appendix G and confirms how this work has demonstrated that, in relation to the live entertainment offer at typical English seaside resorts, changes in tourism, changes in cultural attitudes and changes in the live entertainment industry have affected all resorts, but not equally, and generally, not particularly significantly. The most significant effects were presumed to be related to the medium-size resorts in the study, but the evidence is not conclusive. This is partly because particular local circumstances and imperatives outweigh national trends, national initiatives, and industry-wide developments that were expected to have universal, generally detrimental, consequences on resorts of a particular size. This work can demonstrate how the importance of live entertainment in relation to these changes is, arguably, felt the least at the smallest resort (Hunstanton). Changes have 'passed them by' and this small resort has a clear understanding of the influence of such changes, i.e. not much, on their location. They are simply focussing on local

patrons whilst not ignoring visitors. In terms of policy directives and activities changes have been felt most at Margate (medium-size), then Skegness (small), although *proposed* changes at Scarborough (medium-size) may yet prove the most significant. To illustrate these points, the council at Margate has effectively 'downgraded' their main live entertainment venue with consequences for the fabric of the building, which requires considerable investment, whilst at Skegness there has been a rationalisation of the theatres and the remaining venue has been turned into a non-traditional seaside theatre – a multi-purpose venue that is not suited to 'theatre' but is well suited to various types of live entertainment. It is not clear whether this is a way forward for resorts with too many theatre seats which, as already noted, have their own reasons for retaining theatres and thus, high numbers of theatre seats.

Decisions related to live entertainment provision are the result of local factors that may not equally apply, even in resorts in similar population/economic/social class/political categories. Conditions at one resort may, or may not mirror those at another, and the live entertainment offer may, or may not, be similar. Local economic, social and cultural historical and contemporary conditions are a result of the initiatives, policies and priorities of the local politicians, as reflected in the practices of the local authority officers. It is the similar thinking and actions of these individuals, rather than the local circumstances (including local politics) that may, or may not, provide similar live entertainment at similar, or different resorts. The local political and administrative context (particularly in relation to the programmers), is the key to the shaping of a new understanding of live entertainment, and is now discussed.

The place of the local political and administrative context in shaping live entertainment policies and practices

According to the respondents in this study central government does not materially influence live entertainment at seaside resorts. There are numerous central government initiatives that have established various bodies responsible for regional activities such as economic regeneration based on tourism, and regional and local initiatives in the area of cultural activities, but according to the findings of this study, they have generally had little effect at resort level. The exception is Scarborough, where the central government agency arm of the Arts Council is linked to the subsidies Scarborough Borough council provide for the Stephen Joseph Theatre, there are no clear instances of central government directly influencing local government policy towards live entertainment. Of course, central government allocation of funds, for whatever purpose, is the key to potential influence, but all the local authorities in this study are keen to preserve a live entertainment provision at their location regardless of central government financial imperatives. The local political context, regardless of political 'colour' or precise differences in political structure(s) is supportive of live entertainment.

Local authorities recognise their lead role in bringing together interested parties that can co-operate in the delivery of local cultural services. These include, in particular and increasingly, local businesses and local communities - especially where the resident population is growing. These initiatives, in relation to Local Cultural Strategies, are at a formative stage. Meanwhile, consistent with the lack of effect of central government initiatives on local cultural activities, it is the local authorities in this study that continue to support the provision of various forms of live entertainment. These include programmes with some traditional seaside entertainment, but also increasingly varied programmes, including some 'elitist' live

entertainment. The autonomy to achieve this is embedded in the historical practice of allowing local authorities to decide which non-discretionary cultural services to provide, and in permitting managers the 'freedom to deal', provided they hit the 'bottom line'. Paradoxically, when it was easier to fill theatre seats at the seaside, there was more political control. Officers were subject to greater scrutiny via committees and sub-committees related to the defined and understood field of live entertainment but this is no longer the case. Live entertainment has moved down the hierarchy of local government importance to the point where the relevant Portfolio Holder/Member is unlikely to be particularly knowledgeable about it. The senior officer(s) ultimately in charge of live entertainment are not likely to be specialists. An expanded managerial role for middle managers may take them away from a focus on live entertainment. There will nevertheless be an individual responsible for the 'bottom line' – perhaps identified as the 'programmer', sometimes the theatre manager. The bottom line is the ability to stay within an agreed subsidy and remains the local authority 'control' mechanism. It actually allows wide choice by the 'fund-holder'.

As noted throughout this study the range of live entertainment offered reflects the perceived image of the resort (and other local factors) from the programmers and practitioners, not the consumers, point(s) of view. Whilst the live entertainment mix is a consequence of a combination of the historic social, cultural, economic and political context of the location, it is fundamentally based on a philosophical and artistic, but also technical, melange. It is a compromise, as perceived by the local practitioners, which reflects the local context, rather than is directed by it. However, the priorities of local politics change, and at different times prioritising local non-statutory activities (particularly, at times, 'low-priority' cultural activities) can place live entertainment back towards the top of the local political agenda. In particular, discussions on managing the reduction in over-supply of theatre seats usually lead

to a debate about closing or modifying the venue(s), including the possibility of partnerships with the private sector. This debate is usually resolved by a compromise that allows local authority owned and managed live entertainment to continue provided it stays within defined (sometimes redefined) economic boundaries, that is, the 'bottom line'. The debate is not likely to be resolved on the cultural and philosophical merits of live entertainment. It is not even resolved in relation to the (unquantified) economic value of live entertainment to the location. This is true at all resorts in this study and is likely to remain the case all the time there is insufficient independent evidence for a conclusion based on detailed individual, but also agreed, comparative analysis, related to potential cultural and economic advantages across similar, and dissimilar, resorts.

Despite these comments, it is clear that all the local authorities in this study appreciate the cultural 'value', if not the economic return(s), of the live entertainment they offer. They may have differing aims and objectives but none of them see a future without live entertainment – that is, live entertainment as defined and discussed in this study. There may be less direct council involvement, resulting in more collaborative partnerships with the private sector; but if such political 'fashions' fade, or fail, the local authorities will be there to 'pick up the pieces'. There is a deep-seated tradition that suggests local authorities at the seaside will continue to provide live entertainment, regardless of any 'basic philosophies of central government that might encourage disengagement (from such cultural activities)' (Hughes and Benn, 1996 p183). Local authorities will continue to exercise a high degree of control over 'their' live entertainment. The 'freedom to deal' given to their managers is really a reflection of the wider autonomy that the majority of local politicians seem to wish to retain. Changes in the local political context related to the provision of live entertainment have made little difference to the political freedoms or restrictions exercised by the managers. In this way, any differing

political composition or philosophy of different types of local authorities at the seaside, including any differences *within* the resort's political and managerial make-up, have, to date, not influenced the largely unrecognised, but nevertheless generally understood, importance of live entertainment to the locality. The local political context is conducive to delivering a live entertainment offer, but how far it is appropriate has not been fully explored. This is discussed further in section three of this chapter relating to the limitations of the study and further research possibilities, but also in policy implications of the study (section two of this chapter), particularly as far as local authorities, perhaps, of varying (size) typologies are concerned. As far as this section is concerned, the discussion of system-wide factors influencing live entertainment at English seaside resorts can now be summarised.

Despite changes in the structure of tourism, all resorts in this study believed tourism would be a key part of their future economic strategy. Despite a dwindling audience for traditional seaside live entertainment, it would continue to be part of the tourist 'offer'. In this sense, live entertainment would always be a part of the 'mosaic' that made up the total tourist product. However, the significance of live entertainment was related more to an expected part of the (tourist) product *once the tourist was in the resort*, rather than influencing the decision to visit. The implication of this finding is that live entertainment was tactical, rather than strategic, particularly (if considered at all) in attempts to regenerate resort locations.

Additionally, the pattern of tourism had changed, and had encouraged live entertainment programmers to move away from (summer) season-specific activity towards a 52 week cultural offer that increasingly 'blurred' distinctions between performing arts and live entertainment (between 'high' and 'low' culture), and live entertainment of the seaside variety. This meant more of a focus on residents and non-tourists.

An increased amount of live entertainment, or more promotion of live entertainment, would not materially affect the economic impact of tourism, although it could be significant in attracting potential residents, or businesses. However, better *quality* live entertainment, perhaps linked to amount, would project a better image for tourists, residents and businesses alike and help counter negative cultural attitudes towards live entertainment. It would also help in building audiences in a situation where there was excess capacity of theatre seats. Quality is thus an issue for both the 'high' and the 'low' arts, and better quality 'high culture' live entertainment could result in seaside resorts focussing some of their attention on (arts-related) cultural tourism. However, better quality live entertainment was increasingly difficult to obtain, due to changes in the practices of the industry, particularly the consolidation of agents and managements on the supply side. Nevertheless, quality live entertainment was seen as part of the 'cultural rounding' of tourists and residents and in these ways, live entertainment was more important in the social and cultural life of a resort, than in its economic standing. This priority was reflected at most local authorities, who planned to continue to own, manage and control their live entertainment venues, and allowed their managers and programmers a good deal of freedom to do so, including the freedom to balance 'high' and 'low' (culture) live entertainment.

Live entertainment cannot be identified as more, or less, important in economic, social or cultural terms in relation to resorts of varying size, or at various stages of a resort life-cycle. There may be theoretical perspectives as to how resorts at a particular stage of life-cycle may react in a consistent fashion (Buhalis, 2000 p105) but such consistency does not necessarily apply to the live entertainment part of the cultural offer. Cultural factors (particularly related to image) are resort-specific and thus the position of live entertainment in the life of a resort is dependent upon the unique local, economic, social, cultural and political situation. In short, live

entertainment is part of the total cultural offer that could reflect local distinctiveness and emphasise the uniqueness of each resort, but this possibility has not been 'exploited' by politicians and programmers.

Changes in tourism, changes in cultural attitudes, changes in the live entertainment industry and changes brought about by political initiatives have affected all resorts, but not equally. The *least* effect has been the political initiatives that have simply left local authorities to manage the cultural offer as they see fit. This includes a continuing lead role in bringing together and co-operating with any partners but within a framework of a continuing commitment to the provision of live entertainment. This commitment is regardless of the size of the resort, or its economic, cultural, or political make-up and is developed in the following section.

Section Two: Policy implications for local authorities at English seaside resorts

In addition to answering the key aims and objectives, the results of this study also allow some useful comments on policy implications. These include the need to better integrate live entertainment into local (seaside resorts) plans, particularly local cultural strategies, and possibly regional, economic and cultural policy-making and planning. This could be via a local cultural strategy where the local authorities might usefully distinguish between the high/low performing arts in relation to their economic, but particularly their cultural effect, including any consequent effect on the resort's image. Additionally, the financial support given to live entertainment by the local authorities may not be adequately accounted for and it might need to be better justified via a local resort-specific audit, than by comparisons with other resorts. On the other hand, if reasonable comparative criteria could be devised, there is the opportunity to adopt 'best practice' across resorts. Linked to all this, and crucial to local policy-making in relation to live entertainment, there is the

fundamental question as to how much longer local authorities can continue to provide a service (live entertainment) that is (implicitly) justified via beliefs and impressions, rather than explicitly justified via, for example, 'percentage of seats sold'. This 'culture versus economics' debate, sometimes influenced by political expediency, needs to be resolved in a period of considerable change for seaside resorts. Key policy implications are now discussed in more detail and further developed in section three in a discussion of further research possibilities, particularly in relation to widening and deepening the debate surrounding live entertainment within tourism/leisure policy-making, and destination marketing theory.

Integrating live entertainment into local government policy-making

'Joined-up' government as articulated by central government is meant to deliver realistic and coherent regional and local aims and objectives. These would be in response to central government direction, but would fundamentally reflect local characteristics and priorities. In relation to cultural development, according to Bone and Mitchell (2002 p15), the joined-up approach would need to demonstrate wider links to areas such as 'economic development, healthy living and well-being, education and training, business development and inward investment, community development and planning'. Consistent with this, within any Local Cultural Strategy initiative, the suggested best approach is a thematic one requiring delivery across a number of inter-connected topic areas. Flowing from the wider aims and objectives for the region would be strategies designed to achieve the stated aims and objectives. There would need to be methods of implementation and control which could 'check' whether the strategies were achieving the aims and objectives. If not, corrective action would be necessary. This joined-up approach is in its very earliest stages. So far as live entertainment is concerned, and in relation to most cases in

this study, embryonic cultural strategies are emerging but have not been much developed. They may be linked to wider issues such as economic regeneration, but the links and potential effects are not clear. With regard to this study, live entertainment as defined in this work may not even feature as a separate entity, let alone as part of a themed approach, although the area in which it often operates, for example, 'cultural activities', may be well recognised.

Central government regeneration policies for seaside resorts have not suggested that the cultural activities on offer can materially help the economic prosperity/revival of seaside locations. Hitherto, the focus has been on economic restructuring. However, Local Cultural Strategies *have* been identified as important in helping create a cultural identity for individual resorts – either within the wider cultural identity of the region, or, perhaps controversially, as distinct in relation to a particular local offer that need not necessarily reflect the regional identity. All the local authorities in this study support cultural activities and in some cases have articulated a local cultural policy. As noted, such policies do not usually stress the role of live entertainment although there is clear political and financial support for this aspect of the cultural offer. All of this is consistent with the general lack of knowledge and understanding relating to this 'aspect of 'cultural policy' that is relatively unexplored. 'Entertainment (at seaside resorts) has not generally been the concern of cultural policy' (Hughes and Benn, 1997 p235). The potential link between live entertainment and local cultural policy-making is debated further in the final section of this chapter.

This study has identified the weak link between live entertainment and politically inspired cultural strategy initiatives but has not, so far, addressed how far cultural activities at the seaside might be in *any way* political. Cultural policy in the recent past has had the narrow focus of 'the arts' although, as noted throughout this study,

it is accepted that local authorities at the seaside have 'played a significant role in provision of *seaside entertainment* from the earliest days of tourism' (Hughes and Benn, 1997 p235). The fact that local authorities have *always* been prepared to support live entertainment, even through periods of decline in their traditional economic base, is more a reflection of the accepted, 'given' nature of live entertainment than of any useful knowledge in relation to its economic, social and cultural impact, or any discussion about the 'rights' of local authorities to determine their local cultural provision. However, 'New Labour's' emphasis on a more planned, strategic approach in relation to cultural activities requires the providers of live entertainment to identify and articulate their priorities and plans. Cultural services are probably moving up the political agenda. Fifty-one per cent of all chief leisure officers or heads of cultural services that responded to a Local Government Association survey in 2002 believe 'the contribution of cultural services would increase a lot over the next three years. A further two-fifths (39 per cent) thought it would increase a little' (Local Government Association, 2002a p3).

This work has identified the potential significance of local cultural strategies within particular future policy making initiatives at seaside resorts. The potential significance of a well-researched and well-articulated Local Cultural Strategy, however, is restricted by the political 'focus' of the document. Whether culture can be an economic instrument, or is largely a 'soft' factor which generally improves people's 'life experiences', may be less important than whether it is connected to planning processes which will 'action' the proposed cultural activities. The 'action' in this case includes the involvement and perhaps approval of a range of government (and other) bodies which all have their own politics and priorities. However, as a minimum, a requirement has been identified for a more strategic, planned approach to the role of cultural services at the local level. This work has identified some

development on this in relation to live entertainment at the seaside, but any such advances are not yet influencing policy except, perhaps, at Scarborough.

This study suggests that local cultural strategies are local in the sense that the implementation of the strategy is almost entirely dependent on the *local* political context. Collaboration in joint regional cultural strategy is, currently, not likely to be effective. It may be possible to share a broad vision but as strategy is developed, 'certain key differences become discernible, not least in the ability to resource delivery, ...and (this) lessens the focus with the emergence of competing priorities' (Bone and Mitchell, 2002 p13). There will be many difficulties in collaborative approaches to any planning initiatives but they may be exaggerated within the value-laden world of cultural activities. Problems of definition of 'culture' and as noted throughout this study, of 'live entertainment'/'performing arts', are just the beginning of contentious issues in any debate that is based on resource allocation (finance) to cultural activities, and are now discussed.

Financial support given to seaside live entertainment by the local authorities

The performing arts do not always have to have an economic end in themselves. They can be supported for their aesthetic value. But this study of seaside live entertainment has shown that this is not true of all the arts – there is clearly a pecking order, and officially sanctioned, central, regional and local government subsidy, is most obviously allocated to the 'high' arts. Although live entertainment at the seaside is low in the pecking order ('low' culture), it is not deemed necessarily unworthy of *local* government subsidy or even unable or unlikely to thrive or survive on its own. In fact, it receives substantial support, both financially and politically, at all the resorts in this study. But this may also be an issue of semantics, or historical practice, as well as economics.

Consistent with problems of definition, live entertainment, in (any) government terms, is not a recognised category and strictly speaking should not receive subsidy, in any case. But economically vulnerable activities that might be financially supported *do* include 'the performing arts' (Selwood, 2001 pxxxviii). The list referred to by Selwood are those activities that fall within the remit of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and, from a totally objective view, live entertainment at the seaside (not in the list) could thus be considered outside the remit of government regional agencies. But not, as demonstrated in this study, outside the operational activities of the local authorities. The implication is that live entertainment can thrive/survive without 'direct' central government aid, that is, aid as redistributed by various government agencies allocating money for cultural activities. Indeed, this study has demonstrated how seven typical seaside local authorities are subsidising their live entertainment *without* direct central government support. It may be that they are funding their live entertainment via central government grants that are ostensibly for other cultural activities such as museums or libraries. But this seems unlikely when museums and libraries are subject to persistent financial constraints. It seems that local authorities at the seaside are continuing to subsidise a discretionary cultural activity from funds primarily provided for other local (non-cultural) services. Whether this is a planned, systematic, strategic approach which encompasses all the services of the local authority is one intriguing question that this study has 'exposed'. However, this is hardly a 'revolutionary' revelation. If live entertainment had been considered anything other than an essential ingredient of the seaside 'offer' it would have been subject to much greater scrutiny in the past. In this respect, the current economics of providing seaside live entertainment may not be the key issue. Acquiescence and, to some extent, apathy (live entertainment is a 'given'), along with a lack of local political importance (except at times of financial crisis, when the economic argument *does* surface, but then generally recedes), are more likely reasons for the hitherto, and current, lack of focus and

accountability with regard to the economic effect of live entertainment within the cultural offer. It thus seems likely that live entertainment will survive on cultural grounds (as in the local cultural/political context), rather than on economic grounds. And this is notwithstanding any perceived economic value of the cultural tourist. It will also survive without central government financial support. In this respect, live entertainment may not even have to justify itself in relation to any known or perceived effect on tourists. Live entertainment is essentially a cultural, not economic, matter. As such it reflects, but is not necessarily driven by, the local cultural, social, and political, rather than economic, agenda. This 'soft' approach, with a lack of quantitative analysis means live entertainment does not easily compare across resorts.

Comparative methods of the effect of live entertainment provision

It has been noted throughout this study how three key factors of change have influenced aspects of the live entertainment provision at English seaside resorts but, as discussed within this final chapter, they have not fundamentally influenced policy. The *effect* of these factors on local policy and planning has been less than might be expected. Live entertainment continues as a significant part of the total tourist (and resident) 'offer' at resort locations. This is despite a lack of knowledge as to how it operates and, consequently, how it truly affects the social, cultural and economic life of the locality. Subsidies are provided but there is no real tracking of the precise nature of their contribution to that part of the 'creative economy' at the seaside which might lead to social, cultural, and also economic, advantages for the location. Without this, it is impossible to lay secure foundations for the further development of strategic policy-making in the area of live entertainment.

It is impossible to justify, and thus appropriately target, funding for the optimum cultural offer, including the role for live entertainment in any tourist-related environment. However, the development and refinement of Best Value and Benchmarking techniques may lead to measurable outcomes for the subsidy or 'investment' being made, but this study suggests, at more of a local, individual, rather than regional or national level. This is (partially) given expression by the former Secretary of State, but in relation to national initiatives, in the hope that there will be 'real partnership with obligations and responsibilities' (DCMS, 1998b). With regard to live entertainment at the seaside, this study suggests this view is overly optimistic. It seems unlikely to happen at a national and regional level, or even, perhaps, at a local partnership level. There is not sufficient knowledge about the *real* current and potential impact of live entertainment and there are too many 'rivalries' and priorities (such as in-house hotel entertainment, and political rivalries at local, then regional level) that are likely to inhibit effective collaboration between proposed partners, and throughout the layers of government agencies. There are problems of 'holistic' partnership approaches, even at a single, local level, to the development of local cultural strategies - which some commentators believe should be at the centre of *all* (local and regional) corporate planning processes for local authorities (Local Government Association, 2002 Appendix B).

In relation to this study, placing cultural strategy at the centre of planning would particularly relate to being able to quantify and compare the outcomes of all cultural activities, but particularly live entertainment. However, this has not been possible even at a single, discrete, local level. No one resort, either via documentation or interview, has been able to separate out and justify live entertainment, let alone compare it with other aspects of the cultural offer. In effect, it might be possible to be clear about the broad outlines of a reasonable strategy but, to paraphrase recent commentators of holistic governance, 'the problem is their implementation,

development, fleshing out, and institutionalisation...if we cannot hold public managers responsible for outcomes, but outcomes are what we care about, then we can only hold them to account for the extent and quality of their efforts in activities such as collecting intelligence and information, setting priorities, and attempting to collaborate' (Perri 6 et al, 2002 p176). This study suggests that there is only the beginning of such an approach with regard to live entertainment at the seaside, and such beginnings are only at the individual resort level - they are not even consistent across resorts of a similar size, as each location continues its unique approach.

Live entertainment at the local level: Policy-led or funding-led?

As noted, this study can suggest implications for local policy making that need not require an immediate engagement in emergent collaboration initiatives. There are difficulties in gaining a consensus outside the local level but this need not affect the on-going debate on the key issue of an activity, live entertainment, that is known to be required but has not been objectively justified. And the key point in *that* debate must relate to how far subsidised live entertainment will continue to be primarily policy-led, rather than funding-led. Does the social, cultural and political need for live entertainment at the seaside (all linked to the total destination product) in the differing *local* circumstances, always out-weigh any financial benefit? This study shows there are no developed and agreed measures to answer this question but, despite this, it looks as if the economics are not the most important factor, at least at the local level. An on-going debate on this at the local level might be the key to eventually informing regional policy initiatives and potential collaboration. This cannot happen until there is clarity at the local level. The clarity required is associated with any future for live entertainment that might be tied to clearer cultural *and* economic benefits. Consistent with the 'economic' side of such an investigation, perhaps live entertainment should only be provided if it makes money,

or at least, does not lose too much money. It may be appropriate that central government allows regional bodies to allocate central funds but this is not, currently, an approach that necessarily accommodates local cultural and economic circumstances. At present, for seaside live entertainment, this does not materially matter, but it may do in the future. Live entertainment is not a net receiver of central government funds, at any level. Live entertainment does not therefore currently need to be justified on economic grounds and thus policy can be determined by non-economic 'drivers' inherent in the local political context, such as the discreet, distinct, (perceived) local importance of live entertainment.

The local policy implications are clear. Policy for live entertainment is not based on funding priorities per se, but on *some* understanding of the overall cultural priorities for the location, linked to the total destination product, largely as a reflection of people's perception/image of the location. A clear understanding of this is currently lacking, although this study has revealed the scope, nature and philosophy behind the contemporary live entertainment situation at particular seaside resorts. These resorts are not necessarily a representative sample but it has been explained how they may be considered typical. As such, they reflect the wider issues of social, economic, cultural and political change affecting seaside resorts, and the changes within the live entertainment industry that have impacted on the provision of live entertainment of the 'seaside variety'.

Staying within the financial 'bottom line' is the *given* justification for providing a particular programme of live entertainment. But it is a convenient and understandable (quantitative, not qualitative) justification, rather than one based on a true knowledge and understanding of the real social, cultural, and economic value of seaside live entertainment to the location. It may be too complicated to articulate understandable and explainable policies for live entertainment expenditure, but

nevertheless, this is the tacitly agreed means by which they operate. Subsidy figures are discussed, financial performance in general is debated but generally, provided the 'bottom line' is hit, the programmers can programme whatever they like – provided of course, they can obtain it. Their programming is largely free from political interference because the programmers are the people seen to have the required expertise. In this way, they have the power and consequently, a good deal of tacit control over the funding. Allowing the programmers this freedom reinforces the view that live entertainment provision is policy, rather than funding-led.

This study has shown that live entertainment at the seaside is something of an enigma in that its position in the cultural offer (with any links to economic benefits) and consequent 'justification' is not clear. However, the study has provided many clues to the solving of the puzzle. One of the key clues lies in policy makers each having their own understanding of the values and uses of live entertainment. But, again, unfortunately, these different views only add to the complications, as these are individual perspectives based on individual experiences and prejudices. Consequently, there is a problem in articulating this in a consistent, coherent way, and thus engaging in a meaningful debate which would lead to clarity in relation to the role of live entertainment within the cultural services offer at the seaside. Any consensual policy viewpoint related to seaside resorts in general, is missing. However, it *can* be shown how, in relation to policy implications, live entertainment is generally apolitical. It becomes somewhat political when the subsidy is reached, or exceeded – at which point that part of the overall puzzle i.e. 'what to do with live entertainment?' is complicated by individual prejudices, of both the officers and the members, and sometimes, other parties. In short, changes in cultural policy and attitudes affecting seaside live entertainment, are not brought about by any substantive changes in the constituency of the subsidised cultural sector as determined by central government policy and philosophy. This study has

demonstrated that significant changes to live entertainment policy and procedures are rare but, in any case, are more a consequence of local priorities and prejudices rather than of any planned or articulated local, regional or national strategy – for tourism, resorts or cultural activities.

At the present time, given the lack of a clear, coherent policy for local cultural services and the additional confusion of an area of such services (live entertainment) that is little understood, there is tacit agreement that it is legitimate to allow local authorities at the seaside to provide the amount and type of live entertainment that they feel is most suited to their local situation. This legitimacy is largely invested in the programmers. Such legitimacy is extended to include validity. There are particular universal forces at work, such as cultural change, but they affect each resort differently because each resort's history, policy, philosophy and consequently, their political priorities are unique. It is thus valid to allow each resort to deal with the issue of live entertainment in their own, unique way. There is no evidence from this study that resorts view this in any other way and it may be that the lack of regional co-operation reflects this. Arguably, this suggestion is strengthened by the fact that, whilst certain inter-resort competition is recognised, none of the resorts are attempting to overtly utilise live entertainment to improve their position vis-à-vis other resorts. It may be that, as a consequence of particular policies, a particular resort gains a reputation for a particular cultural offer. But this is more a result of attempting to satisfy the local stakeholders e.g. the hoteliers, or residents, or politicians, than an 'attack' on a 'fellow' resort, or clarity regarding any suggested causal relationship between live entertainment, resort image and perhaps, economic benefit. In this respect, this study has not identified any significant link between policy and particular outcomes. This holds true at different resorts. It is thus not surprising that, even if a certain resort 'looks' similar to another, there can be variability in their live entertainment offer.

The consequence of a lack of empirical research in the area of live entertainment, particularly in relation to its economic effect, for example in regeneration, means 'relationship' policy making does not effectively happen. 'Relationship' policy making would pose questions about the strength of connections between policy, cultural activities and outcomes, possibly at local, regional and national level. It might even address the vexed question of whether it is appropriate for economic measures to be applied to live entertainment – that is, whether such cultural activities are actually intended to increasingly meet economic, as opposed to social and cultural, objectives. Nevertheless, if local authorities are going to spend money on their cultural services in the future, the subsidy for the non-discretionary service of live entertainment will come under scrutiny and the extent to which they are delivering their stated objectives will be the key question. This is just one possibility for a future research agenda and whilst this study has laid the foundations for an investigation into the key relationships at seaside resorts between policy, funding and outcomes, further investigations must happen within a clearer understanding and articulation of live entertainment within leisure/tourism policy at the seaside, and a clearer appreciation of the significance of live entertainment within that part of the tourist destination experience associated with the influence of cultural factors. The latter comment places live entertainment within the wide debate of factors associated with tourist destination marketing research. Some future research possibilities are now discussed, along with advances from this study towards the contribution to knowledge surrounding English seaside resorts, and particularly that part associated with cultural activities.

Section Three: Contribution to knowledge and recommendation for future research possibilities

The preceding sections of this final chapter have demonstrated how this study has given a much clearer focus to three key change questions affecting the issue of live entertainment at English seaside resorts at the beginning of the 21st century. Section one gave specific answers to questions posed, for example, by 1990s researchers, particularly as regards the role of live entertainment in tourism at the English seaside, but also significant clarification of where live entertainment sits within cultural activities. Section two of this final chapter reinforced the key role played by local authorities in the provision of live entertainment. The study has been broad enough to inform cultural studies, tourism studies, indeed, cultural tourism, and local government studies.

The contribution to knowledge of this study is now absorbed in a discussion in this final section regarding possible linkages and development of the findings of this study to established areas of leisure/tourism research. Principally, this concerns the role of local authorities in relation to that part of their leisure/tourism policy at the seaside related to cultural activities, particularly live entertainment, and the consequent potential of live entertainment in the marketing of seaside destinations.

This study has achieved the aim of examining the changing nature and role of live entertainment provision at the English seaside. The management of that provision has been discussed, together with the extent to which three key factors have influenced any change in management practices, and despite initiatives that suggest the local authorities role in leisure provision may be changing from direct provision to facilitators/enablers of provision (Bull et al, 2003 p196) the immediate future of live entertainment within leisure/tourism policy at the seaside remains firmly in the hands of local government.

It has been established that the study has been a topical debate in the sense that it was an area of tourism, cultural provision, and political control little investigated, but also in respect of being an aspect of cultural activity that, perhaps, controversially, should financially account for itself during a period of relative economic decline at the seaside. The 'morality' of attempting to justify political control (via finance, or otherwise) has not been questioned although, implicitly, the advance of 'market forces', if tacitly allowed by the politicians, may solve this dilemma. However, this may not be what the public want. Should the *public* be allowed to decide? Certainly, there seems to be little public accountability. In fact, if public 'approval' (actual or implied) relates to the numbers of theatre seats left *unsold* at the seaside, the public may be getting a poor deal. These could be questions absorbed in further (seaside resort) research associated with the scope and responsibility of local authorities in devising and implementing their leisure policies, particularly related to any accountability for the cultural and economic consequences of such policies. This, in turn, is related to the effectiveness of their destination marketing initiatives.

The study has established a firm basis for quantitative and qualitative justification for providing live entertainment at seaside resorts. Qualitative judgements in this study are those of the practitioners who provide live entertainment and these views, a particular limitation of this study, cannot be regarded as objective. However, the quantitative element i.e. exactly what live entertainment is provided in each resort, is an agreed comparative method and a significant advance in being able to justify live entertainment programmes. But it has not been the emphasis of the study, merely a 'checking' method 'against' the subjective interview material. As noted, it must also be remembered that the single most significant limitation to the study is that the qualitative material issued from the *providers* of the live entertainment, not the *consumers*. Clearly, one significant area for further research would be to investigate consumer response and attitudes to the live entertainment on offer. This would

effectively match qualitative consumer views with actual quantitative consumer results. This would be particularly intriguing in relation to cultural tourism and could even suggest how far 'Cultural tourism contributes directly to the maintenance and profile of...theatres and concert halls' (Local Government Association, 2001 pvi). This would be a significant advance on the restricted focus of this study. However, given the direction in which the study developed, seemingly, there is the more fundamental need for a thorough examination of the role of the local authorities in all of this – explicitly, the role of seaside local authorities in directing local cultural strategies within their local tourism/leisure policy and planning. This could point up the significance, or not, of live entertainment in the cultural offer.

The local authorities provide particular programmes of live entertainment, sometimes regardless of consumer preferences and seem to be 'provider of last resort', particularly if no commercial sector provider shows sufficient interest in running the live entertainment. As 'provider of last resort' local authorities give subsidies for live entertainment that may artificially deflate the quality of that part of the cultural offer at the seaside, notwithstanding the fact that this study suggests there is currently little understanding of the real effect of quality standards. There is thus a lack of understanding as to how the live entertainment provided can be justified via the local political 'control' situation, and that is where the crucial debate lies, (although still linked with the social, cultural and economic importance of live entertainment to the location – especially, in a tourism context, in relation to the marketing and promotion of the destination).

Further research possibilities relate, firstly, to whether the cultural offer at the seaside *should* be largely controlled by the politicians and local authority officers. How far should it be controlled by particular groups of local and regional stakeholders, but essentially, should the local authority be the 'driver' in all this? It

seems, for the time being, it should, even if it is (eventually?) 'reduced to a role of regulation and safety net provision' (Bull et al, 2003 p209). 'Until recently, the received wisdom concerning local government was that it represented a neutral vehicle for local administration ...underpinned by democratic pluralism, which included the notion of free competition between interest groups across a range of issues' (Henry, 2001 p102). However, this study shows that the only interest group directing the live entertainment is the local authority. Buhalis (2000 p98) suggests that 'Managing and marketing destinations is also challenging because of the variety of stakeholders involved in the development and production of tourism products' and it has been demonstrated in this study how the live entertainment part of the cultural offer is poorly understood, and by extension the cultural offer itself, and on, perhaps to the destination offer. Not necessarily as a consequence of this, but rather out of necessity (and a historical perspective which has become a tacit obligation), direction and responsibility in a lot of this has fallen to the local authority. And, although this study shows local authority direction of leisure policy is politically permitted, and legitimate, as regards live entertainment at the seaside, any pluralist/social inclusion agenda(s) suggested in this thesis, are not being met by these means. In tourism terms, it has not been demonstrated that live entertainment is anything other than an accepted 'given'. This study has not placed such observations, or 'grounded' them, within what might be described as the 'politics of leisure policy'. This offers the opportunity to develop the work of this study but link it to questions concerning the best way for seaside local authorities to exploit what seems to be their continuing lead role in cultural and leisure/tourism policies.

Notwithstanding the pluralist comments, above, it has been noted how it is hard to envisage any single body other than the local authority being able to co-ordinate live entertainment at the seaside. This is the Government approach, as already noted in this final chapter (DCMS, 2000, Appendix B), which places local-government led

local cultural strategies at the centre of linkages between such strategies, and plans. In this respect, any controversy around such a pluralist/political debate (not many citizens/consumers involved in the decision-making quangos) is almost redundant, and is really one about the practical, relative effect of local and regional partnerships. If the pluralist argument of local governance is not working, (and by extension, regional partnerships), and, additionally, as this study suggests, New Labour performance initiatives such as best value have effectively transferred power to the professionals rather than the politicians, 'softer' objectives such as social inclusion in the arts may not be effectively happening. This study certainly indicates a lot of confusion about the vehicle that might deliver an agreed, 'rounded' cultural offer i.e. a Local Cultural Strategy. Whether such a local cultural strategy, instigated but not dictated by the local authority i.e. more of a 'pluralist' strategy, could deliver a better deal for seaside locations, is an intriguing question. It would lead to a more meaningful debate about the *relative* economic, social and cultural impact of live entertainment within the overall cultural offer at a particular location *and* perhaps, the optimum local authority role in all this.

At one level, the 'public will' should influence the cultural offer. This may be more significant at seaside resorts if they become centres for retirement or business, rather than tourism. A debate in this area would at least involve stakeholders other than the providers of the live entertainment. Implicit in this suggestion is the scope for research in relation to where live entertainment at the seaside fits in post-modern culture, as cultural attitudes in relation to seaside resorts change. Greater understanding here would help with the need to better comprehend the relative importance of live entertainment in the 'low'/'high' culture on offer at the seaside. What exactly do people understand by popular culture at the seaside at the beginning of the twenty-first century and how much of this relates to which types of live entertainment are *perceived* to be on offer? Is there a significant 'blurring of the

boundaries...collapse of the distinction between high art and mass/popular culture' as suggested by McGuigan (1996). This study suggests this is not yet the case at English seaside resorts but the situation is clearly changing. Additionally, this study has done very little to assess the accepted universal (cultural) effect of television on live entertainment at the seaside – particularly in relation to audience expectations and behaviour. Again, within post-modern cultural perspectives it may be increasingly necessary to absorb seaside live entertainment into the performing arts arena, rather than see it as a separate genre.

As noted, this study suggests there is general agreement about allowing local authorities to provide the live entertainment offer. However, they all provide a (more or less) similar offer that varies according to the local circumstances. This has been regarded as a valid way of dealing with the acknowledged differences and, in turn, permits the need to recognise variances, even at similar resorts. Currently, this is the only way to deal with the complexities of a constantly changing situation and is accepted practice. But this is because there has not been a debate – praxis should not prevent a questioning of the 'rightness' of this approach. How to determine the *local* importance of particular cultural activities, *related to the overall, unique, destination offer*, is the key, unanswered question from this study.

At the outset of this work it was known that 'Local government has played a significant role in provision of seaside entertainment from the earliest days of tourism' (Hughes and Benn, 1997 p235). It was not known how that role was being affected by recent economic, social, cultural and political changes and initiatives. Changes that went beyond the effect of tourism per se. The significance of entertainment for tourism has been explored in this study but this investigation has only served to open up other important areas of change and context that need research if the general role for live entertainment at the seaside is to be better

understood. The relevance of this study as a pointer to wider academic enquiry related to seaside resorts is significant and broad. This study could inform a research agenda that looks at the role of local government in the promotion and marketing of 'their' resort. In this respect it links to areas of tourism and cultural research such as destination marketing and cultural tourism – particularly 'the potential contribution of tourists to sustaining local (cultural) services' (Local Government Association, 2001 viii). But all of this is related to the fundamental question of how practical it is to expect individuals and non-local authority bodies to determine the cultural provision and thus influence, perhaps significantly, the all-important image of the location.

According to King (2002) there is a need for destinations to change from passive promotion along with the need for 'strong brand image to key targeted segments' and Bennett (1999) suggests (such) initiatives need to be undertaken in close co-operation with the private sector. McKercher (2002) discusses this in relation the importance of cultural motives in the decision to visit a destination. Attempts at joint promotion have been described in this study but it could be that increasingly sophisticated uses of databases to target key customers such as cultural tourists, or indeed, regular users of 'low' seaside live entertainment, could take such an agenda forward. In an increasingly sophisticated (consumer) world it could be that the appropriate cultural offer is the key to the (destination) benefits sought by particular target markets considering those benefits (Alford, 1998). Perhaps particular types of performance art/live entertainment are identifiable with particular resorts and this could be the uniqueness they could exploit.

However, the underlying issue remains the relationship between policy, funding and acceptable outcomes, in relation to local authority political control and the appropriate cultural offer within an appropriate destination image strategy.

The outcomes might be economic. For example, a role for live entertainment in economic regeneration. There has been no research on the contribution live entertainment might make to the economic well being of the resort. Might it be possible to devise a live entertainment economic multiplier model? Experience with economic impact and multiplier studies within tourism research are not encouraging inasmuch as they often fail to measure social, cultural and environmental impacts (Local Government Association, 2001 p11), but could economic impacts (for live entertainment) be measured? It is important to understand the effect of any reduction or withdrawal of subsidies/investments. What would be the likely economic consequences of a lesser cultural offer? How are these consequences to be assessed, including possible effects such as a changed image that might lead to less tourists, or more retiree's re-locating to the seaside? If the level of subsidy were *raised*, how should this be linked to defined, improved image, and perhaps, consequential economic benefits, but also an improved social and cultural experience? Theoretical positive benefits of live entertainment to the local social, cultural and community situation have been suggested but, as with economic effects, there are no stated agreed outcomes that can clearly justify expenditure on live entertainment. 'There is a need for a programme of systematic research into 'best practice' which goes beyond small scale, largely anecdotal evaluations and seeks to identify more precisely the nature of processes that underpin successful initiatives' (Local Government Association, 2001 pvii). This (best practice) statement actually concerns the role of the arts in regeneration but can be applied to seaside live entertainment and the link between such activities and wider social, cultural and economic factors, as well as regeneration and destination image. Research work on specific outcomes for the arts (Moriarty, 1998) but particularly Matarasso (1997 p12) has shown how much of the data is 'indicative rather than definitive', offering 'guidance, rather than precise measures'.

Money for live entertainment needs to be justified. '(this) subsidy is not 'something for nothing'. We want to see measurable outcomes for the investment which is being made. From now on, there will be real partnership with obligations and responsibilities' (DCMS, 1998b). 'There is need to move beyond theoretical assumptions about the outcomes of the arts...to maximise impacts and to inform the planning and management of projects...a clear need for the identification of robust and valid performance indicators' (Local Government Association, 2001 p37). Although this study has informed the debate, the relationships, partnerships, obligations and responsibilities, in relation to continued financial support, have not been fully established or comprehensively explored. The study has, however, provided a basis for a deeper investigation of the relationship between funding, policy and outcomes concerning live entertainment at English seaside resorts. This would ideally be achieved by in-depth case study comparisons of local government actions at resorts which had attempted strategic planning of their cultural provision and had clearly identified a role for live entertainment, linked to the image of the destination, and those that had not. It would be useful if some of these locations were recognised as providing 'best practice' for their cultural provision. It might be most useful if the case study resort(s) were medium-size, as these appear to be the most vulnerable. These 'ideal' cases have not necessarily been identified in this study.

In fact, this study has clearly shown how live entertainment is regarded as a 'given' and thus its potential significance is not clearly understood. But this is likely to be because its influence within the cultural offer, and, in turn, the potential importance of the *total* cultural offer at English seaside locations (related to destination marketing), is implied and presumed, rather than fully understood. Future research must include the identification, and classification i.e. importance of live entertainment, as a discrete factor in the cultural offer. Clearly some tourists to the

seaside are 'low' culture live entertainment tourists but their potential is not understood. Clarity of particular market segments, as identified in local government planning, is the key to a meaningful local cultural policy that delivers economic as well as social and cultural benefits, and identifies the potential significance of aspects of the cultural offer within destination marketing (Murphy et al, 2000; Buhalis, 2000; Bennett 1999). Such research would identify the role of cultural tourism, generally, (Hughes, 2000; Urry, 2002) but including 'low' culture, specifically at the seaside, as discussed in this study via the work of Hughes and Benn (particularly, 1995, 1997, 1998a), and Hayler, (1999).

There is no question that live entertainment continues to be an integral part of the seaside experience for tourists, visitors, residents and businesses. The importance of live entertainment in the cultural offer varies from location to location, largely dependent upon the priority attached to it by local policy makers. This priority reflects their view of the influence of live entertainment in the projected and perceived image of the resort. This 'one-dimensional' view from the practitioners has been a limitation of the applicability and practicality of this study. However, the research possibilities suggested above can build on this study by focussing on the policy makers but also comparing their views and beliefs with other key stakeholders, including consumers. This can be achieved within a research brief that would seek to identify, for live entertainment at the seaside, the link between subsidy of live entertainment and the economic, social and cultural consequences of particular cultural offer(s) at particular seaside locations. This would inform a necessary on-going debate about the role for live entertainment at English seaside resorts during a period of considerable change.

APPENDIX A1

Details of the resorts, and theatres in the study, 2000/01

Pages 336 – 342

Details of the resorts, and theatres in the study, 2000/01**Bournemouth**

Bournemouth Borough Council

Population: 153,000

Political composition: C 26; LAB 6; LD 19; IND 6.

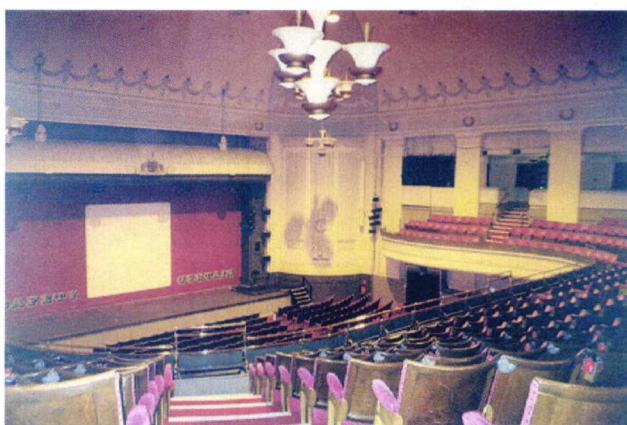
Theatres: 4, Council owned and managed. The Bournemouth International Centre (BIC); The Winter Gardens; The Pavilion Theatre; The Pier Theatre.

Theatre seats: (Total) 5,955

The destination: 'Internationally renowned for being one of Europe's most fashionable resorts, Bournemouth attracts millions of visitors of all ages and nationalities each year. Seven miles of golden sand, vibrant nightlife, first-class attractions, beautiful gardens and summer festivals promise something for everyone. Whilst embracing its increasingly popular image as the 'next coolest city on the planet' (Harpers and Queen), Bournemouth continues to guarantee the diversity and excellent value that have given it its reputation as Britain's Best Resort' (BRA, 2001).

Theatre in this study: The Bournemouth Pavilion Theatre

Built in 1929 the Bournemouth Pavilion has 1512 seats. Originally built as a Concert Hall to house the Municipal Symphony Orchestra, the Pavilion was converted to a theatre in 1932-34 with the addition of a stage and a fly tower. The fly tower was further raised in the 1950s. There is a ballroom as well as a theatre within the complex. The Pavilion is located adjacent to the famous, and well-maintained Lower Gardens, within 50 metres of the seafront. To the uneducated eye the building is in reasonable exterior and interior repair - but the exterior suffers from its close proximity to the



sea. The Pavilion retains a 'standing balcony' (no longer used) which gives a feeling of space at the rear of the auditorium. There are problems of flying but most large touring productions can be accommodated. 'The current condition of the Pavilion is poor and in need of major refurbishment. A minimal refurbishment programme has been implemented to the Pavilion

ballroom. This has emphasised the urgent need for refurbishment elsewhere' (Bournemouth Borough Council, BIC/Pavilion Three-Year Business Plan, 2001 p26).

The current situation at the Pavilion Theatre, Bournemouth, is a theatre/building more suited to a previous age, in need of major refurbishment.

Eastbourne

Eastbourne Borough Council

Population: 80,000

Political Composition: LD 16; C 14.

Theatres: 3, Council owned and managed – The Congress Theatre; The Devonshire Park Theatre; The Winter Gardens. 1 Council owned, privately managed – The Hippodrome.

Theatre seats (Total): 4,368

The destination: 'Elegant Eastbourne, on the Sussex coast, boasts five miles of beaches sheltered by the Sussex Downs, a great setting for a wide range of sports, activities, and quality events. Water sports, sailing, golf, rambling, horse riding, gliding and hang-gliding are all on offer. Highlights include the award-winning modern Sovereign Harbour, unique cliff-backed sandy beach Falling Sands with red and white striped Beachy Head lighthouse, and the South Downs Way, ideal for ramblers. Heritage and culture are well provided for with a variety of historic homes and castles close by, four theatres to choose from and you can visit local vineyards to sample some of the best of English wines' (BRA, 2001).

Theatre in this study: The Congress Theatre



Built in 1963 mainly as a conference venue, the 1689 seater Congress Theatre is one of the best remaining examples of cantilever construction i.e. no pillars to obstruct sight lines. It is a characteristic 'resort' architecture of the time, 'architects wanted to create a new 'truth to materials' approach using the starkness of glass and concrete' (Invite Everyone, Eastbourne Borough Council,

2002 p25). The Congress Theatre is a listed building, protected by the twentieth century society.

Not particularly designed as a theatre, most large touring shows can nevertheless be accommodated, with a high fly tower and good size orchestra pit.

The current situation is a theatre that provides excellent acoustic and reasonably good quality surroundings, with excellent



sightlines, located close to the main accommodation, yet only 100 metres from the seafront.

Hunstanton

King's Lynn and West Norfolk Borough Council

Population: Borough: 133,500. Hunstanton; 4,500

Political composition: LAB 27; CON 26; LD 5; IND 1; O 1,

Theatres: 2, Council owned and managed – the King's Lynn Corn Exchange/Arts Centre; the Princess Theatre, Hunstanton. 1, council owned, privately managed – the Pier Pavilion, Cromer.

Theatre seats: (Total) 1,645

The destination: (Norfolk) 'A large County situated on the east coast of England. Its low rainfall makes Norfolk one of the driest parts of the country. It is also one of England's most historic counties, with magnificent castles, historic houses and 700 medieval churches nesting in gently rolling countryside alongside small market towns and villages. The 90 mile coastline, much of it designated as an Area of Outstanding Beauty, runs from the Wash in the west, past the striped cliffs of Hunstanton and salt marshes of North Norfolk, to the cliffs of Cromer and Sheringham. It then descends to touch the broads at Horsey and continues on to Great Yarmouth. The coast, and much of inland Norfolk, offers endless opportunities for walkers, cyclists and birdwatchers who come to enjoy some of the best nature reserves in the Country. The resorts of Great Yarmouth, Cromer, Sheringham and Hunstanton offer all you would expect from the English seaside holiday, golden beaches, fun fairs, and even an End of the Pier show!' (BRA, 2001).

Theatre in this study:

The Princess Theatre

The Princess Theatre was originally the Capitol Cinema (1932), then a bingo hall, before the Borough Council purchased it, derelict, in 1981. It was re-named the Princess Theatre in honour of Diana, Princess of Wales, following her marriage to Prince Charles in that same year. The original building is noted for its Norfolk Carrstone construction.



The Borough Council re-built the theatre and has continued to invest in the Princess Theatre. Since 1996 the council have spent approximately £600,000. This money has provided new seats, new toilets, an auditorium calling system, and a new entrance area that incorporates a café/bar. In particular, after the Christmas pantomime 2000/01, the Princess was '...temporarily closed, for

further improvements. The seating in the auditorium has been replaced and raked to improve sightlines from all areas of the theatre, and improve access for disabled people. Carpets have also been replaced throughout and paintwork restored' (Kings Lynn and West Norfolk Borough Council Marketing Strategy, 2001 p4).

The current situation is a small, well-maintained local theatre – the Princess Theatre Members are an active body of 380, who support the venue in various ways.

Margate

Thanet District Council

Population: District: 126,557. Margate: 52,000

Political composition: LAB 33; C 18; IND 3.

Theatres: 1, Council owned and managed (as an Independent Provident Society) – the Winter Gardens, Margate; 1, Private Trust – the Theatre Royal, Margate; 1, Private Trust - Tom Thumb Theatre.

Theatre seats: (Total) 2,953

The destination: 'Situated in the sunny South East, three of the most famous resorts in the Kingdom are found along this coastline – Margate, Broadstairs and Ramsgate – each with its own distinct character. Inland, all the charm of rural England can be found in the ancient villages, rambling country lanes and oak-beamed pubs. Blessed with above average sunshine, 26 miles of golden sandy beaches, Thanet offers visitors a unique combination of leisure attractions' (BRA, 2001).

Theatre in this study: The Winter Gardens, Margate 'Built in 1911, the Winter Gardens is a fine example of Edwardian architecture which has retained its charm and intimate atmosphere whilst contrasting with the new stark concrete an brick edifices now being built around the Thanet resorts' (Winter Gardens Information Guide, Thanet Leisure Force Limited, 2001).



The Winter Gardens has a seating capacity of 1420 but often utilises only approximately 1200 seats due to poor sight lines and poor quality upholstery on a number of seats. The Winter Gardens is run as an Independent Provident Society (IPS). Thanet District Council provide an operating subsidy via Thanet Leisure Force Limited. The Winter Gardens total revenue is approximately one third live entertainment, two thirds catering operations.



The current situation is a theatre that has been allowed to deteriorate over many years and is in need of major refurbishment. There are covenants restricting external alterations.

Scarborough

Scarborough Borough Council

Population: Borough: 108,155. Scarborough: 43,080

Political composition: C 17; IND 16; LAB 11; LD 5.

Theatres: 2, Council owned and managed – the Spa Theatre; the Spa Grand Hall; 1, council owned, privately managed – the Futurist Theatre; 1, Private Trust – the Stephen Joseph Theatre.

Theatre seats: (Total) 4,353

The destination: 'The Borough's 45 mile coastline is set against the backdrop of the North York Moors National Park and offers three top resorts, each with its own character and charm. Scarborough was Britain's first resort. Its North and South bays are very beautiful, as are its gardens which, along with the castle, overlook the harbour. Ancient Whitby, where the cliff-top Abbey dominates the quaint fishing port, made its way into the history books as the place where Captain James Cook set sail. Filey is an unspoilt haven in a busy world, a family resort that has changed little since its development in the mid-19th century' (BRA, 2001).

Theatre in this study:

The Spa Theatre

The Spa Theatre (585 seats) is part of the Spa Complex, which also contains the larger Spa Grand Hall (theatre). Built in the second half of the nineteenth century, the Spa Complex was refurbished in the 1980s to provide Scarborough with a major conference complex, including the two theatres. According to the Entertainments Best Value Review



Group, the Spa Theatre is 'A traditional 'end of the pier' Victorian Theatre' (Scarborough Borough Council, 2001 p5).

The current situation is a theatre in need of significant investment, currently best suited to traditional Variety.

Skegness

East Lindsey District Council

Population: 124,168 Skegness: 17,000

Political composition: O 36; LAB 9; LD 8; C 7.

Theatres: 1, Council owned and managed.

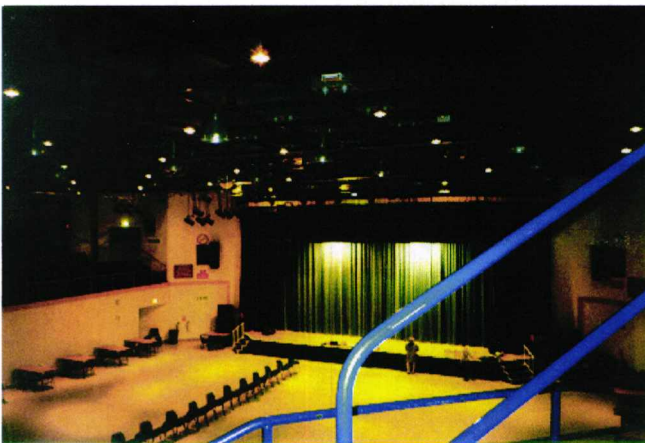
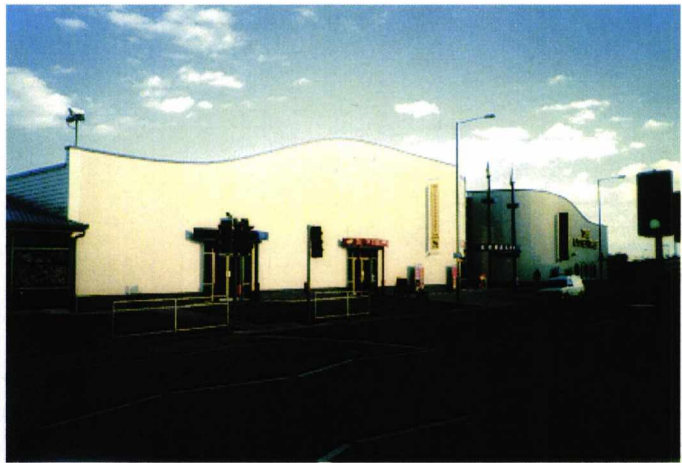
Theatre seats: 1,168

The destination: 'The Lincolnshire coastline, stretching from Skegness along to Mablethorpe, is home to some of the finest seaside resorts in the UK. The most famous must be Skegness, renowned as one of the UK's top seaside destinations and famous for the Jolly Fisherman. Our resorts have something for everyone: sun, fun, excitement and laughs, as well as tranquility, peaceful pleasure, clean beaches and glorious fresh air. All our resorts are famous for the warmth of their welcome, outstanding value, friendly service and excellent choice of accommodation, both serviced and self-catering' (BRA, 2001).

Theatre in this study:

The Embassy Centre

The Embassy Centre was formerly the Embassy Theatre (built in 1956) and was converted to a flexible-space venue in 1983. The Embassy Centre was designed as a conference centre, so there is no flying and no orchestra pit. Maximum seating is 1,168 but the stalls seating is easily removed to allow 2000 standing. Cabaret seating is sometimes installed, reducing



the capacity but improving the intimacy of the functional interior.

The current situation is a modern, clean, functional multi-purpose venue lacking some of the atmosphere and facilities of a traditional theatre. This situation is enhanced by the recent addition of a concrete 'skim' around the exterior (see photograph).

Weston-super-Mare

North Somerset Council

Population: 180,000 Weston-super-Mare: 80,000

Political composition: C 32; LAB 13; LD 11; IND 3; GRN 1; R 1.

Theatres: 2, Council owned and managed – The Playhouse; The Winter Gardens.

Theatre seats: 1,058

The destination: 'North Somerset stretches from the edge of Bristol in the north to the River Axe and the Mendip Hills in the south. Scattered across North Somerset are three coastal towns – Weston-super-Mare, one of the largest seaside resorts in the West Country; Clevedon, a charming Victorian seaside town; and Portishead, a coastal town with stunning views across the River Severn...Weston-super-Mare has two sandy beaches, at Weston and Sand Bay, two miles long. Weston has been awarded the Tidy Britain Group's Seaside Award in 2000 for the sixth consecutive year' (BRA, 2001).

Theatre in this study:

The Playhouse Theatre

'The Playhouse was developed on the present site in 1946. The original building was destroyed by fire in 1967 and the present building opened in 1969...the combined perception of The Playhouse seems to be reasonably favourable...(but) The Playhouse needed modernising' (Market Analysis Report, North Somerset Council, 2000 p29). The Playhouse has 664 seats and



is situated away from the seafront but close to the main shopping area.



The current situation is of a rather 'tired' building – both internally and externally.

Sources:

British Resorts Fact Pack, BRA, 2001

Hayler, 1999

Municipal Yearbook, LGA, 2000/01

Photographs - summer of 2001

APPENDIX A2

Statistics from the British Resorts Association Benchmarking Exercise 2000/01 by Total, then by Quarter by Venue

Pages 343 – 372

NOTE: APPENDIX A2 is confidential, industry-sensitive information and is provided as a separate document. It gives categories of live entertainment provided and basic Performance Indicator's (each Quarter, for each theatre for 2000/01), along with composite Benchmark Performance Indicators of all the theatres in the study.

APPENDIX A2

Statistics from the British Resorts Association Benchmarking exercise 2000/01 by Total, then by Quarter by Venue

	Page No.
1. Accumulative Performance Indicator's (all 7 theatres) 2000/01	344
2. Bournemouth Pavilion Theatre operating statistics 2000/01	
a) Quarterly Analysis, April/May/June	345
b) Quarterly Analysis, July/August/September	346
c) Quarterly Analysis, October/November/December	347
d) Quarterly Analysis, January/February/March	348
3. Eastbourne Congress Theatre operating statistics 2000/01	
a) Quarterly Analysis, April/May/June	349
b) Quarterly Analysis, July/August/September	350
c) Quarterly Analysis, October/November/December	351
d) Quarterly Analysis, January/February/March	352
4. Hunstanton Princess Theatre operating statistics 2000/01	
a) Quarterly Analysis, April/May/June	353
b) Quarterly Analysis, July/August/September	354
c) Quarterly Analysis, October/November/December	355
d) Quarterly Analysis, January/February/March	356
5. Margate Winter Gardens operating statistics 2000/01	
a) Quarterly Analysis, April/May/June	357
b) Quarterly Analysis, July/August/September	358
c) Quarterly Analysis, October/November/December	359
d) Quarterly Analysis, January/February/March	360
6. Scarborough Spa Theatre operating statistics 2000/01	
a) Quarterly Analysis, April/May/June	361
b) Quarterly Analysis, July/August/September	362
c) Quarterly Analysis, October/November/December	363
d) Quarterly Analysis, January/February/March	364
7. Skegness Embassy Centre operating statistics 2000/01	
a) Quarterly Analysis, April/May/June	365
b) Quarterly Analysis, July/August/September	366
c) Quarterly Analysis, October/November/December	367
d) Quarterly Analysis, January/February/March	368
8. Weston-super-Mare Playhouse Theatre operating statistics 2000/01	
a) Quarterly Analysis, April/May/June	369
b) Quarterly Analysis, July/August/September	370
c) Quarterly Analysis, October/November/December	371
d) Quarterly Analysis, January/February/March	372

APPENDIX B

**Nine preliminary interviews 1998/1999 with some key issues
and sample quotes**

Pages 373 – 375

APPENDIX B

Nine preliminary interviews 1998/9 with some key issues and sample quotes

During the early stages of the literature review, the views were sought from acquaintances in the live entertainment industry. The initial, unstructured interview with 'Mr Southport', Phil King, and the Director of the British Resorts Association, Peter Hampson, provided a broad historical and recent background and the general outline for further interviews. However, the interviews remained largely unstructured and developed according to prompts by the researcher. The purpose was to gain a general 'feel' for recent developments in the industry, as very little had been written about the changes happening to seaside live entertainment during the late 1990's.

All the interviews were recorded and then transcribed, verbatim. A method of extracting common points was adopted. The interviews were very helpful in informing the literature review although very few quotes are utilised, as the primary research for the study is the more substantial in-depth work at seven selected resorts. However, of particular note is the interview with Mr Sam Shrouder, the Chief Executive of Apollo Leisure – the main private sector provider of live entertainment interested in taking on council-owned seaside theatres. The interviewees were:

05/03/98 – Phil King, Chief Tourism Attractions Officer, Southport, and Peter Hampson, Director of the British Resorts Association.

22/04/98 – Ron Cussons, Director of Tourism and Community Services, Eastbourne.

07/05/98 – Chris Wolfe, General Manager, the Winter Gardens, Margate.

14/05/98 – Mike Marsh, Head of Leisure Services, Hastings.

14/05/98 – Peter Bedford, (retired) ex Head of Entertainments, Eastbourne, and chairman of the English Tourist Board's Working Party on live entertainment at English seaside resorts, 'Curtain Up' (ETB, 1984).

21/05/98 – Peter Miller, Head of Tourism and Leisure, Thanet District Council.

16/10/98 – Tony Osmanski, Assistant Director in Planning and Leisure, Suffolk Coastal District Council.

04/12/98 – Peter Bailey, Theatres Manager, Worthing Theatres.

27/05/99 – Sam Shrouder, Chief Executive, Apollo Leisure (UK)

The 1998 interviewees noted problems of supply. Products in demand were difficult to get at the right place and time. Discouragingly, there was over-supply of artistes, acts and shows that were not sufficiently popular to sell well at the box office. The traditional system of the venue managers putting together their own show(s) had virtually disappeared – shows came in readymade. This was partly a consequence of a lack of a 'training ground' for new talent – young talent would have once worked their way up the bill on the variety circuit, but this no longer existed. On the demand side it was felt many of the seaside theatres were too large to be run economically

i.e. the demand for the (generally) available product will be much less than the capacity. However, it was felt people will always pay for perceived quality e.g. 'big-time' productions or the known stars of the day.

Audiences were changing: *"A new breed of audience, not necessarily conversant with theatre etiquette. Audiences have changed. People are rowdy in shops, planes, street corners and we have to deal with that sort of person"* (CW, 07/05/98).

It was clear that most programmers in council-run venues operated independently, relying on their own industry knowledge, expertise and contacts. The industry was 'incestuous' – people dealt with people they knew and trusted and information on deals was closely guarded. Industry practitioners believed a 'feel' for the industry / audience was more important than attempts at, for example, analysing people's stated preferences. Noticeably, the private sector respondent (the Chief Executive of Apollo Leisure) was more prepared to take a risk / try a show. The 'caution' and 'risk' approach of respectively, the public and the private operator (identified as 'SS', below), are partially illustrated by the following quotes:

"When negotiating a deal you've got to have a figure in mind as to what it will do, otherwise budgets will be out...I think a venue manager like myself and colleagues around the country in resorts know a lot more about what will / will not work in our venue by getting to know the audiences" (PB, 03/12/98).

"Things go wrong, of course they go wrong. We've had plenty of failures. Still got to be a feel. When a show fails, it set out with everybody believing that it was going to work, otherwise people wouldn't have done it. And there's nothing else to go on. It has to be a feel for what's right and what's wrong" (SS, 28/05/99).

SH – Do you see the private sector getting bigger, bolder, taking over aspects of the public sector?

SS- *"As financial restraints become more and more on local authorities, then they are looking more and more for alternatives...no doubt that Apollo as a company will continue to take on more theatres from local authorities to run them on their behalf."*

SH – Which ones attract you? Do you put out a general call and say we might be interested in running this?

SS – *"No, we target local authorities that have theatres that we believe would fit into our portfolio. That's a very wide range of theatres but basically we wouldn't want to take a theatre much less than 600 seats – from then on upwards, we're in the game"*.

SH – See certain resorts as much more interesting?

SS – *"There are resorts that are more interesting. What we're involved in is a certain degree of opportunism. We would talk to any resort...obviously, if somebody said you can have Blackpool, Bournemouth etc we'd all be very pleased and feel that that's important. Whatever – we've got Torquay, Scarborough, Southport – then we go down to second division resorts like Felixstowe and Folkestone. They all can be made to work for us, in their own, different way."*

Respondents felt local authorities would wish to retain control, partly in order to 'oversee' the quality of life in the resort, although there had been moves to open local authority venues up to competition. The private sector would 'cherry pick'.

"If they expect entertainment and they go on to use it there is a clear role for the private sector. If they expect and don't use it, clear role for the public sector, to provide the service, like a bus company" (PH,05/03/98).

According to the respondents, hoteliers demanded that the local authorities should continue to provide live entertainment. In some cases, a lot of the entertainment was aimed at the residents, in others it was very much geared towards a distinct tourist season. Respondents were generally optimistic that live entertainment would continue at seaside resorts but certain resorts (the large ones – Blackpool, Bournemouth etc.) had a greater chance of continuing to provide live entertainment. The seasonal aspect of live entertainment was discussed and it was generally noted that, whilst the summer season business becomes 'softer', the same theatres were doing better out of season.

APPENDIX C

Main issues/themes emerging from the literature review

Pages 376 – 379

Main issues/themes emerging from the literature review

MAIN ISSUE – The changing economic status and fortunes of seaside resorts (including issues of image and character of resorts and any consequent effects on the tourist decision-making process)

- Tourists – total demand, trends (more short-breaks, specialised holidays), shifts in composition, numbers, types, socio-economic groupings, demographics – national and local. Seasonality, 'shoulder months'.
- Tourist behaviour and attitudes: The 'post-tourist'- individuality, definitions of 'good-taste'. Values, beliefs, identities - resorts less valued within British culture. Influence of the 'service' classes.
- Tourist attractions – the ordinary and the extraordinary, heritage (built environment), 'tacky'. Features/uniqueness of resort
- (Lack of) distinctiveness.
- Issues of image
- Seaside resorts – comparisons, rivalries.
- Resort life-cycle – expanding, stagnating, declining. Facilities that might help arrest decline e.g. wet weather.
- Accommodation – hotels and boarding houses
- Rejuvenation strategies, including role of business and residents
- Transport/transport links.
- Size of resort to range of entertainment services, resorts as 'sites of consumption' – for residents and tourists, civic pride. Competition from inland centres of consumption etc. Developments. Local industry/commerce = cultural change (as also with a high proportion of residents to tourists), resident's demographics.
- 'Tomorrow's Tourism' document/regeneration and consequent political and social framework
- Live entertainment (a) As part of offer/'mosaic'/part of promotion/image (b) In the tourist decision-making process.
- **Themes:**
- **Tourist location preference**
- **Importance of tourism to infrastructure/ provision**
- **Live entertainment: tourist**

MAIN ISSUE – Changing cultural trends and attitudes, including the influence of such changes relating to performing arts/live entertainment of the 'seaside variety' and changes within the live entertainment industry

- Definitions, live entertainment within leisure.
- Cultural trends affecting live entertainment/live entertainment of the 'seaside variety'.
- The 'elitist' versus 'light' arts debate – understanding and position of live entertainment in this.
- Economic effect of live entertainment – facts, monitoring of attendances at live entertainment.
- Live entertainment in attracting visitors.

- Position/understanding of festivals, amateur etc.
- Cinema?
- Seaside resort or Town by the Sea? Residents
- (Local) cultural policy history (general)
- Cultural activities in the tourist product, including arts-related – ‘arts-core’ and ‘arts peripheral’
- Audience behaviour, changes in type and style
- **Themes:**
- **Culture and tourist location preference i.e. demand-side**
- **Importance of tourism to cultural provision**
- **Effect of culture on potential audience**
- **Role of live entertainment**

Sub-issue: Industry structure and methods

- Data gathering and industry comparisons – BRA Benchmarking
- Industry consolidation and private sector involvement.
- Rise and influence of corporate media and entertainment companies
- Hotel competition
- Negotiating methods/deals – with agents and producing management’s
- Negotiating Management Contracts (also under CCT and BV)
- Forecasting and budgeting
- ‘Gut reaction’/‘failures’
- Ownership and control
- Revenue other than box office
- Price of tickets
- Criticisms of local authority management (from ‘Curtain Up’).
- Promotion is the main method of ‘marketing’ (but see also under technology)
- ILAM/IEAM (‘professionalism’)
- **Themes:**
- **Industry changes**
- **Restrictions/scope for decision making**
- **Influence of local authorities**

Sub-issue: Supply-side issues

- The product - lack of talent
- Rise of producing management’s
- Trends – variety, musicals, one-nighter’s, touring productions, repertory etc.
- Entertainment programmes (‘close examination’)
- Seasonality/shoulder months/ Pantomime
- **Themes:**
- **Restrictions/scope for decision making**

Sub-issue: The effect of technology

- Investment – venues, box office (especially for marketing)
- Size of venue, flexibility, lighting, sound, virtual reality
- Competition for the entertainment pound
- Audience behaviour, changes in type/style
- Local authority responsibility – licensing etc.
- All-weather facilities/flexible space/social uses

- **Themes:**
- **Restrictions/scope for decision making**

MAIN ISSUE – The changing nature of central government policy relating to tourism and seaside resorts and changing attitudes and organisation of local government at seaside resorts, particularly related to cultural activities, including live entertainment

Sub-issue: Ideology/philosophy/practice

- Role of Tourism Planning: justify leisure provision in rejuvenation
- Influence of DCMS including LCS
- Government policy –restrictions/flexibility/funding. Conservative, then New Labour.
- LGA initiatives/influence/policy/'lead'
- Freedom for movement (legal framework, statutory issues)
- Tourism and cultural heritage, spend on *all* leisure activities
- Comparison with national/seaside averages (trends)
- Surveys carried out
- Arts Audits
- Arts/Cultural policy, cultural activity
- Arts/Lottery funding (and that part of it to do with live entertainment)
- Lottery – a substitute for arts development funding?
- Ownership and Control
- CCT history and private sector involvement (Management Contracts)
- BV preparation
- LCS (preparation for)
- What may private sector *not* be prepared to pay for?
- Local Government role in delivering a local identity
- Culture/live entertainment and local government – suited?
- Social inclusion
- **Themes:**
- **Restrictions/flexibility of government policy**
- **Central (but some) local, government attitude to cultural activities**
- **Role and (economic) importance of cultural activities**

Sub-issue: Structure and key staff

- (Local) political framework – Counties and Districts (division of responsibility)
- Processes and relationships for delivering cultural policy (ETC/RCC/RDA)
- Joint Boards, Joint Committees, Add-on Agencies, Central government departments
- Internal linkages and committee system
- (Level of Arts Strategy) Clear strategic framework?
- CEO and Leader of the Council/Council structure
- Director/Chief Officer (Tourism/Leisure/Cultural activities)
- Committee chairman/Portfolio Holder
- Officers – titles and roles
- Arts/Cultural activities (Arts Officer/Arts Development Officer)
- Theatre Management
- Down-grading' of live entertainment/Rise of Arts/Culture?
- Management Information Systems/Accountability

- Break-even/Box-office profit? Fixed Costs covered?
- Residents consulting/forums
- Box office
- Promotional/publicity
- Liaison with regional bodies
- Professionalism of staff (ILAM/IEAM)
- **Themes:**
- **Place and importance of tourism**
- **Role and importance of cultural activities/live entertainment (structures)**
- **Role and importance of cultural activities/live entertainment (councillors and staff)**
- **Growing significance of cultural activities (live entertainment?)**

APPENDIX D

Details of interviewees, with explanations as to which
Questions they did *not* get asked

Pages 380 – 383

APPENDIX D

Details of interviewees, with explanations as to which Questions they did *not* get asked

(Four page explanatory letter and booking form setting up the interviews are not included in this Appendix).

PRIMARY RESEARCH – INTERVIEWS DURING THE SPRING/SUMMER 2001

Informed-source in-depth interviews (45-60 minutes) at 7 seaside resorts, with up to 5 individuals, including:

(Officers)

- (D) Director level e.g. Director of Leisure and Tourism
- (H) Head of Division e.g. Head of Entertainments and Events/Head of Cultural Services
- (O) Operational level e.g. Theatre Manager

Note: To include the individual primarily responsible for programming.

(Members)

- (M) Member. The member chairing the committee (or holding the cabinet post) with overall responsibility for live entertainment, or a member who might reasonably deputise for the chair (for interview purposes), or a member with special responsibility for live entertainment.

Before any responses were requested, the following details/explanations were carried out:

RESORT:

VENUE(S):

DATE:

INTERVIEWEE and POSITION of INTERVIEWEE:

EXPLAIN - *Three Key Factors for investigation.*

EXPLAIN – *Tourist is someone staying in the resort – short (1-3 days) or long (4+)*

EXPLAIN – *Not long for each question!*

The interviewees – chronologically by resort and then by the order in which interviewed

BOURNEMOUTH - interviews 24/04/01

(Order in which interviewed)

Key:

BD = Kevin Sheehan, Director Bournemouth International Centre (BIC)

BM(1) = Cllr Pamela Harris, Chairman of BIC /Pavilion Management Committee

BM(2) = Cllr Michael Filer, Vice-Chairman of BIC/Pavilion Management Committee

BH = Rob Zuradzki, Head of Entertainments and Events

BO = Mike Cooper, Theatre Manager, Pavilion and Pier

EASTBOURNE - interviews 16/05/01

(Order in which interviewed)

Key:

ED = Ron Cussons, Director of Tourism, Leisure and Amenities

EO = Chris Jordan, General Manager, Performing Arts

EM = Barbara Goodall, Spokesperson for Tourism, Leisure and Amenities

EH = Janet Mein, Head of Arts and Heritage

MARGATE - interviews 21/05/01 and 07/06/01

(Order in which interviewed)

Key:

MO(1) = Steve Davis, Operations Manager, Winter Gardens (Hospitality)

MO(2) = Lynda Davis, Box Office and Marketing Manager, Winter Gardens

MD = Peter Hooker, Managing Director, Thanet Leisure Force

MH = Peter Miller, Head of Tourism and Leisure, Thanet District Council

MM = Iris Johnstone, Portfolio Holder, Tourism and Leisure

HUNSTANTON – interviews 04/07/01

(Order in which interviewed)

Key:

Note: Meant to be also talking to John Barratt (Head of Leisure and Tourism) but John was leaving King's Lynn and West Norfolk. Howard Barnes (also leaving!) suggested he could 'double-up' for John.

(Order in which interviewed)

HH = Howard Barnes, General Manager, Arts and Entertainment

HM = Douglas Benefer, Portfolio Holder for Culture, King's Lynn and West Norfolk Council

WESTON-SUPER-MARE – interviews 17/07/01 and 18/07/01

(Order in which interviewed)

Key:

WH – Vivienne Thomson, Tourism and Entertainments Manager

WD – Francis Mangan, Assistant Director, Marketing and Leisure (Operations)

WM – Councillor Elphan Ap Rees, Chairman of Marketing and Leisure Committee.

Since May 2001, Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Leisure and Marketing, Woodspring District Council (incorporating Weston-super-Mare)

WO – Andy Jeffrey, Programme and Marketing Manager, Playhouse, Weston.

SCARBOROUGH – interviews 21/08/01 and 22/08/01

(Order in which interviewed)

Key:

- SO - Kevin Barrand – Resorts and Entertainments Officer
- SM – David Jeffels – Cabinet Member, Tourism and Leisure Services
- SD – Peter Dahl - Director of Tourism and Leisure Services
- SH – Steve Hollingworth – Head of Leisure and Operational Services

SKEGNESS – interviews 10/09/01 and 11/09/01

(Order in which interviewed)

Key:

- SkM – Jess Lord – Chairman of the Economic Policy Forum_(Note:Tourism is included in this Forum, where policy is decided on re Planning, Tourism, and Economic Development, which are then implemented by the Executive Board)
- SkH – Bob Suich – Head of Tourism, Arts and Public Relations
- SkO – Anne Stocks – Coastal Manager, ELDC (assists with programming)

Justification of selection of supplementary Questions (see Appendix E for actual Questions asked):

1. Each interviewee at each resort will receive the same quantitative data prior to the interview AND the same introductory remarks from the interviewer.
2. Each interviewee is asked to comment on each of the 3 Key Factor's (KF's) in the same sequence. Not all respondents will have the information/knowledge/willingness to answer issues related to the three distinct (but inter-related) KF's. However, this research seeks to establish the changing nature of live entertainment. This changes according to a number of interrelated factors, not least of which are the actions taken by the key individuals being interviewed. Therefore, informed sources need to be aware of the significance of their position and are asked to respond to each of the three key influencing areas by commenting, as a minimum, on ALL of the Broad Questions (point 3, below).
Additionally, where it is assumed the respondent is either 'expert' or 'very knowledgeable'* there will be specialist, Supplementary Questions (compulsorily asked to respondents in these categories if such questions are not adequately covered in response to a Broad Question).

*Anticipated knowledge and understanding:

CODE:

- Expert: XXXX
- Very knowledgeable: XXX
- Knowledgeable: XX
- Some understanding: X

	<u>M(Member)</u>	<u>D(Director)</u>	<u>H(Head)</u>	<u>O(Operational)</u>
KF1	XXX	XXXX	XX	XX
FK2	XX	XXX	XXX	XXX
KF3	XXX	XXXX	XXX	XX

3. Given the nature and purpose of semi-structured interviews matters explored may change from one interview to the next (and one location to the next) but broad and specialist questions devised for each KF (and *italicised* on the

interview form) will remain consistent and be covered in every case – but see point 5 below.

4. Notwithstanding point 3 above (the need to cover each KF) but consistent with the first point in it (matters explored may change –see points 5 and 6, below) there will be scope to explore different aspects of the themes/broad/specialist questions e.g. with general probes such as “What did you mean by that? or Could you explain that?” or, with specific probes e.g. “Can you explain the reasons why this resort is no longer putting on a summer variety show?”
5. It is recognised that emergent issues (either from the broad themes, specialist questions or ‘probes’) may depend upon the order in which participants are interviewed *at each resort AND the order in which the resorts are visited*. Where it is judged that this iterative process is ‘exposing’ further *essential* questions, these will be incorporated (coded) into subsequent interviews. Thus each (taped) set of interviews at each resort will be scrutinised before the next resort is visited.
6. The general themes for investigation of each KF are given below. These are then translated into broad questions. Lists of further specialist questions related to each KF/Broad Question(s) support these broad questions. (As noted, specialist questions are only compulsorily asked of those respondents in the XXXX and XXX categories). Additionally, general (and subject-specific) ‘probes’ will be used if the interviewee appears to require more detail/explanation BUT probes are not prescriptive – it may be that the interviewee has nothing more to say in response to a ‘broad/specialist question’. (Broad themes, specialist questions and (specific) probes are only such matters/points as have been written about in chapters one to three – particularly chap 3. Note: These chapters were informed by the preliminary interviews held in 1998/9). Additionally, as noted in point 5 above, further essential broad/specialist questions may be incorporated and of course, there will be the opportunity in every interview for the respondent to comment freely.
7. There is some inherent conflict in this interview process. On the one hand a truly phenomenological approach would be unstructured and the Q would not be prepared beforehand. However, secondary research has established that the 3 KFC’s do apply (albeit differently) at each resort. Certain basic issues must therefore be covered in each case, with each respondent (see also point 2, above). Hence, the broad questions, but also the probes (detail) and the opportunities to comment freely.
8. The ‘results’ of the interviews - chaps 5, 6 and 7 are the *effects* of the changes being explored. Broad/specialist questions will emphasise this – the *recent history* and the *current situation* need to be discussed...but this leads to questions (in the interviews) on the *changes* taking place that are influencing the provision of live entertainment. ‘Changes’ is a word deliberately incorporated in broad and specialist questions, but also to be utilised in probe questions e.g. (KF1/Broad Question 1) “(How) has this changed during the last decade?”

The ‘levels’ of questioning are:

1. Broad Questions (for all).
2. Specialist Questions (compulsory for XXXX and XXX, unless already covered in response to Broad Questions).
3. General (subject-specific) questions, also useful as probes.
4. General probe questions...“Could you explain that?”and free-response questions...“Anything further you would like to add, etc.?”

APPENDIX E

The interview questions

Pages 384 – 389

The interview Questions

KEY FACTOR ONE

General theme: The changing economic status and fortunes of seaside resorts (including issues of image and character of resorts and any consequent effects on the tourist decision-making process).

BROAD QUESTIONS:

1. How optimistic are you that (English) seaside resorts can maintain/sustain tourism as a significant part of their economy?
2. What is the economic well being of this resort attributable to? Tourism? Business? Residents? Has this changed in recent years? How?
3. Do you feel the resort is expanding, stagnating, declining?
4. How far is any economic influence attributable to image and character? How might image and character affect the tourist decision-making process?
5. During the last decade, how has the resort attempted to protect/develop/regenerate their economies (including infrastructure) and market themselves?
6. To what extent will the resort continue to rely on tourism for its economic well being?
7. How influential is the live entertainment provided in affecting perceived image and character, and the consequent economic well being? How important is live entertainment in the tourist decision-making process?

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS:

KEY FACTOR ONE

(Linked to) Q2 (M, D, H) Does the resort have specialist product(s) or an image that it is known for e.g. heritage, self-catering, or a particular hotel chain? (from 1998 interviews...suggested as necessary for survival etc.) Where does the built fabric represented by the theatres fit into this?

(Linked to) Q5 (M, D) What specific investment has been directed at the tourist e.g. wet-weather facilities, car parking? In an ideal world, what additional tourist-related facilities would you like to see in the resort?

(Linked to) Q5 (M, D/H) Which resorts do you regard yourself as being in direct competition with? Why?

(Linked to) Q6 (M, D, H) Do you have a core market of tourists? Who are they? (from 1998 interviews, when comment were made about the elderly, low-income, low-spending core).

(Linked to) Q7 (M, D, H) How important is live entertainment in attracting visitors? If the level/amount of live entertainment was increased, what effect would this have on visitors? (Note: This Q ties in with H&B 1994 survey, Q11) How significant is live

entertainment as a tourist resource? (Note: The first part of this Q ties in with H&B 1994 survey, Q3. The last (third) part is Q3 from the H&B Blackpool survey).

(Linked to) Q7 (M, D, H, O) If the tourist product is a 'mosaic' of various factors – accomodation, the seafront, cultural and leisure activities etc, *once a tourist is staying in the resort* either for a short stay (1-3 nights) or a long stay holiday (4+) how important is live entertainment to them, compared to other aspects of the total product?

(Linked to Q7) (M, D, H) How far do you market live entertainment as a part of the holiday product? (Note: This Q was included in the H&B Blackpool survey) Further note – p123-125 of 'Ent in tourism: a study of visitors to Blackpool' gives lots of ideas as to how to tie this all together i.e. importance of live ent – to tourism/tourist etc.

QUESTIONS FROM MINUTES/REPORTS ETC.

KEY FACTOR TWO

General theme: Changing cultural trends and attitudes, including the influence of such changes relating to performing arts/live entertainment of the 'seaside variety' and changes within the live entertainment industry.

BROAD QUESTIONS:

1. What changes do you see in cultural trends and attitudes that may affect the performing arts at the seaside/live entertainment of the 'seaside variety' in the 1990's and at the beginning of the 21st century?
2. Generally, how important is live entertainment to the economic, social and cultural life of the resort? How much live entertainment is aimed at the residents? The tourists? The day visitor? People within a reasonable travelling distance?
3. During the last decade, what notable changes have occurred in the live entertainment provided at the resort? Why?

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS:

KEY FACTOR TWO

(Linked to) Q1 (O) During the last decade, what changes have you noticed in the composition of audiences, their attitudes to various types of live entertainment (including 'high culture'), their etiquette, protocol, behaviour?

(Linked to) Q1 (M, D/H, O) What is the future for traditional seaside variety? (New supplementary) What is modern variety? What is a modern variety show?

(Linked to) Q2 (O) Who are your core target markets (for live entertainment?) (Note: An assumption (from 1998 preliminary i/veys) that it's old, low-income)

(Linked to) Q2 (O) Which theatre(s) are you in direct competition with?

(Linked to) Q2 (D/H, O) How might the live entertainment programme differ according to the needs of residents/tourists/day-visitors/people within a reasonable travelling distance? How might the live entertainment on offer be influenced by any issues of seasonality?

(Linked to) Q2 (M, D/H, O) Should the level/amount of live entertainment be increased/decreased, stay about the same? (Note: This Q ties in with H&B 1994 survey, Q10)

(Linked to) Q2 (M, D, H, O) With reference to the *types* of live entertainment provided (as detailed on the monthly analysis sheets) how satisfied are you with the eventual programme mix?

(Linked to) Q3 (O) With regard to booking acts during the last decade i.e. getting the right product (at the right time), what key changes have you noticed? What type(s) of live entertainment is available/provided? Why? With regard to getting the right product, how do you see things developing in the future? (Note: The second Q ties in with H&B 1994 survey, Q2)

(Linked to) Q3 (O) With reference to the monthly and quarterly analysis sheets for 2000/2001, what have been the main programming issues? The successes? The failures? The surprises?

(Linked to) Q3 (O) With reference to the *deals* on the monthly analysis sheets 2000/2001, (linked to net contribution) please explain the policy and issues surrounding deals at your venue. Has this changed in the last decade? Do you see it changing in the future?

(Linked to) Q3 (D,H,O) How important is hotel, pub/club and in-house live entertainment? To the town? In influencing/affecting what is put on at the council's venues – have changed tastes increased the importance of forms of entertainment in non-traditional (theatre) venues? (Note: This Q ties in with H&B 1994 survey, Q9. The last part of the Q is directly related to p123 of the Blackpool (1997a) article)

QUESTIONS FROM MINUTES/REPORTS ETC:

KEY FACTOR THREE

General theme: The changing nature of central government policy relating to tourism and seaside resorts and changing attitudes and organisation of local government at seaside resorts, particularly related to cultural activities, including live entertainment.

BROAD QUESTIONS:

1. What influence does central government exert on (the resort's) policies towards tourism and general economic well being? What have been the major New Labour initiatives that have affected the resort's (tourism) objectives and strategies, either positively or negatively? How does this compare with the initiatives of previous governments?
2. With regard to tourism in general, but seaside resorts in particular, could you describe the active links to central government, perhaps through various agencies. Which of these directly affect local government decision-making? How?
3. With regard to cultural activities, could you discuss the active links to other (government and non-governmental) agencies?
4. Could you discuss any recent changes to your local government structure, the structure as it currently stands and operates, and how such a structure may affect the provision of cultural services, including live entertainment. Could you comment on the ideology/philosophy that underpins such changes?
5. What initiatives are in place to deliver an appropriate Local Cultural Strategy? Where does live entertainment fit into this?
6. Broadly, what is the future for live entertainment in the resort and what changes can you foresee regarding the likely future involvement of the council in providing live entertainment?

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS:

KEY FACTOR THREE

(Linked to) Q3 (M, D/H) How far does the/can the local authority take the strategic lead in such relationships?

(Linked to) Q4 (M, D, H, O) Where does live entertainment fit in the hierarchy of the local government structure? How might such changes (in local government structure) affect members/councillors ability to scrutinise and challenge decisions related to cultural services, including live entertainment?

(Linked to) Q4 (M, D, H, O) How might such changes affect the provision and programming of live entertainment in the resort?

(Linked to) Q5 (M, D, H, O) Can you describe the relationships between interested groups and people (members, officers, the public) that might facilitate an appropriate LCS?

(Linked to) Q6 (M, D, H) With reference to live entertainment, how has the resort reacted to demands for increased operational efficiency and entrepreneurial activity?

(Linked to) Q6 (O) Professionally speaking (with regard to management skills required of theatre managers these days), how have demands for increased operational efficiency affected you?

(Linked to) Q6 (M, D, H, O) With reference to Best Value and Benchmarking, and specifically to the quarterly benchmark figures how do you feel the live entertainment venue(s) in the resort is performing? Please comment on ALL columns and include a comment on the *size* of the venue(s). Too large? Too small? About right? NOTE: This Q is asked regardless of the progress of BV i.e. some resorts are not BV'ing cultural activities until Year 4.

(Linked to) Q6 (M, D/H) With specific reference to the monthly and quarterly analysis sheets for 2000/2001, how far is the council prepared to tolerate/continue with types of entertainment that give negative, or very low net contribution?

(Linked to Q6) (M, D/H) At what point would the negative economy of a theatre (subsidy) lead to the closure of the venue? (Note: This Q was asked by H&B in their Blackpool survey)

(Linked to Q6) (M, D/H) Please comment on how likely it is that the council will become involved in some arrangement whereby there is some commercial/private company involvement in the running/programming of the resort's theatre(s)? Please comment on any (current or future) non-council funding arrangements.

QUESTIONS FROM MINUTES/REPORTS ETC:

BROAD Q FOR ALL (M, D, H, O): DO YOU HAVE ANY FURTHER COMMENTS YOU WOULD LIKE TO MAKE?

APPENDIX F

Common categories and concepts that represent the qualitative data

F (i)	Area of analysis One	Pages 390 – 396
F (ii)	Area of analysis Two	Pages 397 – 401
F (iii)	Area of analysis Three	Pages 402 – 407

APPENDIX F (i)

Common categories and concepts that represent the qualitative data

General theme: The changing economic status and fortunes of seaside resorts including issues of image and character of resorts and any consequent effects on the tourist decision-making process, including the significance of live entertainment.

Q1 How optimistic are you that (English) seaside resorts can maintain/sustain tourism as a significant part of their economy?

<u>Resort</u>	<u>Category</u>	<u>Concepts/'Bits'</u>	<u>Mentioned, but more closely related to...</u>
Bournemouth	Quality	Quality must be high	KF2 Q3
	Length of holiday	Hotel high prices Overseas competition Weather Travel to resort	(booking shows/ent in hotels)
	Niche market	Conference/Youth	
Eastbourne	Investment	Resort fabric worn out	
		Council attitude to tourism	
	Niche market	Conference/Regional centre for the arts	
Margate	Length of holiday		KF1 Q6 (core market)
	Quality	Poor hotels/need to up-grade	
	Investment	Council attitude to tourism	
		Slow to change	
Hunstanton	Niche market	Bird watching and lavender fields	
Weston	Length of holiday	One/two weeks down, short-breaks, week-end up	
	Niche market	(Promotion) Specialist holiday Guide	
	Investment		
Scarborough	Length of holiday	Converting to day visitors, week-ends	
	Investment	Council, with partners Regeneration Improve accommodation	
	Quality/Niche market	Natural product, natural environment, timeless quality – headlands and beaches Conferences, Festivals, Caravans	
Skegness	Investment	Council role	

Q2 What is the economic well-being of this resort attributable to? Tourism? Business? Residents? Has this changed in recent years? How?

(Linked to) Q2 (M,D,H) Does the resort have specialist product(s) or an image that it is known for e.g. heritage, self-catering, or a particular hotel chain? Where does the built fabric represented by the theatres fit into this?

<u>Resort</u>	<u>Category</u>	<u>Concepts/'Bits'</u>	<u>Mentioned but more closely related to</u>
Bournemouth	Tourism	Seasonal	KF1 Q7 (scale of ent)
	Residents		KF3 Q6 (cost to council) KF1 Q1 (patterns of hol-making)
	Business	Financial sector, Chase Manhattan Conferences	
Eastbourne	Tourism	Quality, scenery, surroundings, scenery, safe, cleanliness (USP is theatres)	KF2
	Image	Elderly	
Margate	Tourism	Bring in art and culture, and casinos Day trippers Worth £114m	
	Image	Butlin's, old, lack of big hotels	
	Business	Three Business Parks	
Hunstanton	Tourism	Day trippers, clean, family environment	
Weston	Tourism	Day trippers	KF1 Q1 (patterns of hol making)
	Residents	Retired's Commuting to Bristol	
	Business	Financial	
	Image	Poor hotels, lack big name, cheaper end	
	Hotel Operator	Vertical integration	
Scarborough	Mixed economy	Middle size	
	Tourism	No specialist product but culture, heritage, short-breaks 'Knock on benefit' Future is business tourism	KF1 Q7 (theatre as an attraction)
	Residents		
	Business		KF1 Q6 (core mkt)
	Image	Victorian resort, strict planning regulations	
Skegness	Tourism	Only 17,000 residents, has to be tourism	
	Private	Butlin's and caravan 'knock-on', big private investment Lack of small investors	
	Image	Cheap, cheerful family fun, Jolly Fisherman	
	Residents		

Q3 Do you feel the resort is expanding, stagnating, declining?

<u>Resort</u>	<u>Category</u>	<u>Concepts/'Bits'</u>	<u>Mentioned but more closely related to</u>
Bournemouth	Expanding	Conferences doing well	KF1 Q1 (niche mkt & qual issue)
	Declining/Not contracting		
Eastbourne	Expanding x 2	Sovereign Harbour	
Margate	Declining, about the same	Industrial side up	
	Improving		KF1 Q1 (short breaks, 2 nd hols)
	Last year the lowest	Worst weather	
Hunstanton	Expanding (in a small way)	Investment, £1m, day trippers up	
Weston	Declining	Needs quality	KF1 Q1 (qual)
	Stagnating		
Scarborough	Standstill	Tourism dependent on development	KF1 Q1 (niche culture & heritage)
	Decline	Go up-market	
Skegness	Just above stagnation	Large hotels into multiple occupancy Regeneration	KF1 Q5 (investment)
	Maintaining/holding own	Investing	

Q4 How might image and character affect the tourist decision-making process?

<u>Resort</u>	<u>Category</u>	<u>Concepts/'Bits'</u>	<u>Mentioned but more closely related to</u>
Bournemouth	Quality		
	Image – Young people		
Eastbourne	Quality	5* Hotel investment	
	Image	Retired's, older	
Margate	Image	Traditional resort, cheap, hotel investment	KF1 Q5 (arts/tourism tied into regen)
Hunstanton			KF1 Q7 (o/all pack)
Weston	Image	Blackpool of the West, 'Kiss me quick'	
	Image importance	Businesss	
Scarborough	Image	Key to young families	KF1 Q5 (2 diff mkts aimed at-trad hol & c/side)
Skegness	Image	Cheap, doesn't cost much, working classes, value for money. Family fun	

Q5 During the last decade, how has the resort attempted to protect/develop/regenerate their economies (including infrastructure) and market themselves?

(Linked to) Q5 (M, D) What specific investment has been directed at the tourist e.g. wet-weather facilities, car parking? In an ideal world, what additional tourist-related facilities would you like to see in the resort?

(Linked to) Q5 (M, D/H) Which resorts do you regard yourself as being in direct competition with? Why?

<u>Resort</u>	<u>Category</u>	<u>Concepts/'Bits'</u>	<u>Mentioned but more closely related to</u>
Bournemouth	Council involvement (investment)	Conferences (direction) Bed spaces (too many) New build, Airport Financial and insurance businesses	KF1 Q7 (importance of live ents)
	Competition	Blackpool (conf) Overseas	
	Quality		
Eastbourne	Council involvement (investment) + p/ships	Private sector Tennis tournament Youth, students, casino town (?)	
	Competition	Torquay, Bournemouth, Scarborough, not Blackpool	
	Quality		
	Promotion	"Good life just got better"	
Margate	Council involvement (investment)	Sports centre, Turner centre, Industrial Parks. Coach parks. Develop sites – sports projects.	KF1 Q4 (image)
	Competition	G Yarmouth, Folkestone, Hastings	
	Wet weather	Theme Park, something for young. Towards arts/heritage	KF3 Q3
	Promotion		
Hunstanton –	Council involvement (investment) p/ship	Tourist Forum, free coach parking. Dev of sea front, putting green	KF1 Q7 (theatre keeps people for eve)
	Promotion	Leisure Card. Family, but not 'flashing lights'	
	Competition	Skegness	
Weston	Council involvement (investment)	Sealife Centre, Sovereign Centre, W Gdns	
	Wet weather	Plans – swimming pool on seafront. Funfair at Knightstone ls.	
	Competition	Torbay, Weymouth, overseas	KF1 Q6 (core mkt)
	Go up-market	Casinos, hotels	
	Promotion	Families and older generation...lacks facilities	
Scarborough	Council involvement (investment) p/ship	Yorkshire Forward, RDA, St Nicholas Gardens. Locked into Government priorities. Tackle key derelict sites. Council as catalyst – co-ordinator, not got capital. Maintenance rather than investment	KF3 Q2
	Competition	G Yar Bridlington	
	Wet weather	Umbrella dev. Zenith dev. Indoor swimming/leisure.	
	Promotion	Can't impact on tourism, can, possibly re conferences. Promo in Europe, Short breaks.	KF1 Q6 KF3 Q7 (theatre for res & vis)
Skegness	Council involvement (investment) p/ship	Access/egress roads. Euro money. Dev site(s). Tower Gardens, Embassy Centre. Keep railway	
	Promotion	Conference market	
	Wet weather	Theme Park, Good fairground, available site	
	Competition	Scarborough, Blackpool, G Yar	

6 To what extent will the resort continue to rely on tourism for its economic well being?

Linked to Q6 (M, D, H) Do you have a core market of tourists? Who are they? (from 1998 interviews, when comment were made about the elderly, low-income, low-spending core).

<u>Resort</u>	<u>Category</u>	<u>Concepts/'Bits'</u>	<u>Mentioned but more closely related to</u>
Bournemouth	Importance of tourism	Significant part of the economy	
	Core markets	Senior citizens. Early and late season. Conferences. Widely spread.	
Eastbourne	Importance of tourism	Also industry and residents	
	Core markets	(Overall, quality) 55+, sporting theme	
Margate	Importance of tourism	(Less, but £114m)	
	Core markets	'Dying off', older, C1's	
Hunstanton	Importance of tourism	No industry	
	Core markets	East Midlands, fairly mixed. Middle income. Day trippers (lack of hotels)	
Weston	Importance of tourism	Residents important. Tourism all year round	KF1 Q5 (imp of hotels)
	Core markets	Retired's, coach, day visits, short breaks	
Scarborough	Importance of tourism	Little else, T is the lifeblood. (T) v great extent. Whole purpose of resort built on T. Zenith Project.	
	Core markets	Shoulder months are coach, 60+. Season is families. Proposed, conference – investment and up-market, culture, c/side, want high-spending.	KF3 Q5 (supp) Wet weather fac but wouldn't sig change custs
Skegness	Importance of tourism	Always rely on T, too far for manufacturing. Nothing else here to support the local economy.	
	Core markets	Midlands, ex-miners, families. Working classes.	

Q7 How influential is the live entertainment provided in affecting perceived image and character, and the consequent economic well-being? How important is live entertainment in the tourist decision-making process?

(Linked to) Q (M,D,H,O) If the tourist product is a 'mosaic' of various factors – accommodation, the seafront, cultural and leisure activities etc., *once a tourist is staying in the resort* either for a short stay (1-3 nights) or a long stay holiday (4+) how important is live entertainment to them, compared to other aspects of the product?

(Linked to) Q7 (M, D, H) How important is live entertainment in attracting visitors? If the level/amount of live entertainment was increased, what effect would this have on visitors? (Note: This Q ties in with H&B 1994 survey, Q11) How significant is live entertainment as a tourist resource? (Note: The first part of this Q ties in with H&B 1994 survey, Q3. The last (third) part is Q3 from the H&B Blackpool survey).

(Linked to) Q7 (M, D, H) How far do you market live entertainment as a part of the holiday product? (Note: This Q was included in the H&B Blackpool survey) Further note – p123-125 of 'Ent in tourism: a study of visitors to Blackpool' gives lots of ideas as to how to tie this all together i.e. importance of live ent – to tourism/tourist etc.

<u>Resort</u>	<u>Category</u>	<u>Concepts/'Bits'</u>	<u>Mentioned but more closely related to</u>
Bournemouth	Tourist product/mosaic	Fairly important, in top six points	KF1 Q2 (conf)
	Quality	Right product	
	TDMP	No, sand and weather. Riverdance, quality.	KF2 Q3
	Level/amount	No ent., might think twice. No effect on visitors, not enormous.	
	Market LE	B'mouth Guide. Summer brochure. Not adver. enough.	
Eastbourne	Tourist product/mosaic	Used to be the main, now part of, imp. component.	Lack of available prod in time
	Quality	Quality resort	KF2 Q3
	TDMP	Come/may come because of LE.	
	Level/amount	No effect. Too much product in winter.	
	Tourist resource	People won't choose because of LE, but expect it. Pretty important. Work with theatres as part of tourism offer.	
Margate	Market LE	Not enough.	
	Tourist product/mosaic	Mistake to shift away from T. LE is added bonus, accom first. Part of the package, a factor. V imp, especially the older visitor. 4 out of 10. Keep summer show	
	TDMP	Doubtful. Could be. Very much, if right product.	
	Level/amount	Could affect, if packaged; Butlin's	
	Market LE	80% attendee's from Kent and Sussex. Ltd with forward booking.	
Hunstanton	Perceived image	Says a lot- LE can project image	
	Tourist product/mosaic	Less sig. than used to be. Sig for B&B	
	TDMP	Should be sig. Contributory factor. Is an attraction.	
	Level/amount	Can't increase in summer. Maybe increase pantomime.	
	Market LE	Be more aggressive. Week-ends.	KF3 Q6 (USA example)
Weston	Tourist product/mosaic	Not that important. Important for short-stay. Sits very highly.	
	TDMP	Yes, advance bookings, in Holiday Guide. V imp. theatre hand-in-hand with destination.	
	Level/amount	Niche, could increase. Generally, no.	
	Market LE	Advance bookings from Holiday Guide. Package LE with Arts Festivals/Carnivals. Do more, total package.	
	Tourist product/mosaic	Reasonably imp. Plan night around affordable LE. Depends on weather.	
Scarborough	TDMP	Gone through with BV – 6%, but £50m. People expect LE. Once was important. Holiday was based on LE, now just all part of the holiday.	
	Level/amount	More quality, less quantity.	

	Perceived image	Yes, especially the Spa	
	Market LE	TIC/Holiday Guide. Not high profile.	
Skegness	Tourist product/mosaic	V much – Skegness is known for its LE. People expect it. Gives balance. Absolutely crucial – Skegness and Blackpool. Crucial part of the package.	
	TDMP	Vital, people come because of LE	
	Level/amount	Maybe increase in Winter, otherwise, no.	
	Perceived image	Crucial to the image, traditional end-of-the pier.	
	Market LE	80,000 Skegness Guides. Part of the key 6 Or 8 things.	
	Tourist resource	Vital to economics/tourism, but as part of T, not culture, even though may not go to theatre at home.	

APPENDIX F(ii)

Area of Analysis Two

General theme: Changing cultural trends and attitudes, including the influence of such changes relating to performing arts and live entertainment of the 'seaside variety' and changes within the live entertainment industry.

Q1 What changes do you see in cultural trends and attitudes that may affect the performing arts at the seaside/live entertainment of the 'seaside variety' in the 1990's and at the beginning of the 21st century?

(Linked to) Q1 (O) During the last decade, what changes have you noticed in the composition of audiences, their attitudes to various types of live entertainment (including 'high culture'), their etiquette, protocol, behaviour?

(Linked to) Q1 (M, D/H, O) What is the future for traditional seaside variety? (New supplementary) What is modern variety? What is a modern variety show?

<u>Resort</u>	<u>Category</u>	<u>Concepts/'Bits'</u>	<u>Mentioned but more closely related to</u>
Bournemouth	Cultural change	Theatre (rep) has changed. Influence of TV. Impresarios taken over. Audience etiquette. West End expectation. Dirty comics/yob culture.	
	Quality	Lack of names/product.	
	Variety	Not evolved. Cycle of LE/TV	
Eastbourne	Cultural change	Changing prog. (BV) New public/young people. Audience changes. 52 week culture.	(BV) KF3 Q5/6
	Quality	Re-package e.g. Panto. Atmosphere of LE. Name over content.	
	Variety	Gone, new mixed programming. Re-define Variety, on cruise ships. Arts and ent very different. Seaside ent very tacky.	
Margate	Cultural change	Audience expect more, lower dress code. Canterbury does culture.	
	Quality (Lack of product)	Balanced programme, names, West End values. Targeting <30 & 55+). Apollo monopolistic.	
	Variety	Summer shows 8/9 acts. Future good, not locals. Want brash and naughty.	
	(Improvements / condition of theatre)		KF3 Q6
Hunstanton	Cultural change	Audience less reverent/dress. Supporting T with theatre. A holiday culture. Social inclusion.	KF2 Q3 KF3 Q5
	Quality	Value for money. Not names but high production values. Family themes.	
	Variety	People look for (family) summer show. Varied package. New Variety is comedy and docusoaps. Value for money. Themed shows.	

Weston	Cultural change	Art's for the snobs. Influence of TV/the familiar. Theatre more accessible. Holiday <u>is</u> culture. Cultural barrier – theatre only for middle classes. Audience don't know how to behave – mobile 'phones etc.	
	Quality	Association with big names/the familiar, trust.	
	Variety	Not a bit of everything, but mixed programme.	
Scarborough	Cultural change	Stephen Joseph, but dress down. Orchestral concerts. 2+ hours doesn't work, add value. Fewer people visit live ent. Drugs, older people worried. Comp for LE, need wow factor, shorter attention.	
	Quality (total Product)	Changed names. Add value – food, drinks.	
	Variety	Will put on Variety next year. Re-thought many times. Variety is various shows in a programme. Limited future. Modern Variety is theme.	KF2 Q3
Skegness	Cultural change	Rep/Opera struggles here. TV, but LE still going – unique experience.	
	Quality	Lack of quality. Technology changes. Right product is too expensive.	
	Variety	Need names. Still a future. Modern, maybe more humour.	KF3 Q6

Q2 Generally, how important is live entertainment to the economic, social and cultural life of the resort? How much live entertainment is aimed at the residents? The tourists? The day visitor? People within a reasonable travelling distance?

(Linked to) Q2 (O) Who are your core target markets (for live entertainment?) (Note: An assumption (from 1998 preliminary i/views) that it's old, low-income)

(Linked to) Q2 (O) Which theatre(s) are you in direct competition with?

(Linked to) Q2 (D/H, O) How might the live entertainment programme differ according to the needs of residents/tourists/day-visitors/people within a reasonable travelling distance? How might the live entertainment on offer be influenced by any issues of seasonality?

(Linked to) Q2 (M, D/H, O) Should the level/amount of live entertainment be increased/decreased, stay about the same? (Note: This Q ties in with H&B 1994 survey, Q10)

(Linked to) Q2 (M, D, H, O) With reference to the *types* of live entertainment provided (as detailed on the monthly analysis sheets) how satisfied are you with the eventual programme mix?

<u>Resort</u>	<u>Category</u>	<u>Concepts/'Bits'</u>	<u>Mentioned but more closely related to</u>
Bournemouth	Importance LE	V imp to locals, as leisure T, as wide cultural mix. Educates people but ballet/opera not well attended. Not a cultural council. Culture is imp – no live theatre would hurt economy of town. Pavilion too big for local. Hoteliers would complain. Aimed (50/50) residents, was 80% tourists. Everything for everybody, v imp to educate public to come.	Too many seats KF3 Q6

	Increase LE?	Programme mix. Can't get quality. Too many venues/seats.	KF3 Q6 (4 points)
	Council self-producing		KF2 Q3 (4 points)
Eastbourne	Importance LE	Vital, keeps hotels viable. Aimed at residents, and summer visitors. Core market(s) but develop others. Forget resorts, broader cultural offering to the area.	
	Increase LE?	Residents say increase. Decrease, but higher quality. Decrease, but if covering costs better to be open than dark.	(BV) says too many seats KF3 Q6
	Product	Same stuff	
Margate	Importance LE	Ent for East Kent, the only summer show for holiday-makers. Seasonality – summer 50% of take. V imp got to keep theatre, social gathering, and children. Aimed at children, pensioners, tourists (Then, 70/75% residents). Comp is the armchair. Commercial enterprise for benefit of community. Reasonable travelling distance, C1's.	
	Increase LE?	Up since TLF, audiences up. Quality increased (big names). Absolutely increased.	(Mix) KF2 Q3
	Product	Lack of. TV influence – younger comedians not touring. Agents control. Venue – size, location, a problem.	(Deals) KF2 Q3 (Promotion)
Hunstanton	Importance LE	60% residents, vital to social fabric of town. Seasonality, but depends on product. Summer season attracts people. Part of tourism package. Travelling distance.	KF1 Q7 (Prog mix) KF2 Q3
	Increase LE?	About right.	
	Product	Small resort can't take large touring product. V clear about programming.	
Weston	Importance LE	Summer, for the tourist. Off-season for residents. To lots of different public. Social and cultural, If LE disappeared, people would notice.	
	Increase LE?	About right, perhaps more da time. Mix about right (including Opera). No increase unless correct quality.	
Scarborough	Importance LE	For residents, reasonable travelling distance. Cultural: end-of-the pier differs. Vast scope – cultural, amateur, social life. Live ent as social good, but economics. Targeting diff markets. Economic benefit to the town. Part of holiday packages e.g. in hotels.	
	Increase LE?	Stay the same. or decrease, more quality.	
	Product	Scarcity, vary product. Clash with Apollo (Futurist). Familiarity with product, then OK.	
Skegness	Importance LE	Crucial to tourism, economics. Culturally, no to tourists, yes to residents – very imp to (local) quality of life. But culture/arts conjure up negative view. Creating jobs. Programme mix – locals/residents and visitors. NOT culture/arts if it doesn't work. Need a local centre, social.	
	Increase LE?	About right. Increase? Prepare the case. Culture hard to book. Book any decent show that comes along.	
	Product	Lack of	

Q3 During the last decade, what notable changes have occurred in the live entertainment provided at the resort? Why?

(Linked to) Q3 (O) With regard to booking acts during the last decade i.e. getting the right product (at the right time), what key changes have you noticed? What type(s) of live entertainment is available/provided? Why? With regard to getting the right product, how do you see things developing in the future? (Note: The second Q ties in with H&B 1994 survey, Q2)

(Linked to) Q3 (O) With reference to the monthly and quarterly analysis sheets for 2000/2001, what have been the main programming issues? The successes? The failures? The surprises?

(Linked to) Q3 (O) With reference to the *deals* on the monthly analysis sheets 2000/2001, (linked to net contribution) please explain the policy and issues surrounding deals at your venue. Has this changed in the last decade? Do you see it changing in the future?

(Linked to) Q3 (D,H,O) How important is hotel, pub/club and in-house live entertainment? To the town? In influencing/affecting what is put on at the council's venues – have changed tastes increased the importance of forms of entertainment in non-traditional (theatre) venues? (Note: This Q ties in with H&B 1994 survey, Q9. The last part of the Q is directly related to p123 of the Blackpool (1997a) article)

<u>Resort</u>	<u>Category</u>	<u>Concepts/'Bits'</u>	<u>Mentioned but more closely related to</u>
Bournemouth	Booking acts	Ballet/Opera difficult. Fees too high., don't like FC. Freedom to deal.	
	Future LE	Goes in cycles. Need Musicals.	
	Hotels	Work with, to promote.	
Eastbourne	Booking acts	Deals, no g'tees, no risk. Product led/Apollo problem. Not bound by quota. Quality always comes first – quality, word gets out. Lack of good Drama. Failing in children's/family. Freedom to deal.	
	Future LE	Mix – some make money, some B/E. Each year audiences going down. Nurture own talent. Needs venue for youngsters. New Cultural Centre. Pop concert pays for Cahmber Orchestra. Own/self-producing, links to AC. 52 week agenda. Apollo problem.	KF3 Q6 KF3 Q6
	Hotels	Work with, very close to H Assoc – get balance, 2 nights out at the theatre.	
Margate	Booking acts	Children's growth area. Problem getting product (Apollo). Can't get young comedians. TV – acts don't want to tour. Theatres need to push promotion. Confidence if FC, G'tee, but freedom to deal, although deals changed. (Story of Levellers at Lees Cliff, controlled by Apollo).	KF3 Q6
	Future LE	IPS set-up. Local resistance to proposed closure. Merchandising issue. Children's straight into 15,000 seater.	
	Hotels	Work with, important to seaside resorts. Pubs good for small numbers.	
	Experience of LE	Compared too much to TV. People no idea what they want. Social agenda.	KF3 Q6 (IPS can provide – investment + social)
Hunstanton	Booking acts	Acts not available/problem of Apollo. Needs an industry forum. Production values the key. No council policy on deals. Good Ballet + G'tee	KF3 Q6

	Future LE	No investment in the industry. Needs investment. Stigma – Do both % and G'tee's. Summer season now makes £. Venue managers lethargy.	
	Hotels	Huge direct competition. Working with caravan sites.	
Weston	Booking acts	Needs F/T programmer. Lack of product. Cruise ships take the good acts. Freedom to deal. Programmers/agents are crooks. Diff to get balanced programme. FC/% shared risk.	
	Future LE	Used to be ¾ night show, now one-nighters. Benchmarking important. Need Children's.	
	Hotels	Threat but partnerships.	
Scarborough	Booking acts	More promoters but few fully produced shows. Deals diff, if a single buyer. LA's not producing own shows. G'tee's down. Apollo, work together. Promotion is the key.	
	Future LE	LE could thrive but needs resorts to work together, someone to harness. Council from £450,000 to £100,000.	KF3 Q6
	Hotels	Can't get promotional material in.	
Skegness	Booking acts	LE is dying. Lack of product. Cruise ships got product. LE linked to TV. Size of theatre – 1100 too small.	
	Future LE	Bigger names will always win. Ent on cruise ships. Local Gov to be a catalyst for the private sector.	KF3 Q6
	Hotels	They're expected to have something. Butlin's absolutely crucial, part of the T product. Pub/club is a diff audience.	

Area of Analysis Three

General theme: The changing nature of central government policy relating to tourism, seaside resorts and cultural activities and changing attitudes and organisation of local government at seaside resorts, particularly related to cultural activities, including live entertainment.

Q1 What influence does central government exert on (the resort's) policies towards tourism and general economic well being? What have been the major New Labour initiatives that have affected the resort's (tourism) objectives and strategies, either positively or negatively? How does this compare with the initiatives of previous governments?

Q2 With regard to tourism in general, but seaside resorts in particular, could you describe the active links to central government, perhaps through various agencies. Which of these directly affect local government decision-making? How?

NOTE: Questions 1 and 2 provided very brief answers. They are combined for ease of analysis.

<u>Resort</u>	<u>Category</u>	<u>Concepts/'Bits'</u>	<u>Mentioned but more closely related to...</u>
Bournemouth	Central Government	Bail out losers, nothing for Bournemouth	
Eastbourne	Central Government	SEEDA, ETB, LGA (tourism section)	
Margate	Central Government	Now recognises tourism, foot and mouth. Nothing on arts. DCMS, Tourism Board, SE Arts, SEEDA. Arts as part of regeneration.	
Hunstanton	Central Government	Not done anything. BRA	
Weston	Central Government	No diff, maybe a recognition of importance of tourism. No money, but more talk. RDA.	
Scarborough	Central Government	New Labour no difference, bit more interest. Links with Tourism Forum. Social deprivation. BRA, ETC, RDA (but weak links with tourism), Yorkshire Forward, (Europe) SRB. 'Middle government – EMDA, regional players.	KF3 Q2
Skegness	Central Government	Regeneration-type issues. Socially based. East Midlands Development Agency – 5b funding.	

Q3 With regard to cultural activities, could you discuss the active links to other (government and non-governmental) agencies?

(Linked to) Q3 (M, D/H) How far does the/can the local authority take the strategic lead in such relationships?

<u>Resort</u>	<u>Category</u>	<u>Concepts/'Bits'</u>	<u>Mentioned but more closely related to...</u>
Bournemouth	Gov Agencies	Southern Arts, ACE, Lottery. Not in Central, not in SW = 0	
Eastbourne	Gov Agencies	SE Arts, SE T Board, RCC. Nothing coming back. Not for the commercial theatre. Culture up the Agenda. RCC v broad brush.	
	Strategic lead	Yes, ought to (could do). Heading up Arts and Culture.	
Margate	Gov Agencies	Via Arts Dev Officer, £300,000 (Lottery) linked to deprivation. Arts Council grant. SE Arts – arts in regeneration.	
Hunstanton	Gov Agencies	Regional Arts Boards don't help resort entertainment, but should.	
	Strategic lead	Within regeneration, an economic effect.	
Weston	Gov Agencies	SW Arts. SW Museums Council. RCC – no.	
	Strategic lead	Local area, yes	
Scarborough	Gov Agencies	Yorkshire Arts. (Developing) RC strategy. BV, but no money. Not rep on Cultural Consortium except through Y Arts.	

Q4 Could you discuss any recent changes to your local government structure, the structure as it currently stands and operates, and how such a structure may affect the provision of cultural services, including live entertainment. Could you comment on the ideology/philosophy that underpins such changes?

(Linked to) Q4 (M, D, H, O) Where does live entertainment fit in the hierarchy of the local government structure? How might such changes (in local government structure) affect members/councillors ability to scrutinise and challenge decisions related to cultural services, including live entertainment?

(Linked to) Q4 (M, D, H, O) How might such changes affect the provision and programming of live entertainment in the resort?

<u>Resort</u>	<u>Category</u>	<u>Concepts/'Bits'</u>	<u>Mentioned but more closely related to...</u>
Bournemouth	Position of LE in Council	Higher, if produced results	
	Style/philosophy/structure of LG affecting LE	One c'tee supervises the theatre.	
	Cultural services	Not promoted by this Council	
	Freedom to deal		
Eastbourne	Position of LE in Council	Non-statutory, low-profile, Cinderella. High under Cabinet system – T, Leisure and Amenities.	
	Style/philosophy/structure of LG affecting LE		
	Cultural services	Modern m'ment, Director doesn't need spcific training. Jewel in the Crown. Balance with commercial.	

	Freedom to deal	Empower professionals. Strategic view, not hands-on.	
Margate	Position of LE in Council	Was much higher, Councillors much more involved. Linked to DSO/CCT, catering. History – not in T and L Directorate.	
	Style/philosophy/structure of LG affecting LE	IPS formed to save Vat, and relief from rates. Cabinet, quick decision. Surpluses up to £500,000, grant not reduced. W Gdns not targeted in savings round. Cabinet and Scrutiny C'tee,	
	Cultural services		
	Freedom to deal	Told few G'tee's, missed some ent. Few years ago very closely monitored, now free (IPS). B Plan to TDC every year. Make sure theatres run by people who know the business.	
Hunstanton	Position of LE in Council	Strategically, re-position to have an impact. Subsidy is good value.	
	Style/philosophy/structure of LG affecting LE	Into Regeneration Directorate. Doesn't need politicians.	
	Cultural services	Doesn't need politicians.	
	Freedom to deal	Members could scrutinise but m'ment free to deal.	
Weston	Position of LE in Council		
	Style/philosophy/structure of LG affecting LE	Speed up.	
	Cultural services	Not high priority in public sense.	
	Freedom to deal	Balance bottom line, some shows pay for culture. Decisions based on figures, not experience of theatre.	
Scarborough	Position of LE in Council	Once exclusive Ents M'ger, no longer. Crucial part of holiday package.	
	Style/philosophy/structure of LG affecting LE	Cabinet decisions quicker, takes out two tiers of local gov.	
	Cultural services	No change, maybe more power to post holder.	
	Freedom to deal	Members representing T do scrutinise closely. Now report to Overview and Scrutiny C'tee but <u>not</u> for LE. T and L c'tee.	
Skegness	Position of LE in Council		
	Style/philosophy/structure of LG affecting LE	Now less input. Asking about social inclusion, not working. Old better than new. Public encouraged to attend.	
	Cultural services		
	Freedom to deal	Old c'tee system gave Members decision-making powers.	

Q5 What initiatives are in place to deliver an appropriate Local Cultural Strategy? Where does live entertainment fit into this?

(Linked to) Q5 (M, D, H, O) Can you describe the relationships between interested groups and people (members, officers, the public) that might facilitate an appropriate LCS?

<u>Resort</u>	<u>Category</u>	<u>Concepts/'Bits'</u>	<u>Mentioned but more closely related to...</u>
Bournemouth	LCS	Just starting	
	Arts Dev.	Arts Council a waste of time.	KF3 Q3
Eastbourne	LCS	Got Arts and Heritage strategy before cultural strategy (get bottom line right). Pull together 'Invite', LCS and BV reviews.	KF3 Q2
Margate	LCS	Starting 2/3 major strategic documents in place. First, Arts and Sports, as starting point of LCS – which will have a tourism strand, and a heritage strand.	KF3 Q4 (3 aspects)
	Arts Dev.	Deliver political and 'arty' agenda.	
	Forums	SRB/EDF	
	Other	W Gdns is a priority from both an economic point of view and a quality of life point of view.	
Hunstanton	LCS	First draft finished. LE links to all LA's objectives. LA as lead, although consultation.	
	Forums	Tourism/Sports/Arts. Take arts to the people.	KF3 Q3
Weston	LCS	Just starting. (Blue Skies took precedence).	
	Arts Dev.	Open-air concerts etc.	
	Forums	Weston Education Action	
Scarborough	LCS	Being written. T&L dept putting it together. Developing cultural strategy.	
	Forum	North Yorkshire Forum	
Skegness	LCS	Working on now, not just arts, also parts of countryside.	

Q6 Broadly, what is the future for live entertainment in the resort and what changes can you foresee regarding the likely future involvement of the council in providing live entertainment?

(Linked to) Q6 (M, D, H) With reference to live entertainment, how has the resort reacted to demands for increased operational efficiency and entrepreneurial activity?

(Linked to) Q6 (O) Professionally speaking (with regard to management skills required of theatre managers these days), how have demands for increased operational efficiency affected you?

(Linked to) Q6 (M, D, H, O) With reference to Best Value and Benchmarking, and specifically to the quarterly benchmark figures how do you feel the live entertainment venue(s) in the resort is performing? Please comment on ALL columns and include a comment on the size of the venue(s). Too large? Too small? About right? NOTE: This Q is asked regardless of the progress of BV i.e. some resorts are not BV'ing cultural activities until Year 4.

(Linked to) Q6 (M, D/H) With specific reference to the monthly and quarterly analysis sheets for 2000/2001, how far is the council prepared to tolerate/continue with types of entertainment that give negative, or very low net contribution?

(Linked to) Q6 (M, D/H) At what point would the negative economy of a theatre (subsidy) lead to the closure of the venue? (Note: This Q was asked by H&B in their Blackpool survey)

(Linked to Q6) (M, D/H) Please comment on how likely it is that the council will become involved in some arrangement whereby there is some commercial/private company involvement in the running/programming of the resort's theatre(s)? Please comment on any (current or future) non-council funding arrangements.

<u>Resort</u>	<u>Category</u>	<u>Concepts/'Bits'</u>	<u>Mentioned but more closely related to...</u>
Bournemouth	Future	Too many seats. Seasons shorter.	
	Changes	Theatre as Arts Centre. Trust status. Council less involved.	
	Other	Need better wet weather. Cultural elite.	
Eastbourne	Future	Too many seats. Lose local distinctiveness, if Apollo dominate. Be cost effective/add value. Quality ent for the region, not seaside ent. Audience dev – outreach, theatre in education. Money – one show pays for another. Bound up with political will.	
	Changes	Council will fund if part of dev area. Will keep live ent – part of tourism/conf product.	
	Other	AC not got any money. 4 venues is not too many, gives variety. Deals need confidentiality but colleagues in ind should work together. Arts and regen/culture and regen/social inclusion. No such thing as a resort theatre, 52 week agenda.	
Margate	Future	People expect more. Apollo too big. Promoters will kill LE, too greedy. Resorts work together/use consortium, BRA. More structured programming. Future is bright.	
	Changes	Trust is better, total freedom. Council as catalyst to change resort.	KF2 Q1
	Other	BO surplus to fund maintenance. Attitudes to price. Need hotel chain, won't come.	
Hunstanton	Future	LE is secure. Looked at Trust.	
	Changes	BV brought about increased op efficiency, but depends on size of building and product available. Council invested heavily, will tolerate neg cont. Apollo approach, council said no.	
	Other	Don't like 'league table' of Benchmark, not 'like-for-like'. Needs statistical system of weighting. Managers need to be pro-active.	
Weston	Future	Reduce subsidy in 4 years – from 300-150,000. Maybe work in p/ship – but tested, no gt interest, based on willingness to invest. Utilise need for social/ed/cultural.	
	Changes	Wrong to give away control, social agenda. Conservatives want to keep theatre, but pay its way.	
	Other	Playhouse (size/reputation) not enough for big names. Prof skills of manager more imp.	
Scarborough	Future	Too many seats, Futurist to go. Increased op efficiency, work with other resorts. Cultural arts must get best deal. Private sector put shows on. Council not involved in 20 yrs.	
	Changes	Council not involved, step back, provide venues, not shows, and mktg/promo. Reduce council risk, sell Spa.	
	Other	Theatre results very tied to conf seasons/market. Comparison unfair (600 seats), for Ken Dodd need 1800. Uniqueness of Stephen Joseph.	
Skegness	Future	LE key part of offer. In private hands Embassy could turn a profit but would have less on. Must be a theatre, not just a live music venue. Must keep doing a good job, or private predators. Constant improvement, but already good.	

	Changes	Local Gov not about making money. Council retain o/all control of theatre. Always tolerate the negative but policy of B/E for all costs. Council to 'prop up' performance art.	
	Other	Can't afford theatre, got successful compromise (flexibility). Ent within T has broadened. Private sector won't look after local people, LA will. Members don't appreciate effect of LE on area.	

APPENDIX G

Comments on the similarity of the live entertainment offer at particular seaside resorts

Pages 408 – 409

Comments on the similarity of the live entertainment offer at particular seaside resorts

Bournemouth has too many venues but currently supports them in the belief that live entertainment is important to the economic, social and cultural life of the location and helps project a 'classy' image. Higher than average ticket prices support this. Eastbourne has a broad cultural offer. Like Bournemouth, it targets both tourists and residents, again with a higher than average ticket price. Despite this, it has a lower net contribution than Bournemouth and is 'allowing' a number of performances to go ahead that are not, in performance terms, economically viable. Some of these include 'elitist' activities (more so than Bournemouth, although Bournemouth has the 'high arts' Poole Arts Centre close by), as well as a certain amount of 'traditional' drama. The Eastbourne live entertainment offer costs considerably more than its south coast cousin but members and officers at both resorts are generally satisfied with their particular, local provision. This emphasises the critical role played by these particular authorities in continuing to provide a wide range of predominantly, popular, 'low' culture live entertainment, but related to the perceived distinctiveness of their resort. Bournemouth is the 'large' resort in this study. Eastbourne is a medium-size resort but the eighth largest resort in the country and bears some comparison with Bournemouth due to similar markets and image. The other (medium-size) resorts are Margate, Scarborough and Weston-super-Mare.

Margate's image of a resort mainly for older visitors and day-trippers, but with an increased focus on local residents, is reinforced by its more traditional programme during the summer, but many 'low culture' events in the winter. Scarborough currently subsidises a season of variety at the Spa Theatre but also supports other traditional seaside live entertainment with a subsidy to private operators. The largest single subsidy, however, is reserved for the 'elitist' live entertainment at the Stephen Joseph Theatre. In these ways, Scarborough recognises the historical importance of live entertainment in relation to tourism, but significantly, is planning to reduce total current subsidies. This is in recognition of a lessening of the economic impact of tourism although there is no talk of reducing the current level of subsidy to the Stephen Joseph Theatre. This suggests a local political priority that might include tourists, but particularly local people, travelling to Scarborough because of the Stephen Joseph ('high culture') Theatre. It suggests consistent high quality live entertainment, perhaps of the 'high culture' type, could be persuasive in the decision to visit/travel. This might apply in the particular local circumstances at Scarborough but not, perhaps, at a similar-sized resort such as Weston-super-Mare. In this way, system-wide factors manifest themselves differently at similar, but significantly different, resorts. Weston-super-Mare is not a 'classy' resort so in tourist terms offers a broad non-elitist live entertainment programme. Weston's policy has been to broaden the appeal of the town towards business investment but there is little evidence to suggest that the current live entertainment offer is consistent with this. In any case, competition from 'quality' live entertainment at Bristol is deemed too fierce – either to attract tourists, or businesses to Weston.

Skegness is a small resort, heavily reliant upon tourism for its economic survival. The live entertainment on offer is significantly 'skewed' by being focussed on three key summer months. The offer is comprehensive within the general category of 'traditional seaside entertainment'. This is consistent with the resort's image and demonstrates the council's focus in portraying Skegness as a traditional family resort for the lower-income bracket. At Hunstanton there are many factors that are

unique to the resort and can be said to influence the live entertainment on offer, or vice versa. The small theatre (a converted cinema), the commitment of the local people and politicians (including significant council investment), and the demonstration of particular live entertainment niches that suit both locals and visitors, has led to more of a 'community' feel to the theatre. There are few large hotels for staying visitors and whilst the surrounding area has large caravan parks that generally provide live entertainment competition, this does not fundamentally affect Hunstanton's provision. (In all cases in this study, the live entertainment on offer at hotels is not seen as significantly affecting the local authority offer). The result at Hunstanton is a resort theatre that has a high proportion of local people in its audience at any one time, including during the summer. Essentially, the venue is perceived as an all-year round local amenity and achieves the highest percentage of seats sold of the theatres in the study. N.B. it has the smallest theatre capacity. These (local) patrons are not just coming from Hunstanton (population 4,500) but from the surrounding area.

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