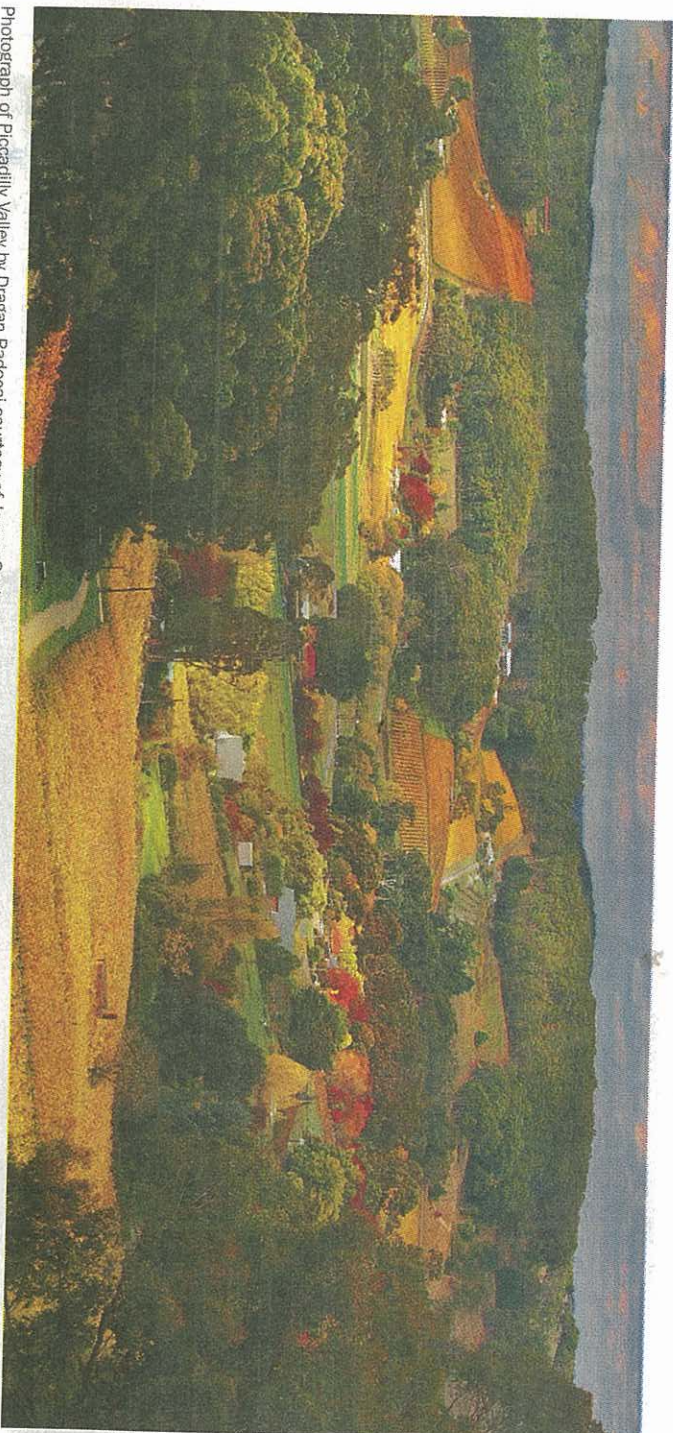


FEATURE



Photograph of Piccadilly Valley by Dragan Radocaj courtesy of James Sexton.

World Heritage Bid an Opportunity for Economic Gain

The Mount Lofty Ranges world heritage bid could boost the economy, create jobs and invigorate the state's tourism sector, according to UK-based UNESCO expert James Rebanks.

BY STEPHANIE JOHNSTON

The Managing Director and Head of Research at Rebanks Consulting, James Rebanks is the author of a seminal study of all 981 world heritage sites

and their ability to deliver socio-economic benefits. A Herdwick sheep breeder and self-confessed 'super nerd' on the potential benefits of a world heritage listing, Rebanks

was recently in Adelaide to deliver a series of lectures and seminars to the region's food, wine and tourism sectors.

Presentations in McLaren Vale, the hills, the city and the Barossa highlighted the implications his world-wide research and experience with the UK's Lake District bid

might have for Adelaide's CBD (as gateway to the region), and to farms, vineyards and businesses in the Mount Lofty Ranges area.

According to Rebanks, a world heritage listing is now highly sought after, with only 12 agricultural landscapes listed around the world to date. "UNESCO designation has, over time, evolved from a technical measure aimed exclusively at preservation into an acclaimed and widely respected brand that countries use to attract cultural tourists, and that tourists, in turn, rely on in selecting the destinations they will visit," he explained.

But there is no free lunch. UNESCO listing is what you make of it: "The critical lesson that emerged from my analysis was that how the management organisations and stakeholders perceive World Heritage status matters – the impact of listing is not automatically created by the designation itself, but is unlocked by the motivations and actions of the participants and the establishment of open and integrated systems of governance."

Rebanks' research revealed that for a growing number of sites, gaining UNESCO status creates a situation whereby a region collectively asks itself the critical question, "Why is our place unique, special and globally important?"

"A handful of World Heritage sites have, as a result of answering that question, found themselves at the cutting edge of a movement around the world which seeks to focus the economic development of places on their uniqueness, their authenticity, their distinct sense of place, and the depth of their identity and culture," he told workshop participants. "They use the added stimulus of UNESCO status to engage with the rest of the world from a position of confidence, selling distinct products and services at added value based upon their provenance."

Rebanks points out that achieving these aspirations is not easy, nor achieved on the cheap. Successful places direct significant effort and investment into achieving those aims, but it appears that UNESCO status, and the catalyst and confidence it provides, can play

a significant role in this movement to high quality and distinctiveness.

Existing world listings for agricultural landscapes include Alto Douro in Portugal, the Val d'Orcia in southern Tuscany, Cinque Terre on Italy's Ligurian Coast, the Cordillera rice terraces in the Philippines, Jalisco's tequila-producing region in Mexico, and the villages and surrounding landscape of Hungary's Tokaj wine region.

A consortium of six South Australian councils is supporting the bid, along with the University of Adelaide, RDA Barossa and the McLaren Vale Grape Wine and Tourism Association.

"We see that a big part of our region's future is valuing our agricultural landscapes," says agricultural economist Randy Stringer, Professor in Global Food Studies at the University of Adelaide. For Stringer it all comes down to the question of – if you can get it, why wouldn't you want it?

"Why wouldn't we want our region to be recognised as part of an exceptional group of agricultural landscapes that include the Loire Valley, Cinque Terra, Alto Douro and Tequila?" he asks.

Stringer does understand that many of us are just plain incredulous of the whole notion. He acknowledges that a common reaction is to ask how can we possibly be part of such an elite group. That for most of us, the Mount Lofty Ranges landscape is merely our backyard. While it is easy for us to see the simple, tangible value of its produce – its wine, apples, cherries, eggs and cheeses – it is often difficult for us to see and recognise the diverse, less tangible values that reflect the utopian origins and wealth of the landscape itself. And it's even more difficult for us to see the many ways those less tangible values contribute to our sense of place and the 'liveability' of our city.

Viewed on our maps, the city boundaries and agricultural landscape are two separate geographies. In our daily lives, no such boundary exists. Stringer believes that we use and depend on our agricultural landscape the same way we use and depend on our city parks and beaches. "We take weekend drives through it, we trek through it, and we ride our bikes through it. We put our visiting relatives in the car to show off those vistas, vineyards, orchards and charming villages." He explains that what we buy in the city influences what is produced in the countryside – shaping and reshaping how the landscape appears.

For Stringer, the question is simple: "Do we embrace our unique inheritance, promote it, and celebrate it for our parents, for our children and for the world? Or do we allow our landscape to predictably and monotonously evolve to look like every other place in the world?"

*Stephanie Johnston is the Project Manager for the Mount Lofty Ranges Agrarian Landscape World Heritage Bid

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