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THE CITY AND ITS CANAL: PRODUCING A PLACE MARKETING PILOT PLAN FOR CHESTER

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Abstract

The main purpose is the presentation of a Place Marketing Pilot Plan (PMPP) for the city of Chester and its unique Canal. This plan was produced in the context of the INTERREG IIIc project *CultMark* (*Cultural* Heritage, Local Identity and Place *Marketing* for Sustainable Development). The PMPP is based on the Strategic Planning process always starting from the identification of the vision of the place and the primary place (incorporating tourism) development objectives, also leading to the increase of competitiveness.

Key words: Place Marketing Plan, Chester/ Chester Canal, *CultMark* INTERREG IIIc project, heritage tourism

JEL:

1. Introduction: the purpose of the paper and presentation of Chester

1.1 The purpose of the paper

The main purpose of this paper is the presentation of a Place Marketing Pilot Plan (PMPP) for the city of Chester and its Canal. The PMPP aims to become a guideline for the effective implementation of the Place Marketing Final Plan (PMFP), which will focus on the provision of a marketing plan guide that should effectively promote the uniqueness of the Canal. The PMPP is based on the Strategic Planning process and also on the Strategic Image Management (SIM), always starting from the identification of the vision of the place and the primary place (incorporating tourism) development objectives that have to be satisfied, also leading to the increase of competitiveness.

The focus is on three key issues. The first key issue is the ASEB (Activities, Settings, Experiences and Benefits) model that is an invaluable tool for the development or improvement of a local destination, attraction or specific asset as a visitor attraction. It helps focus on experiences and benefits for the design and/or redesign of visitor facilities and activities (i.e. basic products) and other aspects of marketing e.g. promotion and price. The second is the analysis of the Critical Path Model (CPM) aiming at the provision of a strategic guide to the planners and decision makers of Chester in order to implement the PMPP, and also to prepare the appropriate actions for the planning and the implementation of the PMFP. Its purpose is to provide Chester with an overall perspective that helps in a strategic way to promote and support effectively in the forthcoming years its image, and especially the image of the Canal as a unique destination of heritage tourism. The third key issue is the analysis of the proposed '8Ps' marketing model of by Morrison. The text focuses on the development and application of 'packaging' by taking into account the distinctive characteristics of the culture of Chester and, more specifically, the role and the significance of the Canal.

1.2 The studied area

Chester is the county town of Cheshire, and is centrally located within the UK in the North West region. Its excellent concentration of motorways, roads and railways makes most UK areas within easy travelling distance. Chester is also well served by Liverpool and Manchester Airports, and private aircraft can be accommodated at Hawarden Airport, four miles from the City. The Cheshire Oaks Retail Park has over

100,000 visitors a year but has the potential to move from a regional attraction to a national attraction, drawing new visitors from across the UK. The Boat Museum at Ellesmere Port is a nationally recognised attraction but has the capacity to increase visitor numbers above 100,000 a year. A potential attraction grouping is: Boat Museum, Grosvenor Museum and Gateway Theatre. The three attractions could produce joint marketing campaigns. Challenges for a Place Marketing Strategy include increasing visitor numbers to Chester's listed buildings, the Military Museum and Cheshire Fishing. Chester's main tourism development axis concerns history and cultural heritage, focusing especially on major features of the canal from Northgate Locks in Chester to the Boat Museum in Ellesmere Port. The canal has played a major role in the past development of these communities, but has been neglected by them as it fell into industrial decline. Chester's efforts aim to develop sustainable tourism, as the infrastructure around the canal has seen major improvements in recent years.

2. The Production of the PMPP for Chester and its Canal in the context of the *CultMark* project

The PMPP was produced in the context of the INTERREG IIIc *CultMark* project (*Cultural* Heritage, Local Identity and Place *Marketing* for Sustainable Development) that was in operation in five European places from 2004 till 2006: Nea Ionia/ Magnesia/ Greece (lead partner), Chester/ UK, Kainuu/ Finland, Rostock-TLM/ Germany and Pafos/ Cyprus. *CultMark* is applying a place marketing strategy with a cultural approach. This means that it emphasizes the cultural dimension of marketing and the promotion of the heritage resources of each place both in connection with the planning of demonstration actions. The innovative characteristics of this project are reinforced by the use of the two concepts of 'creativity', and 'branding destination'. The main objective of the *CultMark* project is the development and implementation of innovative place (incorporating tourism) marketing strategies, based on the elements of local identity and the cultural assets of the partner areas in order to contribute to their sustainable economic and social development. We would like to express our thanks to the JTS INTERREG IIIC East and to the partners (especially Chester Canal Partnership) for the use of the delivered material.

This paper uses material from the following *reports* that have already been delivered: a) 'The Mini Investment Guide' (it briefly provides concrete information for the economic and investment profile of the partner areas) [June, 2004], b) 'The

Strategies, Tactics and Alternative Scenarios Report’ (it deals with the application of specific strategies, tactics, and alternative scenarios of the promotion and support of the image of each area both in its external and internal environment) [June, 2004], c) ‘The Final Provided Good Report’ (it presents the final provided good for each area, based on the available research data and the local distinctive characteristics) [December, 2004], and d) ‘The Promotional and Distributional Channels Report’ (it presents the ways/ means of distribution and promotion of the image of each area both in its external and internal environment) [December, 2004], e) ‘The Cultural Data Report’ (it concerns the analysis of the internal environment of the cultural sector and the identification of its role in economic development) [June, 2005], f) Place Marketing Pilot Plan for Chester [December, 2005] .

3. Methodology

3.1. The ASEB Grid¹

The ASEB model was developed by Beeho and Prentice (1995). It focuses on *four specific areas of visitor appeal*: Activities, Settings, Experiences and Benefits. It is a consumer-orientated management analysis tool designed to facilitate an understanding of the experiences being realised by visitors to cultural heritage sites and, in particular, the value gained from visiting; thereby emphasising the worth of heritage beyond that of economic generation. Furthermore, any potential mismatches between the experiences and benefits being gained by heritage visitors and those perceived to be offered by attraction managers through their site interpretation can be both identified and reconciled through this approach.

The model also builds on a SWOT Analysis model for each of the above areas (Table 1). The ASEB Grid adds an additional dimension through a *qualitative analysis* of:

- Activities: things for visitors to see and do
- Settings: environmental factors, access and transport
- Experiences: components of the ‘real’ visitor product
- Benefits: visitor satisfaction and motivation to visit, return and/or recommend to others

The Canal Basin at Chester gives visitors a close up and real time experience of canal life with boats and historic works. However, there is poor on site interpretation and

¹ This part is based in the report ‘Identification and development of cultural assets and local identity’ delivered by Chester City Council (2006). We are particularly grateful to Steve Woolfall for his elaborations.

very little else in the immediate area. The planned development of the run down boatyard into a new heritage attraction with boat repairs and educational facilities is an opportunity to solve those weaknesses and to provide a strong visitor attraction that will complement the Boat Museum at Ellesmere Port.

Insert Table 1 about here

3.2. Critical Path Model

The implementation of the 'pilot programme' has as a minimum temporal horizon of 'working' days. In the case of Chester the temporal horizon is 410 'working' days. The character of the Pilot Programme 'Promotion Methodology' is strategic. The method used in the research in order to set up a particular temporal limit for the promotion methodology is based on 'Critical Path Method Analysis' (Aravatinos, 1987/1994: 78-9; Nokes *et al.*, 2003). Table 2 presents the actions in the case of 'Planning phase' and is separated in four columns where each of them represents the parameters of CPM. More particularly:

- *Hierarchical Presentation of activities.* In this column we characterize each activity with a particular name. The presentation of the activities is hierarchical. The important thing is to include all the appropriate actions in order the PMPP, to become a useful database, for the implementation of the PMFP. All the activities (steps) related to the Strategic Planning process and they focus on three dimensions: the planning, the implementation and the evaluation of each action.
- *Immediate predecessor:* This column presents those activities (one or more) that have to be finished first and then the present activity to take place. This view has major significance for the project, since it allows estimating which of the activities are core (have to be done first and any delay on their implementation affects the total planning of the project), and which are secondary (they could be implemented at the same time with other activities).
- *Particular actions:* This column specifies for each step, some particular actions, in order the overall development of the step to become an effective and flexible guideline for marketers to implement actions and at the time that the project has decided to be done.
- *Temporal horizon:* The existence of a specific temporal horizon is very important for each step and of course for the whole project. The temporal horizon is closely related to the satisfaction of city's objectives in the frame of a specific time planning. Time

planning is also related with the existence of alternative scenarios in case that some actions have to be changed and replaced by others.

Insert Table 2 about here

Figure 1 presents all the basic steps related with the 'Planning Phase' and the identification of Critical Path, taking into consideration the primary and the secondary activities. CPM includes the following four main phases of the project.

PLANNING (activities 1-12): In this phase the decision makers and the local actors have to plan and prepare all those actions that related with the promotion and the support of Chester cultural good and the 3C (Chester Canal Campaign) good. The first step is the creation of the Executive Management Group (EMG), which will take the overall responsibility to plan and to perform the PMPP. The crucial point is that the effectiveness of the whole project based on the phase of Planning. Any kind of steps delay, means delay of the following phases and consequently delay of the whole project. The overall temporal horizon of this phase is 120 'working' days (over the 1/3 of the total time of the project). The primary actions need 65 days and the secondary actions 55 days.

PROGRAMMING: In this phase the EMG has the main responsibility of programming, a number of core actions that have take place before the phase of implementation. These actions concern the building of the communication process, the preparation of focus group analysis, the positioning of the final provided good of Chester to distributors and finally the development of a mini-guide seminar to all participants and the selected distributors. This phase requires brainstorming methods and discussions, for the continuing of the pilot project. The temporal horizon of this phase is 60 'working' days. The primary actions need 45 days and the secondary actions 15 days.

IMPLEMENTATION: This phase means action and is characterized by the existence of promotion process, almost in all of the actions. In particular this phase is the promotion phase. The core actions related with the focus groups analysis, the primary research, the improvement or the creation of the website, and finally the implementation of a variety of advertising activities on Media, magazines, newspapers, etc. In addition, the participation of Chester in two events (i.e. exhibition) in national and European level is also proposed. The implemented actions it is crucial to be supported by a good and effective group of Public Relations. Finally the project proposed some additional actions, such as the creation of a TV programme (documentary), the creation of infokiosks, the production of DVDs, CD-ROMs and videos. All the promotion activities of this phase

are on a continuing process. The time horizon of each is a potential time and mainly concerns the time of schedule of these actions. The phase of Implementation is the longest of the pilot project. It takes 175 ‘working’ days. The primary actions need only 65 working days and the secondary actions 110.

EVALUATION- FEEDBACK: This phase is related with the evaluation of the actions that take place in the phase of the implementation. The main aim of this final phase is EMG to come up to the final decisions in order to continue the programme by preparing the PMFP, or to reject the whole effort. So, it’s very important for EMG, to analyse all the available resources and evaluate in which phases of the project is needed to become changes, reductions, reconstructions etc. One very important point, of this phase is that EMG has to prepare a very functional PMFP, with specific actions and with main concerns to support and promote the distinctiveness of Chester. The umbrella of this process is the vision of Chester and the major development objectives. EMG needs to implement a plan flexible, innovative, and according to the evidence and the guidelines of the PMPP. In other words its necessary to provide an official plan that faces the demands of the potential target markets on the one hand, and Chester’s development aims on the other. The whole phase needs 56 ‘working’ days, 46 for primary actions and 10 for secondary ones.

Insert Figure 1 about here

3.3 The 8ps’ model

In the case of Chester, the study in order to set up a ‘production procedure’ used two models from the world of marketing. The first one is the generic and very popular model of Marketing ‘4ps’ (Kotler, 1986) [product, price, place and promotion]. The second one is more complicated and it’s called the ‘8ps’ model (Morrison, 1999) [product, partnership, people, packaging, programme, place, price, promotion]. The study selected the model of ‘8ps’, as the most appropriate in the case of Chester. The ‘8ps’ model is mainly used for tourist destinations.

Insert Figure 2 about here

More particularly:

PRODUCT (GOOD): We suggest that the creation of the ‘provided good’ of Chester could be mainly oriented towards the distinctive cultural and historic heritage of the area and to sustainable tourism development. This approach is also supported by

Chester Economic Development Task Group study, ‘Towards a new economic Development Strategy for Chester 2003-8’, which focuses on the historic, vibrant and quality image for the area.

PARTNERSHIP: The study proposes four levels of partnerships for Chester and its Canal: a) partnerships with actors and decision makers in the area, b) partnerships at regional level, c) partnerships at national and European level, and d) partnerships specifically for the Canal. These actors concern: local and regional authorities, enterprises, cultural organizations, industrial and commercial associations, tourists agencies, universities and research centers, EU cultural organizations, environmental associations and residents. Ideally, in most of the cases the partnerships should evolve into networks.

PEOPLE: Focus on two dimensions: a) The ‘human resources management’ process. Referring to human resources management for visitors’ attraction, Swarbrooke (1995/2002: 244) supports that it is concerned with obtaining, organizing, training, motivating and rewarding the people needed by the organization so that they can perform in a way which allows the attraction to meet the needs of customers, and b) the citizens’ contribution to place/ tourism development. The citizens of a location have been recognized as one of the most important internal target markets (actors) of the environment of a place.

PACKAGING: All packages have particular duration and is applied to specific target markets. The proposed packages are: CULTURE-HISTORY [Escorted tours package (Chester and the rest region), ‘*Culture lives in Chester*’], CANAL [Canal history package in general, ‘*Chester Canal: where the distinctive meet...the unique*’, ‘Maritime and industrial heritage’], EVENTS (common package for all **CultMark** partners), CONVENTION AND CONFERENCES MEETING (common package for all **CultMark** partners)

PROGRAMMING: Programming has an ‘organized dimension’. In other words we talk about Effective Time Management, since each of the provided packages has to be planned and also programmed in such way that will provide the ability of timing to the potential target markets, in a specific and limited time that they have, in order to receive the maximum of the offering city’s services.

PLACE (Distribution channels): The separation of the distributors according to the character of the provided good is an important process and it’s related to the effectiveness of the distribution. Each dimension is working in two levels. First

separately: this level requires the planning and the performance of specific actions per sector. Secondly all the sectors participate to the implementation of common activities.

PRICE: The study proposes the creation of a particular cost-budget analysis plan that will include all the promotion activities on an annual base in order the whole cost to be covered by the Total Place Marketing Budget of Chester with specific account for Chester Canal.

PROMOTION: Proposed promotional means: Television, Internet, Magazines, Newspapers, Newsletters, Brochures, Prospectus, Direct sales, Exhibitions fairs and events etc.

4. Conclusions

The PMPP aims to establish the main axes for the preparation and development of the PMFP. The PMPP is based on the Strategic Planning process, always starting from the identification of Chester's vision and the primary place/ tourism development objectives that it has set. Thus, the PMPP is of strategic character, its aim being the identification of the most appropriate promotion methodology enabling Chester to examine and evaluate some first results of the implementation of its place/ tourism marketing actions. Most crucially, the PMPP has to be applied in a particular temporal horizon (410 working days), and during this period Chester's actors, marketers and decision makers have to collect and evaluate important information leading to the perfection and detailing of the PMPP structure, or to its reformulation and redesigning, either as a whole, or in parts.

This plan was produced in the context of the INTERREG IIIc project *CultMark* (*Cultural* Heritage, Local Identity and Place *Marketing* for Sustainable Development). This project included a variety of primary and secondary research and its findings in relation to the elaboration of PMPP refer mainly to the details in the temporal sequence of the promotion-related activities (including the creation of networks). The originality of the paper connects directly with the originality of the project and particularly with the combination of research and demonstration actions emphasizing the cultural dimension of place/ tourism marketing and the promotion of the cultural resources.

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Figure 1: Critical Path Diagram of the 1st phase

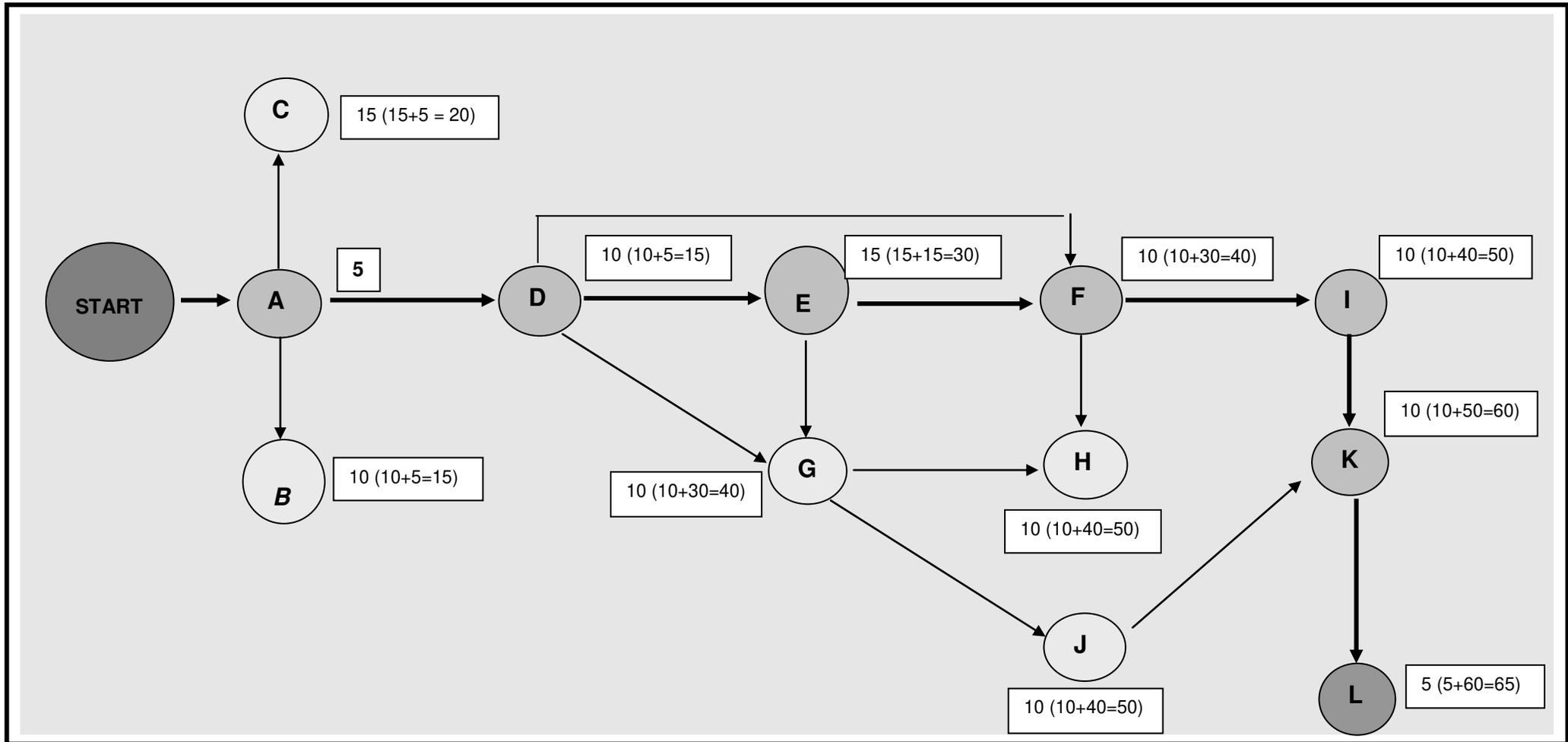


Figure 2: Place Marketing '8ps' model by Morrison

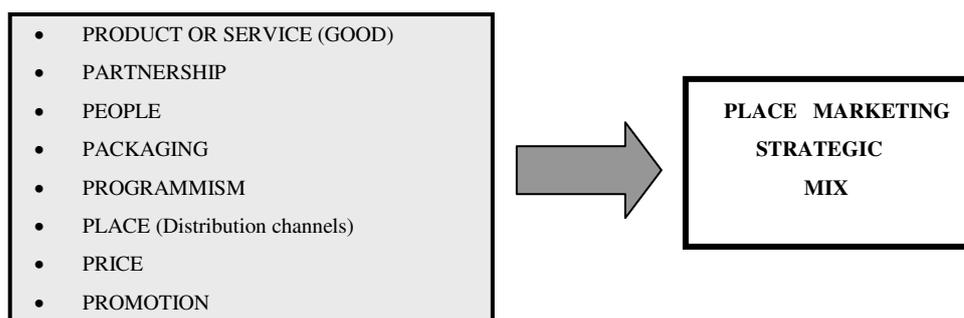


Table 1: The ASEB Model

Chester Canal Basin	Activities	Settings	Experiences	Benefits
Strengths	See real canal boats and canal works		Up-close, real- time and authentic	Witness real way of life
		Near to Chester's Old Port	A short walk from the city core	Easy to reach/ no great effort
Weaknesses	No proper interpretation		Visitors have to make an effort to obtain the history	Visitors fail to learn/ appreciate story of canal
		Little other attractions nearby	Passive, not active	Qualifies benefits of open space
Opportunities	Growth in heritage visits for planned working boatyard		Importance of boatyard has potentially high interest	Life long learning.
		Riverside path to/from city centre	Cheap and frequent service to city core	Easy, economic travel without hassle of inner city parking
Threats	Other cultural venues in city region offer more activities for families as full day out		Children may become bored after short time compared to other venues	Other venues seen as more fun
		Access from visitor generating areas to competing destinations (Manchester) increasingly easy	Convenience - easier to get to competing destinations	Time constrained visitors may choose easier 'big' name attractions in such locations

Source: Chester City Council (2006)

Table 2: The steps of the Planning phase for the PMPP of Chester

	ACTIVITIES	A.C	I.P	TIME (days)
	1st phase: PLANNING (1-12)			
1	Composition of the Executive Management Group (EMG) and the groups that participate in each action (Morrison model: partnership and people)	A	-	5
2	Analysis of the competition at regional and national level	B	A	10
3	Analysis of the competition in Europe and in the international market	C	A	15
4	Identification of the 'final provided good' – Culture – local distinctiveness – Canal (Morrison model: product)	D	A	10
5	Creation of tourism, cultural and 'Canal Campaign' packages(Morrison model: packaging pricing)	E	D	15
6	Re- Evaluation of the selected target markets based on the analysis of their characteristics– Choose the appropriate sample - internal environment	F	D, E	10
7	Re- Evaluation of the selected target markets based on the analysis of their characteristics– Choose the appropriate sample - external environment	G	D, E	10
8	Evaluation and selection of the distributors for each part of the 'final provided good' (Morrison model: place)	H	F, G	10
9	Evaluation of the selected strategies and tactics per target market - internal environment	I	F	10
10	Evaluation of the selected strategies and tactics per target market - external environment	J	G	10
11	Evaluation and final selection of the promotional means (Morrison model: promotion)	K	D, E, I, J	10
12	EMG meeting 1	L	K	5
	End of the first phase			120

Source: PMPP for Chester (December, 2005)