Ann an roinn na turasachd, tha grunn iomairtean tachairt thairis air na deich bliadhna a dh’halbh, a tha a’ feuchainn ri ceangal a dhèanamh eadar dualchas na Gàidhlig agus Gàidhlig ann an Alba san latha an-diugh, le luchd-turais ag iarraidh blas fhaighinn den eadar-dhealachadh a th’air a thabhann tron chànan is chultar.
Chaidh a’ chaidè teachd de Cearcaill na Gàidhligh a cur air bhon san luchar 2007, stèidhde air an t-slighe eileanan ‘Hopscotch’ aig Caledonian Mac A’ Bhruthainn a bha a’ gabhal a-steach an t-Òban, Barra, Eriskay, Lewis a Deas, Beinn a Faoghla, Ulbist a Tuath, An t-Eilean Sgitheanach agus Malaig.

As déidh mar a shoirbhich leis an iomairt seo, le 300 gnothachasan ionadail air fedadh na slighe a’ gabhal com-pàirt, chaidh pròiseact Cearcaill na Gàidhlig a leudachadh airson bun-stèidh de sha shighean a chruinnachadh, le taic bho 650 gnothachasan ionadail air an t-slighe.

Bha na gnothachasan sin a’ cur taic ris an t-slighe Gàidhlig, aig co-aimisireil, aig cridhe na tha a’ tachairt a thaobh ceòl beò cho math ri tachartasan Blas, a' cur Gàidhlig Mar-tha, tha na Fèisean agus Feis HebCelt, agus cothroman eile a chur an aire dhoine.

Air fhoilseachadh le Iomairt na Gàidhealtachd ’s nan Eilean

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Tha Cearcaill na Gàidhligh na eisimpleir air leithid de dh’oirbheir – seo iomairt margaidh cho-obrachail a chaidh a’ chur air bhon ann an 2007’r gus beartas cànain is duachais na Gàidhlig a chuir a chur air adhart air fedadh eileanain Innse Gall agus taobh siar na Gàidhealtachd.

Iomairt na Gàidhealtachd ’s nan Eilean.

(Chàra) an iomairt seo a chompaistach iomabhuidhne eadar Comhairle Earrach-Ghàidhealaidh is Bhòid; Bòrd na Gàidhlig; Comhairle nan Eilean Siar; Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd; CalMac; VisitScotland; agus HITRANS – Compañeeas Còmhdhal na Gàidhealtachd ’s nan Eilean).
The tourism sector is one where several initiatives have taken place over the last ten years, seeking to link Scotland’s Gaelic heritage and Scotland’s Gaelic present with visitors wishing to experience the distinctiveness offered by the language and culture.
The Cearcaill na Gàidhlig is one such approach - a collaborative marketing initiative launched in 2007 to promote the richness of Gaelic language and culture throughout the Hebridean islands and the West Highland mainland. (This initiative was a multi-agency partnership between Argyll and Bute Council; Bòrd na Gàidhlig; Comhairle nan Eilean Siar; The Highland Council; CalMac; VisitScotland; and HITRANS – the Highlands and Islands Transport Initiative).

The first of the Gaelic Rings, or Cearcaill na Gàidhlig, was launched in July 2007 based on Caledonian MacBrayne’s Islands Hopscotch route taking in Oban, Barra, Eriskay, South Uist, Benbecula, North Uist, Skygaae and Mallaig.

Following the success of this initiative with 300 local businesses along the route becoming partners, the Gaelic Rings project was then expanded to form the basis of six journeys with the support of 650 local businesses en route. These businesses supported this bilingual initiative by advertising it within their establishments and distribution of literature.

These businesses ranged from B&Bs to local shops to tourist attractions. Ten thousand copies of a small bilingual book were published consisting of favourite ‘personal journeys’ of six highly respected Scottish writers including Angus Peter Campbell, Mairi Macarthur, Donald Meek and Hugh Cheape. These journeys were based on CalMac’s Island Hopscotch routes. In addition, one hundred and fifty thousand (150,000) leaflets were distributed across Scotland and at key entry points to the UK regarding this.

In addition a bespoke multilingual website was launched www.gaelic-rings.com which also included ‘photographic journeys’ with backing music from Runrig. The initiative also saw bilingual advertising in the relevant tourist press and Calmac Explore etc., together with a bilingual branding presence on the West Highland line between Inverness and Kyle of Lochalsh.

This initiative is a recognition that Gaelic language and culture plays a significant part in the mixture of factors that attract tourists to Gaelic speaking areas and can also provide a thread that links travel, accommodation, hospitality and food and drink into a richer experience for the domestic and international visitor.

Further afield, VisitScotland are actively investigating how the diversity offered by Gaelic speaking communities in the Gàidhealtacht can be accessed by visitors, often attracted by the opportunity of hillwalking or birdwatching, within landscapes notable for their Gaelic names.

Thus they are considering the construction of Gaelic destination plans allowing tourists to draw from the richness of communities where Gaelic continues to be strong. There is already experience of this within communities such as Shawbost in Lewis and Trotternish in Skye – the latter having successfully used local knowledge to position the community as one in which Gaelic learners can be immersed to help their language.

The concept of a ‘Hebridean Way’ encompasses this holistic vision, developing cycling and walking from the Butt to Barra, in a manner similar to the West Highland way but with Gaelic at its heart as part of the infrastructure itself.

The concept of different Gaelic ‘hubs’ along the way – some dealing with Gaelic heritage, others with birdlife, and others with Gaelic music would be seen as a way of marking the authenticity of Gaelic communities, each using aspects of Gaelic as an asset. This could be either through a visit to an interpretive centre, the experience of a local Cèilidh, or the understanding of the landscape through well explained bilingual signage, or a visit to a bird sanctuary within a Gaelic speaking area.

Some of this Gaelic cultural add-in has taken place already – as can be seen for instance in the refurbishing of the museum at Lews Castle, Stornoway and the use of bilingual signage within that.

There is an acknowledgement that an expansion of Gaelic linked tourism would need some additional infrastructure such as bed spaces – but this has been a long recognised issue in parts of the area concerned.

Gaelic linked tourism cannot be seen in isolation from traditional tourism but can add substantially to it. Current discussions that are taking place in the Outer Hebrides around the concept of ‘Hebtember’ – a month of events happening in September focusing on arts and crafts, envisaged as pan-island for a whole month – aiming to bring arts and crafts to the spaces – but this has been a long recognised explanation bilingual signage, or a visit to a bird watching within a Gaelic speaking area.

For more information visit www.gaelic-rings.com

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