Research Paper

Maintaining sustainable island destinations in Scotland: The role of the transport–tourism relationship

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\textbf{A B S T R A C T}

The reliance on tourism as an economic generator has become increasingly important in island communities following a decline in traditional industries. The flow of visitors to these areas impacts upon a variety of sectors and service provisions, adds to job creation, and evokes vibrancy in areas with low and dispersed populations. The mercurial and interdependent nature of tourism is both supported and challenged by the input of numerous stakeholders with a heavy private sector advocacy. In comparison, whilst some entrepreneurial transport provision is evident, geographical distance and low population density contributes to subsidisation and public sector governance of transport systems to curb service irregularity and ensure infrastructure investment. This article investigates the feasibility of cross-sectoral interaction between transport and tourism stakeholders and their perceptions and experiences of working together to manage destinations. Exploratory research involving in-depth interviews with multiple stakeholders identified a growing awareness of the benefits and necessity of collaboration between sectors to increase the attractiveness, accessibility and in turn sustainability of island destinations. Analysis suggests that the extent to which joint working occurs is dependent upon collaborative capacity; leadership; and the cohesion, strength and scope of local governance.

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1. Introduction

The aim of this article is to explore the scope, role and nature of relationship between tourism and transport stakeholders in island communities in Scotland and the influence this has on local economic development and destination sustainability. Accessibility and the requirement of good transport links to reach remote regions are pivotal and reflect the feasibility of tourism development in archipelagos. A reliance on transport is heightened in island areas since visitors are unable to reach these peripheral destinations by land. In Scottish islands this has meant that, for the most part, tourism is contingent on public transport availability where distances between Mainland Scotland and Scottish island destinations can be lengthy. Transport provisions tend to serve, first and foremost the island communities which inhabit these regions thus they are a service critical not only to tourism but also for the sustainability of the local population and subsidised services are a commonality. The consequential benefit this has on tourism is in the higher frequency and lower fares than would be available without government support. However in some cases, albeit few and often those passing an attraction or en route to a port or airport, the relationship is reciprocated as the footfall visitors provide can help to sustain the provision of some operations which might not otherwise have the local usage to justify continuation.

Economically, the opportunity for access and a fluidity of movement to and from an area are intrinsic to its sustainable growth, and mobility has a significant effect on a region’s competitiveness and prosperity (Duval, 2007; Page, 2009a). Access also has a remit in enabling social development within communities by diminishing isolation and enabling people to gain access to employment, healthcare, education and social activities. While isolation can be prohibitive to the movement of local people out of an area it can also curb the arrival of visitors thus impacting upon the potential to develop a tourism market and in turn a source of local income (Payet, 2010). The lucrative opportunity that tourism provides in generating revenue within islands is reliant on the multiple parties involved in providing a range of services and products consumed by tourists. The extent to which this can be exploited will be dictated by the degree of engagement between stakeholders to create a product which is well designed and attractive to its consumers (Jamal & Stronza, 2009; Selin & Chavez, 1995).
Further constraints exist for island areas in the form of financial and political resources; whilst they may enjoy supremacy in terms of environmental assets, the jurisdiction they hold is dependent on the extent and effectiveness of local governance (Bramwell & Sharman, 1999; Dredge, Ford, & Whitford, 2011). Remote areas are disparate to their urban counterparts insomuch as they are removed from city centres where the majority of decision making takes place. This distance is apparent not just in terms of supply and physical connections but also when it comes to policy and funding allocation. A demonstration of unity in peripheral areas and consensus in decision making helps to deliver a clear message from a strong voice ensuring outer lying areas are not overlooked (Kauppila, Saarinen, & Leinonen, 2009). A local governance approach, where policy-making involves the input of public, private and third sector members has been considered effective in influencing change in the policy domain; in providing ownership and empowerment of local policy actions and initiatives; and in generating sustainability by way of holistic and inclusive consideration (Beaumont & Dredge, 2010; Vernon, Essex, Pinder, & Curry, 2005).

2. Literature review

The tourism industry is a complex environment involving many components and participants which contribute to the tourism product and experience. Gunn (2004, p. 34) conjectures that ‘every part of tourism is related to every other part’ which highlights the need for a multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral approach to developing and managing tourism destinations. Effective transport systems are fundamental to destination development and therefore the ability to generate sustainable visitor markets (Gossling, Hall, & Weaver, 2009; Page & Connell, 2009; Prideaux, 2000). Some would argue that they demonstrate the most important component of tourism since they facilitate the necessary movement of people. Similarly the hefty dependence that visitors to island destinations have on public transport services accentuates the tourism industry as a significant contributor to transport markets. The fluctuating relationship between transport systems and tourism markets is therefore reciprocal in nature since together they will reinforce and influence each other and the actions and effectiveness of one party will directly affect the other.

The geographical context of this study allows an analysis to be made within the definable space an island presents. Many of the world’s islands depend on tourism to a greater extent than their mainland counterparts. Briguglio and Briguglio (2005) suggest that this intensifies for smaller islands as tourism is very often their main source of economic generation. While tourism outcomes can contribute to a wider sustainability of peripheral destinations such as through social and cultural elements, they are primarily motivated by the economic imperative. There is little doubt that one of the industry’s key benefits is the ability to generate a substantial multiplier effect, thus stimulating local economies to a broad extent. The discussion around an economic dependence on tourism in islands is relentless and one of the few ubiquitous characteristics amongst them regardless of their warm water or cold water status (Hamzah & Hampton, 2013; Moyle, Glen Croy, & Weiler, 2010). Despite this, the literature on tourism in small islands is limited (Shareef & McAleer, 2005; Warrington & Milne, 2007). The extent to which tourism is recognised for the support it provides to economies is likely to be reflected in the level of political attention it receives and thus the propensity for a joined up approach when it comes to destination management. The separateness of islands has led in some instances to generous devolution agreements in terms of jurisdictional arrangements. However the success of island destinations with high levels of autonomy will be dependent upon effective governance mechanisms at a local level which give consideration to aligned planning and policy objectives that support rather than undermine each other.

2.1. The economic impacts of tourism in rural areas

Following the decline of traditional rural industries, tourism has provided a diversification mechanism to stimulate economies, boost local employment and discourage leakage (Cawley & Gillmor, 2008). The generation of fiscal benefits through tourism has been a significant driver for its use in rural areas and the incorporation of it in economic strategies throughout the world. This is predominantly because tourism can provide financial returns and social benefits without a huge initial outlay or investment (Wong, Mistilis, & Dwyer, 2011). Its recognised advantage is that it provides a way in which to generate profit through the utilisation of natural resources that are inherent to rural areas in the form of remote landscapes, peace and tranquillity and flora and fauna (George, Mair, & Reid, 2009). This is further emphasised in island tourism where the romanticised perception associated with the isolation of these peripheral destinations is a key visitor motivation in seeking a contrast to urban life (Graci & Dodds, 2010; Hall, 2010). However there have also been concerns raised around an over-reliance on tourism in rural areas and the perception of it as a panacea regardless of the impacts that seasonality and carrying capacities can have on sustainability (Phelan & Sharples, 2010). Responsible management has emphasised the need for a collaborative approach to achieve a holistic and comprehensive overview of such a fragmented industry (Baggio, Scott, & Cooper, 2010; Jamal & Getz, 1995; Kauppila et al., 2009).

The growth of accessibility and in turn the flow of visitors to natural environments has motivated an increasing number of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) to use the activity as a basis for business development in rural areas. Tourism related service industries allow individuals to enter the market place in a way which can be introduced reasonably independently in comparison to many alternatives and with little capital expenditure. As such, rural locations are increasingly moving away from a sole dependency on traditional industries as the main source of income generation and are establishing enterprises which can function alongside them (Saxena, Clark, Oliver, & Ilbery, 2007). European studies estimate that over 50% of farmers now engage in alternative methods of rural development such as agritourism in order to achieve economic sustainability (Marsden, 2009). Garrod, Wornell and Youell (2006) and Lane (2009) report that tourism in the UK is now more financially valuable than farming in many rural areas providing an economic comparison which emphasises the significance of support tourism provides to remote destinations. However the multi-faceted nature of the tourism industry and its ability to infiltrate a variety of activities and markets adds a level of ambiguity which makes a statistical definition of the tourism value difficult to deduce. The boundaries surrounding who and what pertain to tourism are blurred which leaves it as a phenomenon difficult to accurately quantify. This is further amplified in island areas where seasonality can disturb a consistent flow of visitors and it is therefore often the case for islanders to play a temporary role in the tourism industry or to juggle more than one job (Baldacchino, 2006; Okech, 2010). Regardless, the potential scope of economic influence the tourism industry has on island communities expounds reason for an expansive number of people to hold a keen interest in its robustness and a purpose for desiring input in the decision-making process (Moyle et al., 2010).

2.2. Tourism—A fragmented industry and collective experience

The acknowledgement of tourism as a linkage of mutually dependent components dictates the potential for collective success in the
overall destination and the tourism product it proffers. Mendes, Valle, Guerrero and Silva (2010) suggest that because the tourism experience is consumed as a series of services and events which are interlinked it will be evaluated holistically and the dissatisfaction with one aspect of a trip will affect the perception of the entire visit. The strength of influence this has impacts upon the likelihood of a return trip and the way in which tourists portray that destination to others (Sorupia, 2005; Thompson & Schofield, 2007). The delivery of an attractive package or certainly a well-integrated series of services and activities will be reflected in the tenacity of relationships engendered by involved stakeholders for this purpose. The structural complexity of the tourism industry is a consequence of the myriad of stakeholders who provide a contribution to the tourism product and experience. It is a constantly evolving system made up of non-linear networks and relationships with a breadth that spans industries and sectors (McKercher, 1999). The complexity of relationships between people in small islands is elevated by the likelihood of role diffusion, role enlargement and role multiplicity (Balchachino, 2005). Overlapping roles and responsibilities, while beneficial for knowledge transfer, have also had the outcome of creating misunderstandings and conflict. Thus platforms for social interaction, even at an informal level, are critical for allowing open lines of communication where parties can build the relationships that will be foundational to future commitments. These relationships create the opportunity for shared visions to emerge; the development of a consensual approach to achieving them; and underpin the affiliations during the notorious difficulties endured by parties engaging in collaborative processes.

Smith (1994, p. 582) illustrates the contribution of service providers as key elements of the generic tourism product by proposing that the industry constitutes ‘the facilitation of travel and activity of individuals away from their usual home environment’. The scope of suppliers involved in accommodating the desires of tourists is thus broad since a multitude of providers will be associated with the travel upon which they may embark or the activities they might undertake. Gyimothy (2000), in her analysis of service providers in the visitor’ experience conjectures their role as ancillary in allowing tourists to realise their anticipated experiences. Edgell, Allen, Smith and Swanson (2008 p. 2), propose that tourism ‘is not a single industry but instead an amalgam of industry sectors—a demand force and supply market, a personal experience and a complicated international phenomenon’. With so many different aspects contributing to the concept of tourism, perhaps the only thing clear is the difficulty in distinguishing its parameters. It has often been referred to as the largest industry in the world however this is an observation likely to be attributed to the blurred boundaries surrounding who and what pertains to the tourism industry. Nevertheless, research has shown that tourist satisfaction can be greatly increased by the collaboration of services within a destination (Baggio et al., 2010; Butler, 2002) and more can be achieved when there is an integrative approach to destination management and stakeholders act collaboratively (Cawley & Gillmor, 2008; Hall & Lew, 2009). The inclination for tourists to incorporate a variety of components into their overall experience indicates that the quality of transportation and the ease with which it is undertaken will have a significant bearing on the attractiveness of a destination thus promoting the argument for and interest in evidence of a relationship between the two industries.

2.3. The transportation element in the tourist experience

The relationship between transport and tourism has been to a significant extent marginalised in tourism research (Dickinson & Robbins, 2008; Khadaroo & Seetanah, 2008) even though transport is considered a key factor in the success of sustainable tourism development (Gossling et al., 2009; Page & Connell, 2009). Duval (2007, p. 6) argues that ‘...the importance of accessibility is such that the ability of a destination to attract tourists is largely contingent on the availability and efficiency of transport needed to travel to that destination’. In rural areas transport systems are primarily established to enable local communities the freedom of movement and the ability to transport goods thus permitting the survival of remote regions, however they also lend themselves to a provision of access for tourism (Hall, Kirkpatrick, & Mitchell, 2005; Page & Ge, 2009). This relationship is intensified in islands since visitors will, in the main, be reliant on public transport services in order to reach their destination thus raising the transport element within the tourism agenda.

In order to elicit sustainable economic development there requires to be a transport system adequate to cope with the demand of tourist flow without exceeding the carrying capacity of the area and effective destination management is mandatory (Page & Connell, 2009; Sorupia, 2005). With tourism proving a significantly valuable industry within island areas and ease of access perceived to have such an influence on destination choices, a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between the two would logically seem imperative. However research has been suggested as lacking, specifically within Scottish transport and tourism (McQuaid & Greig, 2003; Thompson & Ferguson, 2007) even though the tourism industry is consistently cited as critical to Scottish island economies and considered a key growth sector for them (Highlands & Islands Enterprise, 2012; Scottish Government, 2011). Payet (2010) suggests that rural transport may be characterised and driven by tourism requirements in regions where there is a high level of importance attributed to the revenue leisure visitors can bring to peripheral areas. This offers a stark comparison to Thompson and Schofield’s (2007) study findings that the tourism market in urban areas has little influence on public transport which is generally centred on the requirements of the local population presenting an argument to support increased attention on transport services in rural communities.

2.4. The policy environment

A destination’s remoteness only seeks to amplify its dependence on transport connections elevating the preservation of access as a key government objective within rural. Where there is an absence of viability in Scottish services, transportation is largely supported by subsidies with the purpose of safeguarding against inconsistency of service, particularly during periods of recession or, as is characteristic of island destinations, where seasonality occurs. However the policy relationship between transport and tourism has been perceived as non-cohesive with many political objectives acting separately from one another (King, 2007; Page, 2009b; Weston & Davies, 2007). Lohmann and Duval (2011) suggest that the processes governments’ follow in assessing and integrating transport provision with tourism development should be clearer and more adjoined, feeding into the greater economic wellbeing of an area and its growth and development prospects. A more holistic consideration to development has also been identified as the key to accessing government funding within tourism. Wilson, Fesenmaier, Fesenmaier and van Es (2001) report that financial support is more likely to be agreed upon if the area for which it is being sought can show that there is a commitment to the development of sustainable tourism which will benefit organisations collectively. There has been an emphasis on destinations working together in order to realise this preceded by much discussion in research as to the importance of collaborative behaviour in achieving sustainability (Bramwell & Lane, 2000; Vernon et al., 2005). However the number of stakeholders involved in tourism raises difficulties in terms of cohesion in consensual planning and management strategies (Jamal & Getz, 1995). Because of this challenge tourism is often a neglected industry when it comes to applying policy. Arguments frequently fail to progress beyond who should implement and control tourism policy with disagreements...
pertaining to the level of protocol and the implications certain regulations may have on individual businesses (Scott, 2011). The pervasiveness of tourism and what constitutes a “tourism” business or service remains ambiguous and indistinct from a general provision generating reluctance and an inability for any one policy area to take responsibility. Stevenson, Airey and Miller (2008, p. 8), perceive that this leaves it, at a national and local level, ‘...discretionary, minimally funded and delivered on the margins of larger service areas’.

Furthermore, the complexity of interorganisational collaboration between transport and tourism requires stakeholder relationships to not only work across industries but also to traverse the public, private and third sector. The structural distinction of the transport industry which is heavily influenced by public sector intervention contrasts with the complex network of independent SMEs that make up the tourism industry, embedding a challenge greater than those notoriously faced by same sector or same industry collaborations. However research on rural tourism has consistently shown that tourism stakeholders within peripheral areas consider the inclusion and involvement of the public sector as pivotal, irrespective of the often evasive nature of this relationship. Their role as the “enabler” to lead, strategize and coordinate the development of tourism is where they are perceived to hold value, with claims that the efforts of other contributing stakeholders would be futile without public sector involvement (Briendham; 2007; Scott, 2011). The breadth of stakeholder participation and interconnectedness of problems across a variety of policy areas stimulates the need for a collaborative approach across sectors when it comes to managing service delivery in rural communities (Commission for Rural Communities, 2008).

A cross-sectoral approach attempts to overcome conflicting policies which undermine rather than support each other (Christensen & Laegreid, 2007; Emerson, Nabatchi, & Balogh, 2012). Cross-sector collaboration is often a pathway for organisations to engage across sectoral boundaries in order to generate a greater capacity of potential by broadening knowledge and skills to diminish gaps within the extent of their own capabilities (Greenwald, 2008; Sullivan, Barnes, & Matka, 2002). A repercussion of the spatial separation which islands encounter has been observed in the social capital built from the challenges this presents. Relationships emerge as a coping mechanism to the vulnerabilities of island destinations. The small population sizes, close and overlapping connections, and strong cultural institutions present in island communities have been contributory to their perceived favourable environment for the propagation of social capital (Baldacchino, 2005; Scheyvens & Momsen, 2008). The advantages they gain through their distinct and diminutive structures include the potential to build strong identities and social cohesion. Kilpatrick and Falk (2003) consider island communities to be ideal settings for studying social capital since their infrastructure is readily isolated and clear boundaries provide parameters for delineation. However, similar to collaborative activity, the investment and devotion necessary to generate social capital requires significant investment in time and effort and an environment conducive to allowing these relationships to develop is imperative (Adler & Kwon, 2002).

3. Methodology

This exploratory study sought to gain an understanding of the nature and challenges evident within a relationship between transport and tourism from the perspective of the research participants. Therefore the research was undertaken through in-depth phenomenological interviews via the compatible selection of purposive and snowball sampling thus reaching decision on who to interview by combining the researcher’s knowledge of the topic area with those recommended through networking and suggestions delivered following the commencement of the interview process (Denscombe, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Only those with knowledge of and relevance within the study design frame were pertinent for inclusion therefore non-probability sampling was mandatory. The criteria for participant selection included evidence of a strategy, business plan or web page narrative around:

- A remit in directing or contributing to the provision of transport and/or tourism within one of the island areas involved in the study.
- Discussion around transport, tourism and collaboration (but not necessarily together) and an interest, motivation or concern regarding each.
- An active role in participatory governance through engagement with transport or tourism groups and forums within the local destination.

To augment the accuracy of the sample selection a content analysis of supportive literature pertaining to each of the participant organisations was carried out. The purpose of this was twofold; first a consultation of the organisations’ background through a deliberation of the narrative allowed an understanding of their aims, objectives and priorities to develop. This assisted in the tailoring of the interviews to ensure that the direction of the questioning would be appropriate and effective. It also helped to legitimise the applicability of that particular participant for recruitment and the justification for identifying their value and relevance in the study. Second, a familiarisation with the organisation helped to demonstrate to the participant that due attention had been given to their individual remit and philosophy, in order to pre-empt rapport with the participant.

Data was collected from participants across six island areas through a series of 34 semi-structured interviews, each lasting approximately 1 h, each undertaken via face-to-face contact. The interviews were driven by the use of a small number of questions derived from the key research themes in order to guide the in-depth conversations around these topics. Phenomenologically-based research offered an exploration into how respondents perceived and drew meaning from their association with the study phenomena, in this case the engagement of the transport and tourism industries and any form of recognised relationship between them. It therefore required a method of data collection that allowed a sense of flexibility and freedom to probe participants further than the interview questions necessarily permitted in order to gain the richness of information sought by qualitative analysis (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Semi structuring the interviews provided the scope to modify the initial line of enquiry depending on the answer provided by the respondent in order to tease out any interesting or important matters which arose. The findings were then coded and categorised thematically. During the data analysis stage, codes were generated initially a priori led by the secondary data collected during the literature review to activate the process, but also from the primary data itself by distinguishing meaningful words, phrases and sentences to generate themes relating to the research questions and objectives.

The ability to apply data triangulation was a determinant of the sampling strategy chosen. The benefit of its employment in this research was the opportunity it provided to achieve a differentiation between the place and space of participants in order to obtain slices of data across various elements (Bell & Bryman, 2003; Flick, 2009). The intention was to test rather than demonstrate the concregacy of results with the perception that inconsistencies would offer a deeper meaning of the data, a greater understanding of the study environment and therefore increased validity (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). The inclusion of multiple stakeholder groups across industries, sectors and geographical locations.
sought to generate the construction of a more holistic picture and add weight to the argument that different realities exist to different people depending on their standpoint. Lincoln (1995) puts much onus on the importance of ensuring the voices of many perspectives are heard in qualitative research and considers the “fairness” criterion a measure of a balanced stakeholder involvement.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. The value of the transport–tourism relationship

The importance of the tourism industry within island areas was something touched upon by almost all of the interview participants. This was critical to establish at a preliminary point as the extent to which tourism was valued was anticipated to resonate in the commitment and drive for stakeholders to work together. Whilst there was an expectation of enthusiasm to be delivered by tourism stakeholders, there was found to be an equally strong recognition of tourism's economic significance from stakeholders pertaining to transport. Osti, Faccioli and Brida (2011) consider there to be a direct and reciprocal relationship between users and producers of the tourism product underpinned by earlier research from Ap and Crompton (1993) suggesting that direct beneficiaries from tourism are likely to embrace the industry and activities it involves. The critical part transport operations play in the tourism product, particularly in island scenarios where the relationship between transport and tourism is exaggerated, provides a rationale for the discernible recognition of tourism. There was emphasis of a heavy reliance on the tourism contribution and the custom it provides to local transport services and this was considered by transport stakeholders as imperative to viable operations:

If it was not for the tourism market over the summertime we would not exist because 80% of our income is from May to September, the tourist season (R31).

Ferry operators know that, you know tourism is a key part of their business and if you look at the figures in terms of seasonality, where you are certainly carrying double the passengers and vehicles in summer than you are in winter, if not more than that in some cases (R14).

The perspective from a tourism stakeholder unsurprisingly echoed the intrinsic dependency:

An island community is separated from the whole, we need to have transport, we need to have links with the transport managers, carriers, whatever it is to do with transport because the journey maybe culminates here but you have to think from the start of the journey to ensure that the experience is a consistent one… I think it (transport) plays a fundamental part in what we do and what we have here in terms of tourism. If it was not for the transport there would be questions about our viability (R12).

Given the perceived interdependence, it was considered “essential” that transport and tourism industries in island areas worked “hand-in-hand” and these perceptions naturally translated across to the emphasis on relationships between the two:

We do a lot of partnership working obviously with the local council and in relation to transport, if it runs we engage with it because we need to know that these people are joined up and aware and understand what opportunities are available for their customers because a lot of them are visitors (R29).

We all recognise that we have to work together because if we don’t we’re going to fail and most of the time I feel it’s quite a balanced relationship, we need the flights and the ferries as much as they need us, even if that is just for information (R33).

The only case where this opinion faltered slightly was in the Shetland Isles where they differ from the other island groups studied in terms of their heavy reliance on the oil industry to maintain the buoyancy of their local economy. This coupled with a more prominent geographical remoteness inhibiting the development capacity through distance and creating a more niche tourism product curtailed the extent to which tourism income was widely relied upon. The Shetland example provided an interesting comparison to many of the other island areas studied due to its increased isolation and reduced reliance on tourism. Despite this, there was a consistency in the message of interdependence within the transport–tourism relationship:

No tourism business would invest in, emm, infrastructure or products unless it was confident that there would be a market to access that infrastructure and those products. So that is a significant constraint in Shetland, that confidence doesn’t exist because of that (transport) constraint on the market so the external ferry link has got a real influence on tourism development in Shetland (R24).

It also proved to underline the resilience of the perception that tourism can provide what one stakeholder deemed to be “low hanging fruit” or easily obtained gains. While tourism may not have been considered a frontrunner in economic dependence, stakeholders still generally perceived tourism as an important industry for Shetland in terms of the sustainability element and the provision of a source of income. Respondent 27 discussed key opportunities to boost the profile of the region through tourism by using events and festivals to showcase the destination in the hope of elevating the brand. Further he considered that a by-product of working together could help to generate local camaraderie:

Events are definitely a beneficial tool in helping to attract people to Shetland, they provide something that you can hang the Shetland brand onto, it also focuses the local people as well into colluding or collaborating coming together to do something partly through civic pride but partly because they realise that it provides an opportunity as well, you know, if they work together they can achieve something more and see the benefits very directly that come out of an event (R27).

Aside from transport systems and services providing accessibility for tourism, there was regular discussion beyond the logistical dimension with the conveyance of the transport experience as having an emotive quality. A relationship between transport and tourism was considered to be more than service provision; the element of transportation within the tourism product was perceived as a key part of the overall experience. This reflects discussion which has arisen to make an ontological application to the tourist journey with consideration of it as a significant part of the tourism experience and not just as a means to an end (Boopan, 2006; Pearce, 1992). Within Baum’s (1997, p. 21) contemplation of the journey to an island he conveys that, ‘There is something special and different about getting into a boat or an aeroplane as a necessity in order to reach your destination…’ Many respondents spoke about the journey to an island as an intrinsic part of the process, an embedded element in what tourism involves:

They are not just the way people get to the islands; they are part of the holiday… You know the, the, a ferry is part of this whole experience, it’s not just the bus to the airport, and the
Calmac, you know black and white ferries with the red funnel, it’s very iconic imagery... (R13).

One respondent even considered the point from his own perspective, as an islander, going off on holiday himself. This conveyed the inherent recognition of transport’s ability to interweave fluidly into a credible aspect of the visitor experience:

It’s (the ferry) part of the char.. it’s part of the experience because on some summer’s day coming over the pond there, a sheet of glass, the views as well, you know getting to see Bute for the first time... “Is that Bute, or is that Bute or is that still the mainland?” It’s the guesswork, I’ve done it myself! But that’s the holiday started, you know our holiday starts sitting on that ramp (points to pier) every October, ready to go away. We go away for a fortnight and that’s when our holiday starts. Our kids are hyper, I’ve handed the safe keys over, my mobile phone is switched off and I am mentally finished, and that’s when my holiday starts, on that ramp over there, ready to go on the boat. The kids will get a wee treat on the boat, a can of fizzy juice or something like that... And it’s exactly the same for people coming in the opposite direction (R16).

As such, some stakeholders described a desire to merge the journey of getting to the destination into part of the visitor experience through the provision of tourism paraphernalia at Mainland departure points thus allowing visitors to “get excited for what lies ahead”. There was an impetus to try and blur the boundaries between the two industries providing an outcome which aimed to result in greater fluency between transport nodes. Respondent 7 shared the idea that the transport journey should coalesce as part of the whole tourist experience, thus creating an ambience enriched by the contribution from both industries:

From the minute they, they boarded the ferry, that was when their experience of Arran started, ideally they would have wanted it at the harbour side but that was a more difficult one. So the whole visit to Arran, the whole experience started on the ferry and they brought in volunteers and staff to man the ferry, they would give out samples to say “Look this is the beer, this is the cheese, this is the accommodation, do you know where you’re going to stay?”, so it was about creating that visitor journey (R7).

It became clear that stakeholders had a mature understanding of the transport role as a significant element in promoting an attractive destination. This is indeed a key matter for attention within tourism planning since Dickinson and Dickinson (2006) argue that the extent of influence poor accessibility has on destinations can discourage visitors from attempting to reach these places altogether. What was also conveyed was an awareness that the journey to and from an island and the travel around it would be a critical consideration in a tourist’s deliberation as to where they would choose to visit:

It (transport) is part of the holiday experience, you have to sell it as that, the total package and it does not give a very good impression if you cannot get around the islands, or if the standard of provision does not match the rest of what the destination can offer. As I said before it is not cheap to get here and when a visitor steps on that boat they are paying for a service and the only way to join up these services is to work together, to integrate with each other, to collaborate between us (R33).

Transport was seen as a vital aspect within the various components which create the tourism product and working together was deemed the best strategy in achieving integration amongst a collection of stakeholders. A collaborative approach has been pervasively upheld as advantageous in driving coherency within tourism (Bramwell & Sharman, 1999; Jamal & Stronza, 2009). However this study demonstrated that whilst there was much ambition to engage with each other, working across sectors in this scenario presented structural obstacles. Discussion highlighted that some stakeholder groups have more malleability than others. Where the tourism industry has the potential to flex to some extent, transport systems were deemed more complex when it came to implementing modifications. Changes to service provision could have a contagion effect impacting upon a variety of links making the slightest adjustment disruptive to the interconnectedness of services:

There was a change of ferry schedule, I think there was a change of schedule because a bus schedule had changed and so the ferry schedule had to change to suit the bus schedule and the bus schedule had changed because the rail schedule had changed and, you know it goes all the way back... If the act of getting here is disjointed and not pleasurable then it’s a rubbish start to the holiday, it’s a really important thing... (R13).

4.2. Structural disparity

Events and festivals were commonly used to exemplify a demonstration of collaboration between transport and tourism. This was perhaps because they gave stakeholders the opportunity to reflect on intensified situations where there would be a mutual dependency—that is, an attraction or purpose for visiting (the event itself) and access provision in the form of transportation links required to attend the event. In a sense events and festivals provided concentrated occurrences of the relationship generally considered necessary between transport and tourism stakeholders. One participant reflected on the need to work together in order to achieve success:

A week on Saturday we are having the Arran Malt and Music Festival and, emm, this is our third year of doing such an event and, emm, and with that, you know we are attracting potentially up to 2000 people and so I know already that the car, the ferry is already booked and, emm, it’s a very busy day for them, for the ferry and emm, the coach company, Stagecoach, they, I’ve worked with them and they are running additional buses throughout the day, emm, so we’ve actually got six coaches arriving at 11:30 a.m., emm, off that ferry, so it is a case of working together to make sure the event is successful (R3).

However it was noted that transport operators were not always in a position to offer the desired flexibility to meet demands in terms of their capacity to deliver a supporting role. Whilst one operator may be in a position to supply additional provision, this did not automatically equate to a seamless consequence since there often involved a chain between nodes and the possibility of a weak link:

The key operators on these routes do try to work together but it’s challenging, particularly when you switch from a winter to a summer timetable, emm, Calmac, it’s not unusual for them, when they see an usual spike in activity coming up, it might be that there’s an event on, they’ll put an extra ferry on, it does not mean the bus company will be putting extra buses on (R4).

Further acknowledgement by other respondents emerged to reinforce this observation and from it two issues transpired. First a need for comprehensive planning and second, that inflexibility pertained more to unavailability than it did to apathy with transport operators’ engaged with their remit to fulfil routine contractual provision such as school runs and scheduled services. A pervasive message developed throughout the discussions with
both transport and tourism stakeholders delivering a resounding message that the needs of the local population was the priority regardless of the recognition of tourism value. What also emerged was a dialogue around the challenges for transport operators to balance a local provision with a visitor service:

If a key attraction is en route to the supermarket then that's fantastic, you're killing two birds with one stone so to speak, but the, the likelihood of such serendipity occurring, I should imagine is, is few and far between… In the real world they may well be at other ends of the emm, the island so it's challenging when you're trying to provide a service to fairly diverse markets, especially on such a, such rigid budgets (R1).

What we can weave into that (local) network, emm, is a kind of serendipitous benefit if you like to tourism, but it is difficult to put public money into tourist specific services when it just costs money rather than, and we can't even breakeven, emm, so you've got that dichotomy between needing to develop the tourism sector and providing a local service (R2).

While the objectives of tourism stakeholders had visitors at the core, transport stakeholders conveyed the need to consider a wider remit of consumer. Further external disparities pertaining to the two industries presented in the form of regulation. The structural parameters around tourism expansion were generally considered to be broader and more pliable than those applicable to transport with the majority of tourism businesses privately owned. Any amendments to operators of Public Service Vehicles (PSVs) within the island destinations were required to go through complex and time consuming government processes in order to make the necessary changes:

It's not at all easy to make changes to the bus timetables, because you need to give eight weeks' notice and that's the tourist season over by the time you have identified the need for a change, received approval and implemented it (R34).

There was evidence that the fluidity and interrelatedness of tourism, alternating between autonomous and collaborative behaviour, was at times difficult to align with stated subsidised and therefore state regulated transport provision. The capricious behaviour of consumers' requires versatility within the tourism industry in order to provide an attractive and competitive offer however this did not necessarily fit with the conventional behaviour of public administration and therefore the scope and speed of implementing transport services. Whilst a relationship between transport and tourism was clearly deemed important, it did not automatically translate to one which was effortless with further descriptions communicated by stakeholders as “crucial, but somewhat… sometimes a bit disjointed” and “mutually respectful although often incompatible”. These incompatibilities were regularly specified as resulting from the structural antithesis between the two industries which was considered preventative to a closer working relationship between transport and tourism:

Tourist operators don't necessarily have to comply with as many restrictions as transport operators, and the architecture that comes with transport systems. That's perhaps the greatest challenge between a stronger working relationship between the two, the fact that they're so structurally different, tourism is much more nebulous than transport can afford to be and sometimes this makes the fit difficult (R21).

An example of this observation was identified in practice through the obligation of PSVs to comply with the rules administered by the Traffic Commissioner, responsible for transport licensing and regulation in Scotland:

They (tourists) obviously want everything to link in properly for them but sometimes that does not quite work because we are operating a service, emm, and if the boat is running late then the boat does not make the bus and the bus cannot wait for the boat to come in, because we are a registered service and we have to abide by the regulations set by the Traffic Commissioner… (R11).

The rigidity of structure faced by transport services through strict adherence with the Traffic Commissioner, although undoubtedly necessary for continuity of service in many cases, demonstrated a detrimental impact on the holistic effectiveness of an island destination, increasing the potential for disjointedness. Island areas were considered as unique entities with distinct idiosyncrasies and challenges, unable to be homogenously compared to other areas, particularly those with large and regular transport networks. This belief conveyed a narrative around the requirement for local governance networks thus allowing decision-making to reflect the identified needs of destinations locally:

One of the things that we're looking to try and do is to say to the Traffic Commissioner, emm, through Transport Scotland, “You need to look at island services in a slightly different way than let's say..."…. You could understand it on let's say a high-frequency with round about a dozen or eighteen vehicles on one route, because the next vehicle will be along in something like 10–15 min time, like LRT (Lothian Regional Transport). But when there are only three services a day then you've got to think about that (R22).

Although internal structures and processes are critical determinants within the capacity of organisations to collaborate (Gajda, 2004; Huxham, 1993), from a regulatory dimension these were seen to be challenged within the relationship between transport and tourism. What was identified however was a commitment for stakeholders to come together at a local level for the purpose of collective deliberation and progression of local priorities for the benefit of the destination holistically:

The Area Tourism Partnership is a gathering of everybody who has an interest in tourism whether its local authority, the Enterprise, Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise, the DMO or the industry association whatever there is and Visit Scotland, plus other partners who have an interest, say in Stornoway for example we have the Stornoway Harbour we have Scottish Natural Heritage, Calmac various bodies like that they'll come together and sit round the table and discuss moving tourism forward (R12).

The key to success is shared agendas, shared objectives, and shared resources and shared work if you like. So get out of our silos and keep in mind that we're all focused on a generally similar set of objectives and that is the well-being and future of our island (R24).

This reflected the prominent idea of collaboration as an activity driven by goal consensus (Gray, 1985; Provan & Kenis, 2008) and built on shared visions and values (Hansen & Nohria, 2004). Further, it was conveyed that effective stakeholder interaction would depend on the inclusion of multiple parties in order to consider and incorporate the various perspectives and potential impacts of those affected:

It (collaboration) has absolutely been a collective input from many different people and it would not have achieved the richness that it has were it not for everybody coming together and adding something from their own personal knowledge and experience (R33).
It's better coming together with ideas and you work up your debates through one body and that body then presents a view of the disparate groups within the islands whether it be hauliers or seafood providers or tourism businesses, a change in one thing for somebody might impact somebody else so there's always got to be compromise and knowledge and consideration of how the change will affect other groups and sectors (R25).

Generating an environment conducive to building collaborative capacity was deemed critical in providing a platform for stakeholder interaction to explore possible solutions to the barriers faced. Collaboration has long since been regarded as a mechanism to solve complex and cross-cutting problems over the long term by bringing together those who are close to a problem and combining their insights, complementary strengths and resources (Gray, 2000; Welbourne, 2008). Collaborative forums sought to give the industries an opportunity to engage with each other in order to build social capital in an effort to overcome the joint problems they encountered. Social (or relational) capital is often highlighted as one of the most valuable consequences of collaboration and a strong motivation for tourism organisations to enter into a collaborative relationship (Gray, 2000; Welbourne, 2008). The foundations it provides for stakeholders to engage and interact promotes the development of key resources such as trust, reciprocity and shared goals (Erridge & Greer, 2002) and Kanter (1994) suggests that the emergence of these relational elements allow managers to leverage the utmost value from collaboration. Welbourne (2008, p. 488), posits 'the real “true” assets of relational capital in collaboration to be rooted not just in the people involved but in the relationships they can develop. These relationships between transport and tourism, developed through stakeholder interaction, were regularly upheld as fundamental to enable a sharing of resources and perspectives in order to consider possible solutions which were collectively constructed.

4.3. Local governance and leadership

Another area in which island regions had trouble conforming to a more consolidated and centrally driven direction surfaced during the period of restructuring within Scotland’s national tourism organisation from Scottish Tourist Board to Visit Scotland. A more centralised management structure and prominence of focus on a marketing role was considered to have diminished the individuality and diversity of Scottish islands by selling “Scotland” as a whole. This encouraged many of the island areas to establish what was generally referred to in the interviews as a “DMO” (Destination Marketing/Management Organisation) with the objective of enabling stakeholders to manage and direct the industry from a grassroots level through local governance mechanisms. The importance of the public sector and industry’s involvement in the ownership and leadership of the tourism remit was touched upon by various respondents and was something about which they appeared to be quite emphatic:

The industry has an interest, they want to see development, emm, they want to work with the various bodies to ensure that these developments happen so the industry is always at the forefront of moving things forward… The public sector plays a role, but probably the industry has a greater role. We need to work in partnership with them in order to deliver for them and in order to assist them to deliver for themselves (R12).

I think you’re finding more and more that local organisations, industry led organisations are taking ownership and responsibility of how their local area is being marketed and developed (R13).

We are reliant on the industry guys to kind of lead on this and show us how it’s done (R5).

The introduction of DMOs was indicated as a positive move towards a mechanism through which a more joined up approach and source of leadership could be realised by the industry:

In recent years as you’re probably aware of from other places if not from here, there’s been a rise of destination organisations and at the time we wrote the original strategy in 2006, they were more or less unheard of in Scotland and now we’ve got some fairly well established ones and quite active ones. So now when it comes to the delivery, the industry delivering certain things, there may be is at least a more representative industry body that might be able to lead on that (R25).

However industry members as leaders were challenged by a lack of resources, namely time and money. Many contributors were already involved in the tourism industry and so participated on a voluntary basis driven by a motivation to advance tourism issues which ultimately affected their own individual business but with no real authority or efficacy:

Obviously once you get to the start of the season everyone is really busy so nobody has time to push anything through so if they do not get it done by then, it does not get done (R10).

They (industry members) have their own jobs so they can only give a finite amount of time to actually progressing projects, they have limited resources, limited funding (R12).

There appeared to be a level of disconnect between the idea that industry should lead and the reality of what they were actually able to accomplish. While much dialogue was dedicated to discussion around the importance of the industry leading tourism locally, they were often not perceived to have the capacity or resources to carry tourism forward although there was an expectation for this to be the case. The issue of structures was again raised as an emergent challenge to contend with but this time in the context of roles in tourism as opposed to regulatory obstacles:

The local authorities, the provision of visitor information at a local destination level while delivered by VisitScotland is reliant on funding from local government to deliver that and it’s all through service agreements, they will agree what they’re buying from VisitScotland. So what you’ve got is you’ve now got these destination groups emerging as being the front-runners for the businesses, but the structures are not, are not changing… So the structures, I think if you, I think if you’re looking at the role of these groups they have to work within the existing structures and until those central government structures change you’re always going to have this, well who actually is the front runner? Who is the leader? Is that the national tourism agency or is it the private sector? (R7)

Further discussion indicated that the apparent transition from public sector to industry management and the lack of clarity this period created had to some extent left the leadership of the industry in a state of ambivalence:

What the industry were looking for was (a leadership) commitment from the council and there is a sense of, it’s not a statutory obligation for the council, it’s not their remit, it’s somebody else’s to deal with (R5).

This was an observation evidenced ubiquitously throughout the island groups studied. Leadership is a key dimension of collaboration and has been cited as an antecedent to successful collaborative efforts by some (Ansell & Gash, 2007; Weber, Lovrich, &
emphasised the inclusion criteria to pertain to those who have the for stakeholders to come together. At a strategy level, respondents level was considered to present as an amalgam of forces, a extensiveness:

This was re "fl fundamental role in collaborative governance (Ansell & Gash, 2007) and escalated as catalytic to collaboration by others (Mandell & Keast, 2009; Morse, 2010). It has also been linked to the success of collaboration across sectors (Bryson, Crosby, & Stone, 2006). In tourism, leadership is perceived as contributory to successful development within peripheral regions for the motivation and direction it provides to collective stakeholder groups. Yet in the context of this study it was an aspect cited as less evident than it needed to be but with no distinguishable blueprint for identifying an appropriate candidate to lead:

I think it (leadership) has been necessary for a long time, but, you know it does take somebody to... To grab the issue and initiate it and there has not been a lot of that. There have been dabbles with that over the years, emm... (R15).

For that (destination management) to be effective requires the correct strategy in place, the correct stakeholders round the table and everybody signing up to the strategy and in my view I don’t think that’s completely in place... Somebody needs to take a lead on it, it needs to take, it needs someone to take the lead (R7).

Whilst industry input was clearly perceived as critical to the governance of tourism, it was evident that it would not work in isolation. There was still the need for a facilitator role from a body or bodies that had the ability to look more comprehensively at problems and the capacity to deliver or implement solutions at a broader level. It was within this remit that the value of the public sector was recognised:

It is about finding the right relationship with the national bodies rather than, you know... We (industry) need to work with the national tourist boards but we have to find the relationship, the key that unlocks the door to that... I think you must work with national tourism organisations and you can help them come up with campaigns that better suit island groups, you know... (R25).

There’s certain things in there that will... Only the local authorities can attend to, emm, and address whereas, emm, only the kind of leaders and chief executives would address because it’s going up to Scottish Government level. And there’s other things that the... The industry can address, you know so it’s all bringing that together... (R9).

There is a distinct perception that public agencies have a fundamental role in collaborative governance (Ansell & Gash, 2007) although it is equally well highlighted that government alone cannot “solve” collective problems (Weber & Khademian, 2008). This was reflected in the interviews; governance at a local level was considered to present as an amalgam of forces, a collection of organisational input with the advantage in the ability for stakeholders to come together. At a strategy level, respondents emphasised the inclusion criteria to pertain to those who have the ability and resources to actually deliver action or progress a project. Dialogue focussed on the importance of inclusiveness when working collaboratively but with most discussion making the key point that inclusion referred to representativeness as opposed to extensiveness:

I think you need to have the right people round the table who can move it forward and not just based on membership of an organisation (R12).

Leaders in cross-sector collaboration are characterised by their boundary-spanning abilities and their aptitude to appreciate and understand varied perspectives (Lasker, Weiss, & Miller, 2001). This resonated with the conveyed need for holistic consideration and is indicative of the rationale for a reliance on the public sector within this role. However the changes which have taken place within tourism policy in Scotland in recent years are evidently yet to settle into a model which reflects the stability and sustainability sought by a number of participants and the destinations themselves.

5. Conclusion

The relationship between transport and tourism, although clearly perceived as critical in the island areas studied, suffers from a number of challenges. A key obstacle is the structural disparity within which they are expected to function. While transport is, in the case of this study, heavily subsidised by the state and therefore strictly regulated, tourism is predominantly a framework of private businesses at liberty to adapt and adjust. However recognition of interdependence between the two industries provides the advocacy and drive to develop a relationship strong enough to overcome such barriers. While collaboration in this case challenged the theoretical necessity of shared structures and processes what it did display was shared goal consensus and a mutual perception that the success of the destination would be reflected in the ability to achieve a collective effort. The study conveyed that stakeholders involved in tourism are still adjusting to the shift from government as ‘provider’ in a centralised and managerial role to the emergence of a more collective approach to destination management embedded in governance processes. What this shift in control has highlighted is that neither one sector nor one industry can prevail in a scenario which is compounded in interdependence.

A further challenge occurred in that this collective environment which is reliant on leadership to drive development, results in no one identifiable or discernible leader since a divergence of resource strengths are held between participants. The use of social capital has built invaluable relationships between the actors involved. These have helped to overcome structural barriers in the form of a disparate architecture between transport and tourism and the capacity they have created for collaboration has encouraged the development of shared visions and understandings contributing to mutually agreed actions and the identification of an appropriate member/s to lead on initiatives. The reaction to the restructuring of the national tourism organisation with the development of DMOs provides evidence of a strong commitment to develop island areas based on local decision-making. This has not been without its challenges and some discrepancy has arisen over the perceived necessity but realistic ability of the private sector to deliver on leadership without the required supportive governance structures in place. Furthermore, the organic way in which these local governance mechanisms have developed means that each island area was seen to be different from the next. The participatory stakeholders, funding channels and sources of leadership evident in each case varied leading to outcomes which ranged from effective in some instances to duplicated in others and raised questions in term of sustainability.

While the findings of this research were embedded in the context of transport and tourism stakeholders in Scottish islands and their responsive behaviour to obstacles faced within their external surroundings, the focus on an environment conducive to better cross-sectoral interaction was central to the study. This is a concept which can be transferred to other rural destinations and alternative industry relationships within them, with anticipation that the outcomes will be affiliated with the evidence, nature and strength of local governance. Commonalities occur between the challenges which face island areas and those which are applicable to rural areas more broadly. The most obvious shared obstacles for transport and tourism stakeholders in peripheries include, a dependence on tourism markets to stimulate local economies;
an increased reliance on transport systems due to distances from central hubs; and wrangles between the delivery of a public service and the provision of ‘tourist’ transport. While islands may promote a more intensified scenario given the often extensive remoteness of location, the common constraints of rural areas more generally can benefit from mutually relevant solutions providing a wider scope for discussion. The challenges presented within the destinations of this study advocated the criticality of relationship between transport and tourism thus promoting the need for collaboration as a tool to overcome the inherent difficulties faced and to maximise resources through integration. To this end two key areas of interest have emerged. Firstly, there is a need for participants to understand the role they play and the value they hold within collaborative relationships for utmost effectiveness. Much evidence suggested that at a local level this would involve the public sector providing a supportive function while the private sector, which would ultimately be tasked with implementation, required the scope necessary to specify how activities should and could be delivered. Regardless of this balance since it will no doubt vary from one destination to another, a collaborative approach to governance where many perspectives are considered and voices heard from a number of representative stakeholders provides a scenario better informed in the nature of its endeavour and better equipped to deal with the challenges which may arise. Further, establishing a better understanding of problems which exist at a local level and developing feasible solutions to them through collective engagement and robust governance mechanisms will help to reinforce the potential for political change thus helping to break down potential barriers. Secondly, the feasibility of an organisation to collaborate will be to a large extent driven by the environment in which it finds itself and the environment it is able to create for collaboration to emerge. Therefore facilitation of occasions to engage and integrate with stakeholders across sectors to discuss issues which are mutually imposing is invaluable in driving action which possesses a comprehensive appreciation of the situation in its entirety.

References
