The Role of heritage tourism on the Shetland Islands

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Abstract

Purpose: This paper aims to determine the role of heritage tourism in Shetland Island destination development and how this links to tourism public policy in island communities.

Design/methodology/approach: The study is conducted in the Shetland Islands, located off the north coast of Scotland, UK. Descriptive and inductive approaches are utilised to enable the researchers to recognise multiple social structures and draw conclusions from observations and specific information. Primary research focuses on semi-structured interviews with key informants. Data is then analysed via a mix of content analysis and interpretation of the responses through a connected narrative approach.

Findings: Seasonality is a key feature of Shetland Island tourism, alongside other key limitations to growth including transport links and climatic conditions. Potential conflicts exist between tourism stakeholders and in perceptions of the effectiveness of the heritage tourism public policy in Shetland, though overall it is stakeholder collaboration that succeeds in enhancing heritage conservation and development.

Practical implications: While the findings relate specifically to the Shetland Islands, the general conclusions offer an example of best practice, where the tourism public policy for heritage-focussed tourism in island communities could be used in comparable destinations.

Originality/value: The choice of the Shetland Islands as an example of a cold water island destination offers the opportunity to extend existing research and examine how the community of Shetland embraces the opportunities afforded by tourism as an alternative to traditional industries.

Introduction

Shetland (or the Shetland Islands) is a group of over 100 islands, of which only 15 are currently inhabited. Despite their extreme geographical position in between the Atlantic Ocean and the North Sea (the archipelago lies between 60° and 62° north – same latitude as Anchorage in Alaska, Bergen in Norway or vast parts of Siberia) the warming effect of the Gulf Stream creates a remarkably mild climate and results in a relatively bountiful natural environment. These conditions have for centuries attracted various cultural groups, predominantly from the Scandinavian world. Traces of Neolithic, Pictish and Viking settlements can still be seen today in the form of a unique cultural landscape, which is admired by visitors and valued by the local community, who regard their Scandinavian heritage as a crucial part of their culture.

Shetland's tourism industry reflects the importance of the islands' cultural and natural heritage. Local research agencies estimate that 77 per cent of Shetland's visitors come to the islands to experience natural and cultural heritage (AB Associates Ltd. and Macpherson Research, 2006). Local administration and tourism organisations have therefore recognised heritage tourism as an effective means for sustainable destination development and have now for almost two decades been working on the proposition and effective implementation of strategic tourism development plans. One of these initiatives is the newly adopted Heritage Tourism Investment Programme (HTIP), in which the Shetland Community Development Trust in cooperation with numerous local organisations aim to maximise the potential of Shetland's heritage through direct support and funding of various heritage projects (SIC Economic Development Unit, 2007).

A review of academic literature reveals that only a few authors have discussed the development of heritage tourism strategies in island destinations in recent years. While Shetland is the subject of a number of academic articles (Butler, 1996; 1997; Callahan, 1998; Fennel, 1996), there is no study that considers the complexity surrounding the role of heritage tourism in this destination.

Although many authors claim that heritage tourism is one of the most suitable forms of tourism for sustainable economic and social development in remote regions (Garrod and Fyall, 2000; Hall and McArthur; 1996; Harrison, 2002), developing culture and heritage into a successful tourism product can be challenging. Where

many destinations still adopt the traditionalist view of heritage in its conservational sense and with a focus on the supply side, a number of conflicts can occur between the conservationists and the heritage tourism marketers, whose main objectives tend to emphasise the economic benefits of development (Garrod and Fyall, 2000).

This paper aims to investigate the role of cultural and natural heritage tourism in Shetland Island destination development, with a focus on how tourism public policy can contribute to the successful development and marketing of a sustainable heritage tourism product. The paper first sets the context of island tourism, public policy and stakeholder collaboration and the role of heritage tourism within the tourism system. It then presents Shetland as a case study community, one that welcomes tourism as an alternative to its traditional industries and where heritage tourism public policy has been successfully implemented. The paper then concludes with views and recommendations on the role of heritage tourism in the future marketing of heritage and cultural products in island destinations.

Literature review

Heritage and heritage tourism

A review of approaches to defining heritage tourism shows that this concept is an extremely complex. As is the case of the term tourism in general, the academic world has not as yet found agreement over the issue of understanding the nature of heritage tourism in a unified and specific way.

Understanding of heritage can be all encompassing and features many viewpoints, such as visitor experience (Poria *et al.,* 2001; Poria *et al.,* 2003); supply and demand (Apostolakis, 2003); and, the perception of social, natural and cultural history (Christou, 2005). Some authors emphasise the importance of motivations of heritage tourists, who are acting in accordance with their perceptions of their own heritage (Poria *et al.,* 2001). Heritage tourism is also described in terms of tangible objects and resources (Garrod and Fyall, 2001) and intangible experiences and elements of the culture of a social group or nation (Timothy and Boyd, 2002).

Heritage tourism definitions are approached by many authors from a purely descriptive point of view, in categorising the components of what heritage tourism should include (Timothy and Boyd, 2002). The Shetland Community Development

Trust also use this route in establishing the meaning of the term 'heritage' very clearly in their heritage strategy document. Heritage in the Shetland strategy is defined as

> "Manned and unmanned archaeological, historic and natural heritage sites, museums and interpretive centres as a distinct tourism product." (SIC Economic Development Unit, 2007, p.1)

Tourism in island communities

Studies based on tourism development and its implications in island resorts are popular among tourism researchers. These include the work of Apostolopoulos and Gayle (2002), King (1997); Hampton and Christensen (2007); Lockhart and Drakakis-Smith (1997); Farr and Rogers (1994); Harrison (2002) and Briguglio *et al.* (1996). However, most of these studies focus on the island in the Mediterranean, Pacific or Caribbean regions. The notion of the ideal romantic, carefree and exotic destination, which we traditionally associate with the three S's of tourism – 'sun, sea and sand' (King, 1997) can present limitations in terms of academic research. Preconceptions and notions such as environmental degradation and socio-cultural issues are often present in developing countries and might not necessarily be relevant in the Shetland context.

Baldacchino (2006) is one of the very few authors who recognise the differences between islands situated in different geographical locations. The author notes that cold water island destinations have not been receiving enough attention from the academic society. He explores the idea of developing island destinations, which have a choice between following the principles of management and marketing present in warmer climate destinations, or, embarking on a more challenging path of diversification and sustainable development. He focuses on seven areas on interest, which include destination marketing and tourism product development; the concept of remoteness/periphery and how it can be used in the marketing area; the tendency towards concentrated services and economies in small island destinations; the notion of a 'cold tourist'; conflicts of land use versus tourism development; and finally, the issue of political peripheries and dependency.

Baldacchino (2006, p.10) then goes on to highlight some of the most relevant features of cold island destinations that

"tend to have harsh as well as pristine and fragile natural environments, characterised by wide-open spaces. […] They become context for exceptional and expensive form of vigorous, outdoor, adventure or cultural tourism, and direct encounters with nature, history and local culture. The locals […] are not particularly enthusiastic about visitors, […] usually in agreement the visitor numbers must remain low."

The attraction of the remote cold water destinations was also studied by Dann (2006) and Butler (1996). They note that among the main motivations for travel to island destinations is the myth of paradise; the concept of periphery; political independence; physical separateness and perceived purity of island destinations; the spiritual context of the sacred; and, the lack of familiarity in a place where time has stopped.

Butler (1996) contributes to the cold-water tourism debate with his case study on sustainable development in Shetland and Orkney. The author identifies the problems and issues of sustainable tourism and argues that it is possible to eliminate these to some extent - if local control and appropriate policies are adopted. He also stresses the importance of the term 'sustainable development' - tourism should be developed in the context of sustainable development, as opposed to the popular notion of 'sustainable tourism' per se, which often ignores the principles of social inclusion and environmental friendliness (Butler 1996).

Communities and stakeholder collaboration

The importance of heritage in tourism development is evident, whereby many destinations benefit from the growing interest in their cultural and natural resources. However, the positive impacts of tourism on local communities can potentially be jeopardised by degradation of the heritage resources (Aas *et al.* 2005). Where this is the case many contradictions between the aims of the different stakeholders can occur. Aas *et al.* (2005) and many other authors claim that there is a significant difference in the approach of the heritage sphere, whose aim it is to protect and preserve, while the tourism industry has the primary goal of gaining profit.

Heritage conservation and tourism development through stakeholder collaboration are a way of enhancing tourism development in many culturally rich areas. Heritage

could lose its meaning and significance, unless a wide range of stakeholders is involved in the decision-making process (Garrod and Fyall, 2000; Gunn and Var, 2002; Hall and McArthur, 1996). Harrison (2002) applies the concept of community collaboration on cultural tourism and stresses that those organisations responsible for tourism planning need to become more heavily involved in the process of community planning for culture and heritage. It is also crucial to identify all stakeholders and interest groups and to determine any potential conflict areas, as stakeholder collaboration and conflict resolve have many advantages in the long term (. These might include provision of cost effective solutions and using local knowledge, in addition to enabling those stakeholders most affected by the decisions to voice their concerns Aas *et al.,* 2005; Garrod and Fyall, 2000).

On the other hand, disadvantages also exist to multiple stakeholder participation, including difficulties with stakeholder identification, power imbalances and the suppression of minorities within the community (Hall, 2000; Hall and Jenkins, 1995; Tosun, 2000) or unrealistic expectations of some stakeholders (Aas *et al.,* 2005) can be a problem.

Tourism public policy

Tourism policy is a complex process with a large number of actors and partners involved on local, national and international scales (Church *et al.,* 2000). Hall and Jenkins (1995) argue that there has been increasing scepticism and criticisms of the effectiveness of government policies in tourism, while the public sector often has a central planning role. This central role of government in the provision of funds to support the development of island tourism is discussed in relation to several island communities such as Jersey and Bermuda (Christensen and Hampton, 2005), the Seychelles (Gossling, 2003) and Montserrat (Weaver,1995). These funds could take the form of policy instruments such as advocacy and planning, financial incentives, government infrastructure and legal support (Dredge and Jenkins, 2007). As Gossling (2003, p. 21) states, tourism development is often initiated, maintained and controlled by national governments, though several have acknowledged the need to increase the participation of local actor groups. While the reliance on government intervention (Kerr, 2003) may appear limiting at times, government input can demonstrate commitment to environmental conservation, encourage participation

from local stakeholders (Gossling, 2003) or enable economic diversification (Christensen and Hampton, 2005).

When looking at other comparable UK destinations, such as the Isles of Skye, Isle of Man or the Shannon region in Ireland, one sees that heritage and tourism can be approached in very innovative ways, which facilitate community pride in heritage (European Commission, 2002;Harrison, 2002; Jolliffe and Smith, 2001). Sustainability and economical diversification are important issues supported by national and intra-regional policies, where local heritage bodies often have a role of a facilitator for heritage education, partnerships and funding assistance (Harrison, 2002).

Gunn and Var (2002) argue that in order to be effective, tourism planning should predict a better future for everyone involved and should strive to achieve the following four goals: (1) visitor satisfaction improvement; (2) business volume increase (linked to highly competitive markets); (3) sustainable use of resources; and, (4) community and area integration.

A review of current strategies and tourism public policies for heritage tourism development in Scotland and the UK reveals that national tourism policies appear to have gone through three stages of development: (1) the promotion of existing assets to earn foreign exchange; (2) enhancement of the well-being of residents and other stakeholders by managing tourism's positive and negative social, environmental and economic impacts, and finally, (3) development of entrepreneurial policies to encourage quality and competitiveness within the industry (Church *et al.,* 2000; Fayos-Solá, 1996).

In Scotland, heritage tourism rather than being marketed as a separate tourism form or product is an integral part of tourism development across the country, which promotes stakeholder collaboration and partnership (Kerr, 2003; Kerr *et al.*, 2001) and sustainable growth within the changing global tourism environment (Scottish Executive, 2006). Heritage, culture, history, traditions, myths and symbols figure in the majority of promotional publications and strategies.

Research methods

Research in tourism is traditionally based on quantitative evaluations relating to volume and value, while public policies and tourism are often researched in a

descriptive manner (Walle, 1997). In recent years tourism research methods have undergone some considerable changes, generally moving towards a more critical and sophisticated qualitative approach (Goodson and Phillimore, 2004).

Case studies have an interrelated nature, providing the researcher with vast amounts of case-specific information and conceptual insights (Beeton. 2005). They are also said to generally "explore issues, present and past, as they affect one or more units" (Adams *et al..* 2007, p. 112). The structures studied in this paper could be political, cultural, social, economic, and, environmental; with individual experiences varying depending on the viewpoints of different stakeholders. In tourism research the case study approach enables the examination of the key questions on a more subtle level (Beeton, 2005). he general conclusions of the best policy example relating to tourism public policy for heritage tourism in island communities have the potential for use in comparable destinations.

The study includes both descriptive and inductive approaches to achieve the development of the research project objectives, as these allow for the recognition of multiple social structures and for general conclusions from observations and specific information (Adams *et al.*, 2007; Beeton, 2005; Hay, 2000).

Several methods of data collection are adopted: personal communication, literature review, secondary data collection and analysis; and, in-depth semi-structured interviews. Using a semi-structured interview approach enables the researcher to expand on what appears to be significant replies (Bryman and Bell, 2007). For the or the purposes of this study the authors select an interviewee sample consisting of a variety of Shetland's heritage tourism stakeholders from those listed in Table I. These represent a variety of organizations and individuals who can offer very different vantage points on some of the issues identified in the literature review. The responses are anonymous to maintain confidentiality.

Due to the complex nature of the data emerging from the stakeholder interviews, several methods of data analysis are adopted. The data is analysed through a mix of content analysis and interpretation of the responses through what Adams *et al.* (2007) and Hay (2000) identify as 'a connected narrative'. The categories of responses emerging from the interviews are tentatively identified; tentative categories then tested by classifying responses; and, these responses then coded using final categories. Finally, the coded responses are tallied to determine the varying opinions

on certain issues, culminating with a review of the data to identify possible relations between themes. The authors test the validity of this research through analysis of the internal and external relationships between the outcome and the program (Bryman and Bell, 2007), for example, the relationship between public policy and heritage strategies in Shetland.

Table 1. Shetland's tourism stakeholders

Organizations/Bodies Involved in Tourism (generally)	Organizations/Bodies with Specific Focus on Heritage/Heritage Tourism
VisitShetland	VisitShetland
Shetland Islands Council-Economic Development Unit (SIC-EDU)	Shetland Amenity Trust (SAT)
Community Development Trust	Shetland Heritage Association
SIC-Tourism and Culture Panel	RSPB
Shetland Tourism Association	Scottish Natural Heritage
Hotels of Shetland Association	Historic Scotland
Shetland Enterprise	Shetland Family History Society
Shetland Development Trust	SIC-Shetland Community Development Trust
Shetland Charitable Trust	Community Learning and Development
Shetland Recreational Trust	Shetland Field Studies Group
Highlands and Islands Enterprise	+ local heritage/history groups, trusts, local museums and heritage centres
+ Shetland community (local residents/businesses)	

Results and findings

Tourism in Shetland

Shetland Islands boast many exceptional natural and archaeological wonders and a very distinctive culture, which comes from its location at the crossroads between Scotland and Norway. The extensive network of top quality visitor attractions is well distributed around the islands and complemented by a variety of community halls, cafes, and craft shops. Shetland's heritage is a direct testament to the historical development of the islands.

In addition to existing resources and products, many potential attractions and projects are currently underway, with seemingly no limit to heritage tourism development in

terms of visitor attractions supply. Accommodation provision on the islands has been expanding steadily in the past few years, with the vast majority of the accommodation providers being local, allowing advantages in respect of financial leakage from the islands.

Based on the recent survey (AB Associates Ltd. and Macpherson Research, 2006), 104,241 visitors arrived to Shetland in 2006, bringing a direct spend of over £16 million for the same period. A significant number of visitors arrive by cruise ship and while the peak summer season rose to 46% for holiday travel, this is well balanced by the relatively high number of business visitors attracted to the islands.

The main form of tourism in Shetland focuses on both natural and cultural heritage (AB Associates and Macpherson Research, 2006). The motivations of people visiting Shetland are those typical of the cold tourists (Baldacchino, 2006) and also the idealists or new moral tourists, as described by other authors (Poon, 1993; Butcher, 2005). This new generation of tourists rejects the principles of post-Fordism and mass consumption and turns towards a more meaningful, sustainable and culturally aware tourism experience, presenting an opportunity for Shetland tourism product marketing.

Tourism in general has become part of the public policy network since the end of 20th century when the accommodation network and infrastructure created as a result of intensive oil developments experienced a sharp decline in occupancy numbers. Marketing was then focused on the natural heritage and history of the islands and resulted in combined efforts of a number of private tour operators promoting a consistent image of Shetland (Butler 1996).

Tourism focused on heritage (both cultural and natural) is, together with wildlife and activity centred tourism (walking, hiking, fishing holidays), the main form of tourism in Shetland (AB Associates and Macpherson Research 2006). The motivations of people for visiting Shetland are those typical of the 'cold tourists' (Baldacchino, 2006) and also the 'idealists' or 'new moral tourists', as described by other authors (Poon, 1993; Butcher, 2005). This new generation of tourists rejects the principles of post-Fordism and mass consumption and turns towards a more meaningful, sustainable and culturally aware tourism experience, presenting an opportunity for Shetland tourism product marketing.

The concept of periphery and extreme position in the North captures the imagination of visitors and it could be argued that the weather conditions add to the appeal of the islands. On the contrary, the weather does not seem to be too much of an issue for the type of visitors who come to the islands (Baldacchino, 2006; Butler, 1996; Dann, 2006). Stakeholders identify the target market for Shetland as that of a discerning nature; with marketing efforts aimed at longer stay, repeat visitation and a positive experience and understanding of local culture and heritage.

Even though tourism has been blooming in the last two decades (AB Associates and Macpherson Research, 2006), the extreme location of the islands gives way to many limitations to growth. Seasonality seems to be one of the biggest issues, where the islands are only perceived as appropriate for a visit during the summer months. The shortness of the season also means the period during which financial returns from tourism can be made is restricted, therefore prices are significantly higher to compensate.

Another considerable disadvantage for the destination is posed by the relatively high cost and a high degree of planning when it comes to travel to the islands. Local transport providers have a limited capacity and as sea and air travel are the primary means of transport for the locals/business travellers, holidaymakers often have only limited access to spaces on the boats/airplanes. Similarly, the local accommodation sector is often rented out by contractors and therefore cannot be used for tourists.

However, most stakeholders agree that tourism development in Shetland should not exceed the current rate, which is considered reasonable and sustainable. They recognise that it is the intimate nature of the experience that makes the visit enjoyable, and that is only possible when visitors engage with the locals directly and face-to-face in relatively small numbers.

Heritage tourism stakeholders in Shetland

Table 1 provides an indication of the number of interested parties. Potential conflicts exist between the stakeholders and it is therefore necessary for the local tourism public policy makers identify the support and consider the interests of each of the groups involved (Harrison 2002).

With regards to heritage and heritage tourism specifically, there seems to be a slight imbalance between the roles of the Shetland Amenity Trust (SAT) and other

stakeholders. The SAT is Shetland's leading heritage agency responsible for the conservation, preservation and management of Shetland's built heritage. It acts as a facilitator of a number of quite ambitious projects, including e.g. the new Shetland Museum and Archives, Old Scatness Broch and Iron Age Village project; or the new Sumburgh Head Visitor Centre. Through its 'Hub' concept the Trust promotes Shetland's heritage assets with the help of a carefully designed Culture and Heritage brand identity.

The amount of financial and political support the SAT receives from the public domain somewhat disillusion some of the research participants. Under such circumstances, other organisations and bodies find it difficult to compete with any new ventures and projects.

Tourism Public Policy in Shetland

Tourism recently is a greater part of Shetland's public policy network, due to the sharp decline in accommodation occupancy as a result of oil industry developments. Marketing focuses on the natural and cultural heritage of the islands, resulting in the combined efforts of private tour operators to promote a consistent image of Shetland (Butler, 1996).

Although tourists do not represent a new feature in the islands, heritage tourism in Shetland has only been recognised as a main point of focus by the local policy makers quite recently (Butler 1996). The Shetland Islands Council (SIC) makes decisions in regards to the social and economic development of the islands, as well as managing the large oil reserve funds through Shetland Charitable Trust.

The first tourism strategies emerged in 1999 as a result of a joint effort of several local tourism stakeholders. The basic principles for these documents were taken over from the national and regional policies, and integrated Shetland's tourism policy with the wider strategy of 'wise growth'. The rhetoric of Shetland's tourism policy makers in the more recent strategies still focused on the underlying principles of sustainability, balanced economic development and increase of visitor numbers, however, more emphasis was placed on the importance of the Islands' natural and built heritage, their understanding and interpretation (Shetland Islands Council, 2000). The SIC recognizes the principles and practices of sustainable development following a review of international, national and regional policies.

The newly-formed Shetland Tourism Partnership, and their current strategy for tourism, the Shetland Tourism Plan 2006 – 2009 (STP, 2006), is the result of industry-wide consultation. The Plan looks at current trends and prospects of both the global and Scottish tourism industries and identifies the main strengths and opportunities for Shetland. The strategy aims to guide the tourism industry in the islands into increased visitation, increased product quality and reduced seasonality on the islands, with a focus is on four key areas: access, product, people and promotion. Similar remits and responsibilities are present in the most successful tourism strategies, with one or more parts of the regional policy focusing on frameworks for consultation and partnerships with local stakeholder groups.

The views and recommendations of the Shetland Tourism Plan were later used as a baseline in research undertaken by Westbrook and Anderson (2006), commissioned by the SIC to draft a plan for the development of heritage tourism in Shetland. In 2006, the draft plan was approved, with the more specific action plan within the Heritage Tourism Investment Programme for 2007-2012 following in 2007. The document proposes a very specific action plan relating to heritage tourism-based activity in Shetland, defining the basic principles and priorities for developing heritage sites in the islands. The primary purpose of HTIP is to identify heritage projects or initiatives, which are likely to require local funding within the next 12 months (or are eligible for inclusion in the plan within the next 2-5 years).

The Heritage Tourism Investment Programme makes an important assumption– that as well as producing economic benefits, the heritage tourism portfolio development will also result in social benefits such as increased confidence and educational opportunities for local residents. As Gunn and Var (2002) describe, striving to guarantee a better future for the community is one of the conditions of successful heritage tourism development. Inspired by recent national and international guidelines, the concepts of wise growth, social and environmental sustainability, and economic viability are also firmly embedded in the policy.

Gunn and Var's (2002) framework of four goals for tourism policy (Table 2) explores the perceptions of Shetland's tourism stakeholders with regards to the work of the SIC's Economic Development Unit (SIC-EDU) as the key principles of the HTIP.

Research participants agree that the SIC-EDU is relatively successful in achieving most goals. Only community integration is considered a challenge, though a

recognition that the SIC-EDU are trying to integrate the whole community is apparent. A limitation as a result of the remoteness of some of Shetland's communities, where communication tends to be an issue, is seen as a contributing factor. Although a slight scepticism exists towards tourism public policy in Shetland but not heavily criticized. Some parts of the private sector do appear wary of the extent of public involvement and a fear exist on that Shetland might become an economy based solely on the local authority, with few opportunities for private enterprise.

The comparison demonstrates the similarity of the ambitions for tourism policy in Shetland with those widely accepted as good practice. Examples from other similar destinations (Harrison, 2002; Jolliffe and Smith, 2001) show that these objectives are indeed valid and can be interpreted as a good example of sustainable destination development (Butler,1997). The SIC's tourism policies take into consideration the changeable nature of the tourism industry as Gunn and Var (2002) indicate. The high standard of the policy, together with its precise timescale and guidelines for implementation, regular monitoring and consultation with the heritage sector, represent further evidence of the SIC's responsible and positive approach towards Shetland's tourism development.

Table 2. Four goals for tourism policy against HTIP key principles

HTIP Key Principles	Four Goals
1. Value for money 2. Long term viability	1. Business increase
3. Minimum environmental impact 4. Best practise in conservation and heritage management	2. Sustainable resource use
5. High quality and good service	3. Visitor satisfaction
6. Community support 7. Links to wider strategic objectives	4. Community integration

Conclusions and recommendations

One needs to understand the context of national and international public policy within a destination while investigating Shetland's heritage tourism policy. Heritage tourism

appears to play an important role in Scottish tourism policy, demonstrating a commitment to internationally accepted principles of sustainability, conservation and visitor satisfaction. On the other hand, financial strains and the changeable nature of tourism are likely to present continuous challenge to the heritage industry.

The role of heritage tourism in Shetland is crucial to its tourism development, where natural and built heritage are the main assets of the islands as a tourist destination. This case study of heritage tourism development reveals the scope of the role of tourism public policy within an island's tourism industry. In identifying the nature and limitations of Shetland's tourism, heritage and culture are fundamental not only for Shetland's economic development but also with respect to the identity and culture of the islanders. This is identified as a factor that needs to be recognised in wider public policy and strategic development of island destinations. Shetland's tourism policy makers seem to have taken advantage of the examples and guidelines provided by national strategies, especially where partnerships, collaboration and the involvement of the destination's stakeholders are concerned. Although there are some conflicts and issues present among the numerous heritage tourism stakeholders in Shetland, The SIC seem to be well aware of these. They also seem to be committed to identifying the needs and gaining the support of each of the groups involved. This is possible thanks to a positive approach with constant communication, partnership facilitation, effective feedback mechanisms and relatively fast implementation processes. Furthermore, the focus on heritage tourism and subsequent development of the HTIP appears to have improved community opportunities to engage and participate in the development of heritage tourism product development.

Broad ambitious plans for the growth of tourism are not universally applicable in island destinations such as Shetland. Uniform national policy needs to be customized in order to deal with the individual issues present in the often unique environment of remote communities.

Several geographical, political, economic and socio-cultural factors appear to limit the grown of the heritage tourism sector in Shetland. However, little desire for large growth rates and that tourism needs to remain quite low-scale to ensure sustainability of the environment and authenticity of visitor experiences.

Shetland is quite unique in the degree of autonomy it has over its economic development, including tourism. However, lessons can be drawn from the SIC's

planning efforts. The case study demonstrates that, for communities to benefit from sustainable and economically viable tourism growth, tourism development needs to be based on coherent and comprehensive strategies. These strategies should establish inclusive partnerships and work to balance community focus, conservation and economic development. In common with other island destinations, a need to balance sustainable tourism exists within an overall balanced growth framework on Shetland. While Shetland is an example of a relatively wealthy cold-water island, the findings of this research demonstrate the opportunities offered by stakeholder participation, heritage tourism and government support.

The following recommendations are made with a view to encourage appropriate heritage tourism development for the development of island destinations:

- To develop strategies that support tourism based on sustainable growth and effective diversification of an island's economy.

- To design heritage development policies that identify and meet changing community, policy-maker and tourist needs.

- To encourage initiatives to improve stakeholder communication and participation in the development of authentic and individual heritage tourism visitor experiences.

- To effectively communicate the pursuit of sustainable tourism development that links the conservation of heritage resources, community integration and stakeholders

This research demonstrates the role that heritage tourism can play in developing the potential of an island destination. Once effective public policy is in place, stakeholders need to take responsibility for realizing the potential offered by heritage tourism development. The challenge lies in ensuring that growth in an island's tourism product also maintains the principles of what makes the destination special – the support and participation of its island community.

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