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ORGANIC COMMUNITY TOURISM: A Cocreated Approach

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Abstract

This research explores the community role in the regeneration of social places for local tourism promotion in Scotland. We focus on the regeneration of railway stations by drawing on a recent example of community engagement called ‘Adopt a Station.’ We use ethnographic research and highlight six key themes: roots, commitment, gateway, heritage, aesthetics and benefits. Many studies on tourism planning reach pessimistic conclusions with regards to the capabilities of local residents to make valid and worthwhile contributions to the tourism process. In contrast we highlight the potential for co-creation when the community are offered opportunities for involvement in a place meaning creation process.

Keywords:

Community, Cocreation, Scotland, Railway Station, Heritage, Aesthetics
Highlights

- We explore the local community role in regenerating social places.
- We introduce six themes which relate to community activities and benefits.
- Cocreation allows locals to recapture and represent the essence of the community.
- A sense of ownership and empowerment facilitates a place meaning creation process.
- There is evidence that benefits from involvement can ripple out into other areas.
ORGANIC COMMUNITY TOURISM: A Co-created Approach

INTRODUCTION

“I just like seeing the pleasure on people’s faces when they see the finished work, I mean most of the work that I do would be during the evening and at weekends when the booking office at Mallaig Station is not open. So at the same time as I am doing the gardening I can answer people’s queries about train timetables or where the public toilets are, where to eat, any of these things, so you become a public information system whilst you are gardening at the same time” (Sonia, Mallaig and Arisaig).

The aim of this paper is to explore the community role in the regeneration of social places for local tourism promotion in Scotland. We focus on the regeneration of railway stations by drawing on a recent example of community engagement called ‘Adopt a Station.’ The development of the rail network played an important role in the growth of tourism in the Scottish Highlands (Butler, 1985). As well as facilitating access, the railway is also viewed as a central part of the tourist experience itself, for example, the West Highland Line has been voted the best railway journey in the world for the last three consecutive years by Wanderlust travel magazine. The impact of railways also has broader benefits in terms of ensuring social inclusion for local communities and offering an alternative to congested roads (Dallen, 2007).

The Beeching report ‘The Reshaping of British Railways’ had a dramatic impact of the role of railways in our lives. It resulted in the closure of approximately one third of the UK rail network between 1963 and 1972 (J. Simmons & Biddle, 1997). However, recent years have witnessed a rebirth with the rise of the Community Rail movement in England and Wales where some local and branch lines are specified as community routes, facilitated by the association of community rail partnerships (ACORP, 2012) who serve as ‘an organisation of do-ers’, focused on practical initiatives which add up to a better more sustainable local railway’ (ACORP, 2012). ACORP’s community stations initiative serves to better link the community to the railway; support rural communities and market towns; revitalise stations with non-railway activities and enable community groups to offer a wide range of social benefits to their communities (Miles, 2012). ScotRail’s (who hold the rail franchise within Scotland) ‘Adopt A Station’ scheme has its roots in this movement. We demonstrate how, through participation in Adopt a Station the local community can co-create services that
enhance the tourist experience. This is important because Duffield and Long (1981) argue that development of tourism in Scotland needs to align with local values and stem from local initiatives.

Community Tourism

In recent decades, community-based approaches to tourism have gained increased attention (Lepp, 2007). Murphy’s (1985) book Tourism: A Community Approach moved community-based tourism initiatives to the centre of tourism planning and sought to establish the community as a key focus of decision making and approval for tourism planners. Murphy (1985, pp. 96-97) suggests

the [tourism] product and image that intermediaries package and sell is a destination experience and as such creates an industry that is highly dependent on the goodwill and cooperation of host communities. It is the citizen who must live with the cumulative outcome of such developments and needs to have greater input into how his community is packaged and sold as a tourist product.

As a result the knowledge, capabilities and insight of local stakeholders are seen as key in collaboration with tourism planners (Bramwell & Broom, 1989). Jamal and Getz (1995, p. 188) define stakeholder collaboration as “a process of joint decisionmaking among autonomous, key stakeholders of an interorganizational, community tourism domain to resolve planning problems of the domain and/or to manage issues related to the planning and development of the domain.” However the lack of support from locals towards tourism development and collaboration is also noted within the extant literature (Harrill, 2004).

One of Murphy’s (1985, p. 151) goals was to create more of a shared vision of the community and, by ‘focussing on the community’s heritage and culture in the development of the tourism product,’ tourism initiatives could retain distinctiveness. Within a democratic world, public participation in tourism planning may be viewed as a right (D. G. Simmons, 1994). Jamal and Getz (1995, p. 194) argue that community participation should be “dynamic and active” to allow for adjustments in line with changing economic, social and environmental community perceptions. This approach supports local communities in becoming the subjects rather than the objects of development, and in turn increases feelings of empowerment (Mitchell & Reid, 2001). There are many benefits to a decentralised approach to tourism planning including a sense of ownership, feelings of responsibility and
practical involvement (Simpson, 2008). Globalisation and increased competition has led to a
greater need for cooperation and collaboration to ensure sustainable tourism development
(Jamal & Getz, 1995). Mutual benefits should create positive economic impacts as well as
increased satisfaction for residents (Mitchell & Reid, 2001) and, as such, it remains the
responsibility of tourism practitioners and policy makers to “continually strive to raise the
level of awareness of tourism’s potential for communities and thereby to contribute to raising
standards of tourism practice” (Simpson, 2008, p. 13).

Although this rhetoric may appear promising, many researchers appear less than convinced
about its practical application. For example, Simmons (1994, p. 106) acknowledges that
community-based approaches to tourism planning should focus on skill development and the
empowerment of local people, but nevertheless reaches a rather patronising conclusion that
“the public’s knowledge of tourism appears, at best, to be barely adequate to instill
confidence in the soundness of their contributions.” The literature also reveals potential
issues of conflict between a community’s awareness and ability to engage despite their
willingness to do so (Aas, Ladkin, & Fletcher, 2005; Campbell, 1999). Research on
collaboration reveals problematic aspects to community participation in tourism planning. In
a study of collaboration in local tourism policymaking in England’s Peak District National
Park, Bramwell and Sharman (1999) highlight problems including lack of consensus, unequal
power relations and a lack of consultation with local residents. Simpson (2008, p. 3) suggests
that problems can occur where communities are subject to “external pressures, issues of
governance and structure, conflicting stakeholder agendas, jealousies and internal power
struggles, and the growth of artificial hierarchies and elites may occur, diminishing or
undermining potential benefits to the community”. Taylor (1995, p. 488) suggests that the
‘friendly community’ is ‘attractive to all kinds of inward investment but for the tourist
destination it is the stuff of advertising hyperbole’. Furthermore, local tourism initiatives are
often viewed with suspicion, where benefits are realised by the few. A shared vision for the
community is therefore seen as romanticised (Taylor, 1995, p. 488). Problems also occur in
development where community views are secondary to those of the planning organisation.

There is also the potential that those involved in collaboration will be from the business
sector, thereby creating a bias towards economic factors (Aas, et al., 2005). Campbell (1999,
p. 549) suggests that tourism initiatives ‘will not originate in the community and individual
entrepreneurs, both local and foreign, will drive tourism development’. Tosun (2006) presents a typology of community participation which ranges from Spontaneous (bottom up, authentic community planned and led tourism), to Induced (Top-down, passive, formal, indirect, tokenistic, shared benefits) to Coercive (top down, formal, limited choice, manipulative). In a study of local destinations in Turkey Tosun (2006, p. 503) concludes that the desired form of community participation was induced and suggests tourism agencies clearly wish to retain the power over local communities. The risk is that the need for profit may result in social and environmental community objectives being overlooked. Discussing tourism in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, Duffield and Long (1981, p. 422) suggest that “the workings of the market” may accelerate the decline of “community cohesiveness and community-based social interaction.” Cohen (1993, p. 74) suggests that community approaches may simply result in the removal of any distinctiveness and replace with a stereotype where ‘internal variety disappears or coalesces into a simple statement’. Analysis of the literature reveals various techniques which have been used to involve the local community in tourism planning such as surveys and focus groups (D. G. Simmons, 1994; Simpson, 2008; Tosun, 2006) and consultation, working groups and information dissemination (Bramwell & Sharman, 1999; Tosun, 2006). Such approaches tend to be formally planned and executed and are essentially ‘top-down’ methods (Campbell, 1999; Simpson, 2008) and as Tosun (2006) observes have the potential to be tokenistic. These approaches and the problems above, stemming from both community actors and the wider business sector illustrates the need for local community involvement beyond the established business boundaries so that tourism can be integrated into a broader and more complete range of community objectives. In this way, local forces can prevent market forces from eradicating community culture and heritage (Teo & Yeoh, 1997). Our research reveals an alternative, more organic, approach to local community involvement and one where the community’s distinctive features can be retained. We now provide detail of the Adopt a Station scheme as the context for our study.

ADOPT A STATION AND ORGANIC COMMUNITY TOURISM

The scheme is a partnership between ScotRail and groups invited to ‘adopt’ local railway stations. The scheme allows community members to utilize unused space within the station free of charge to provide a range of uses or facility improvements that benefit the community.
Membership of the scheme is straightforward, adopters are required to complete a simple application form and agree to health and safety regulations. Since its launch in 2005, 128 stations (out of a total of 343) have been adopted. Adoptions take place across the whole of the railway network in Scotland with both rural and urban areas represented. The scheme has seen success in the form of bookshops, model railway clubs, community meeting rooms, art galleries, charity shops, toy libraries alongside small businesses and, most commonly, extensive gardening activity (ScotRail, 2012). Both the company and the adopters have a role to play. The company provides redundant spaces, free of charge, and also funds gardening expenses associated with the adoption. Adopters pay overheads, provide their time and are responsible for any interior design costs involved in the restoration and customisation of the building, something which often involves seeking funding from alternative sources.

The existence of vacant rooms is key to the success of the scheme and relates closely to some of the themes in our research. Many of the stations feature listed, historical buildings built in the Victorian era which Butler (1985) identifies as the key growth period for railways in Scotland. These would have featured 1st, 2nd and 3rd class waiting rooms and ladies waiting rooms and in the contemporary era many of these rooms are vacant and, as such ripe for regeneration. The regeneration of buildings that have lost their original purpose is a common theme in heritage tourism, for example, Meethan (1996) found evidence of this strategy in his exploration of the regeneration of the city of York, UK. In contrast to Meethan, adoptations take place within a still functioning station.

Adopt a Station is therefore an example of co-creation, a concept which encapsulates the changing role of the consumer from a passive recipient of services to a proactive cocreator in the activities of an organisation (Chan, Yim, & Lam, 2010; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). In cocreation consumers are viewed as a resource (Lengnick-Hall, Claycomb, & Inks, 2000; Schau, Muñiz Jr, & Arnould, 2009) with firms increasing collaboration to create benefits for both parties. Cocreation activity can offer improved predictability and quality in the exchange for the firm (Evans, Stan, & Murray, 2008) and feelings of self-efficacy, enjoyment and psychological benefits for consumers (Dong, Evans, & Zou, 2008). Zwick et al. (2008, p. 166) suggest that “the co-creation economy is about experimenting with new possibilities for value creation that are based on the expropriation of free cultural, technological, social, and affective labour of the consumer masses.” Previous work has acknowledged the role that
tourists play in cocreating the tourism experience (Goulding & Shankar, 2011) and the relevance of cocreation for tourism, and the need for empirical research is highlighted by Shaw, Bailey and Williams (2011). Our context demonstrates that local residents can also make worthwhile contributions to the provision and promotion of tourism in their communities by cocreating the value proposition of the firm.

Study Methods

In keeping with standard ethnographic practice, we employed multiple methods of data collection. Initial access to the scheme was achieved through the External Relations Manager of ScotRail who proved to be a vital contact for the project and this individual (referred to throughout the paper as John Y) was an invaluable source of background information, artefacts and gaining access.

Data were collected within a 2.5 year period. To gain insight into the scheme and its contextual background the research team followed the Odyssey tradition (Wallendorf, et al., 1987) and embarked on a rail tour of selected adopted stations in Scotland as an initial scoping exercise and immersion process. This helped us to make connections with adopters that would be followed up during the main data collection period.

For the main data gathering, we identified a number of categories to classify adoption projects. These included gardening, arts and heritage, hospitality, education, rotary groups, community councils and individual adopters. We wanted to ensure that our sample reflected the full diversity of activities included within the scheme and we conducted in depth research at a total of 19 stations across Scotland which included the West Highland Line and the North East Coast line as well as the Central Belt and South West Lines (see figure 1 for the geographical dispersal of stations and table 1 for detailed information on the nature of adoptions).

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Insert Figure 1 and Table 1 here

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We recorded data through extensive field notes, photographic evidence (taken by the researchers and provided by our participants), video capture of the station visits (which included video ‘shorts’ with participants) and a combination of audio recorded and electronically captured interviews. Data gathering was enhanced by large-scale collection of artefacts including specialist books, press articles, radio programmes, flyers, leaflets and pamphlets, organisational reports, group newsletters, and adopter group meeting information. Participant observation included attendance at various events and exhibitions, including Annual adopters lunches, press launch, model railway exhibition, and a trip on the famous Jacobite steam train (as seen in the Harry Potter films).

Each station visit followed a similar pattern. On arrival at the station the adopters would give us a tour of the station with a particular focus on their activities (e.g. a renovated heritage centre at Cupar, Pupil artwork at Barrhead, a community allotment project at Wemyss Bay and even a hanging basket watering system at Mallaig). Following these guided tours in-depth interviews were held, sometimes these took place within the station or at an alternative location recommended by the participants. Interviews were a combination of individual and group depending on the nature of the adoption. The researchers were overwhelmed by the enthusiasm and welcome of the respondents and their willingness to participate, at one station the researchers were met by a welcoming committee of 12 people, other groups provided hospitality and others have continued to stay in contact sending updates of adoption activities. Visits to stations lasted from 1.5 hours to a 2 night stay in a railway carriage bunkhouse at Glenfinnan.

After the station visits were concluded a supplementary data gathering exercise was undertaken using an email interview approach and this yielded a further 23 responses. We also conducted interviews with other relevant stakeholders including with First ScotRail staff, the Chief Executive of the Railway Heritage Trust and representatives of passenger focus (rail passenger watchdog). In total, 40 adopters participated in the in-depth audio-recorded interviews and informal conversations with held with more than 60 others. A rich body of evidence has been collected throughout the project. This includes 321 pages of interview transcriptions, 6 hours of video and 886 photos, alongside comprehensive field notes, archival material and information obtained from websites maintained by adoption groups.
During the course of our project, we had regular meetings and discussions of emergent themes. Following the completion of data collection, both researchers had a period of intense immersion in the data. An initial set of codes was created by each researcher independently and these were then compared, filtered and refined using NVivo 9 to finalise the codes, including place transformation, place attachment, nostalgia, challenges, heritage, motivation, and ownership. A sample of respondent quotes and attached codes were shown to colleagues for validity purposes. We then followed a hermeneutic approach to interpretation. Data relating to each station was interpreted initially to gain a comprehensive overview of each station. These were then compared and common patterns identified. The main findings of this research suggest that through involvement in Adopt a Station, community members play a role in the promotion of their local areas through their everyday activities at the railway station. This provides a contrast to other more formally structured approaches to public participation in tourism planning and implementation. We demonstrate this by discussing six key themes: roots, commitment, gateway, aesthetics, heritage and benefits.

Roots

The roots theme relates to the background of the adoptions and the motivations of those involved (figure 2 shows a range of adoption projects). The format of the 128 station adoption projects is extremely varied as depicted in table 1. The External Relations Manager at First ScotRail, who is responsible for the successful running of the scheme, suggests that adoption is an effective means of making the stations unique and providing the local community with the opportunity to take ownership of this important place within the town/village. Although there are some constraints related to health and safety and standardised colour schemes on the building exteriors for corporate branding purposes, he noted that:

“railways always aim to deliver a consistent product this … function is potentially a bit dull, by buying into [the stations] we are making them look a bit different and everywhere is a bit different because we are not saying, sorry, you can only have purple flowers, we are inviting people to inspire and explore in their own way” (John Y).

This flexibility is one of the key attractions of the scheme and reflected in the range of activities that adopters engage in. In many stations, gardening forms part of the adoption. Sometimes this is carried out by an individual, for example, the adopter at Whitecraigs station
requested to treat the station as an extension of his own garden. Other gardening is undertaken by groups, for example some “In Bloom” groups become involved in the station adoption as a continuation of other floral activity throughout the town.

There is a distinction between adopters motivated by commercial and community interests (or a combination). For many, involvement with Adopt a Station voluntary and viewed as simply good citizenship, as one adopter put it “I care about the community.” For others, Adopt a Station provides the opportunity to access premises at a nominal rate. For example, Kirsty at Ladybank suggests:

“It means that I get it more or less rate free….so I am going to have a lovely place to work and it will just be heating, insurance and stuff, but that is a good thing. I could not do it if I had to rent it all.”

From the company perspective, the provision of rent free space is justified as “if it’s lived in, it’s loved” and otherwise it would be “a no-man’s land.” Also for the firm they are subject to a monthly quality control audit as part of the franchise arrangement and fined annually according to performance. John Y notes that:

“Last year we were fined £780,000, the year before £950,000 so in terms of things which are purely within our gift to control, SQUIRE [Service Quality Inspection Regime] is probably the biggest one. A SQUIRE inspector coming along to a station that’s functional and unkempt will mark it down. If he or she comes along and the sun is shining and everyone’s happy and there’s some flowers or the buildings are in use, they might think hey this is not a bad place, I’ll move on.”

Many of the station adoptions have a very obvious role in promoting tourism. Some adoptions involve bunkhouse accommodation, either in converted disused railway carriages or in the station building itself. Others have dining cars and tea-rooms, particularly prominent on the West Highland Line which is regarded as one of the key Scottish destinations for tourists. In another station, the charity bookshop is regarded as a “minor tourist destination” while others have opened heritage centres and art galleries. Several adoptions include more than one of these activities and can involve a range of community groups and/or local businesses:

“We have on our Committee a very good mix of residents and business people and I think that is the key to it all, you must have a good balance otherwise you can be seen

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1 In the 3 years the project has been running fines have reduced from £938,959 in 2009 to less than £500k in 2011. In the same period station adoptions have increased from around 85 to 128
to be totally commercial and working for the businesses and not working for the local residents. “(Sally, Pitlochry)

This involvement from a range of different stakeholders overcomes the potential bias towards economic factors (Aas, et al., 2005) and means that involvement in Adopt a Station can be related to broadening community tourism objectives.

Many adopters, both volunteers and businesses, attribute their involvement in Adopt a Station to the enthusiasm and support shown by the external relations manager at ScotRail. The process of adoption is kept simple with limited layers of bureaucracy. Overall the scheme demonstrates the potential for local tourism promotion to emerge organically and according to the needs of the local community without complex planning and management procedures. Scheme involvement, however, requires considerable commitment from adopters and this is discussed in the next section.

Commitment

The commitment of station adopters was very evident and manifested in the time they devoted to station activities alone. Within volunteer groups, some members will devote several hours per week, while for others it is a much greater time commitment. For example, one adopter who is responsible for 6 stations dedicates significant time to gardening activities: “I spend between 1 and 3 days a week, leaving home at 8.30am and returning about 8.30pm.” Another quite simply stated “it’s my life.”

As noted above, some researchers question community capabilities and the effectiveness of community contributions to tourism planning (Aas, et al., 2005; Campbell, 1999; D. G. Simmons, 1994). Evidence from this study suggests otherwise and shows Adopters with a range of resources and expertise to draw on. These range from gardening knowledge and community leadership skills to heritage management and generating funding applications to supporting future development plans at the station:

“People in the community wonder why I do it sometimes because it is a battle with the weather but if you are a gardener then you carry on doing it. If you are a painter you carry on doing it, if you are a chef and you do a bad recipe you try again, so resilience is the answer I suppose…..So as long as it gives people pleasure and I can still do it, then I carry on doing it. So that is that.” (Sonia, Mallaig and Arisaig)
At Glenfinnan the adoption couple run the station as a tourism initiative with the added benefit of being a railway station as well. The station has a museum and two railway carriages which act as a bunkhouse and tearoom. The couple secured a significant funding package to further develop the station to include educational facilities and refurbish the station itself (see figure 3).

“Oh the funding for our station, oh gosh, well that is a big funding package that I have worked on for probably five years to put together, so I suppose that is my voluntary input because I know how to get funding, I can argue our case in writing. So, we have managed to put together a funding package of over £450k” (Hege, Glenfinnan)

The passion and enthusiasm of community members is evident from the above interview extracts. There is strong evidence of place attachment here which in its most simple terms is “the bonding of people to places” (Altman & Low, 1992, p. 2). Much place attachment theory highlights the emotional and affective nature of bonds between individuals and specific places (e.g. (Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001; Milligan, 1998)). The station adoptions certainly demonstrate this with comments such as “those of us who use the station, love it” and “I could not stand seeing the stations going into decline.” The adopters might be described as “local heroes” (Cutcher, 2010, p. 79) where their civic-minded response to the regeneration of a focal point in their communities creates an “ethical surplus” (Arvidsson, 2005, p. 241).

The next section introduces a key role recognised by adopters which views the station as a community gateway.

Gateway

Many adopters considered the railway station to be the focal point of their town/village. They recognised the station’s role as a gateway or threshold that provides one of the main entrances to the community (see figure 4 for images of community gateways). A common theme was therefore ensuring that tourists (and local residents) arrive at a welcoming station. John Y and Sally (responsible for gardening and floral displays at Pitlochry station) describe the importance of this initial impression:

Okay, to showcase the community for people passing by or people visiting for the first time, that they have a sense of welcome. Because I think that impressions are formed of places by chance means, some places have bad reputations which will be associated with myths or long damaged industries and whatever, others it may be just a first impression that seals their fate if you like. (John Y)
I do think that it has got a very well cared for feel about it and that tends to make people feel quite safe and secure... I think people do feel quite confident walking about here, you know, it is clean, it is tidy, and you would perhaps assume if the place looks well cared for that the tourists will be well cared for too. (Sally, Pitlochry)

This supports Jutla’s (2000) study of Simla in Northern India, where the railway station played an important role in creating a memorable image for tourists arriving by train as this was their first contact with the city. Adopt a Station highlights the need to involve local people in creating this initial image of the community. Through their involvement stations become “flags of identity” (2005) that reflect core community values:

I think it is about the community and having a say in what its local gateway looks like. It is about owning that, it is about taking control, it is about putting something back, it is about community spirit involving folks and being able to project a little of the community into the station because the look of it would be very different if people from another place came... The community creates its own personality around the station and that is wonderful because it gives people a nice soft landing and as soon as they get off the train you can see them breathing out because you can see that somebody cares. If this is the first thing they see then how much better is everything else going to be. (James, Passenger Focus)

As well as providing a good impression to tourists stopping at the station, adopters also believe that a welcoming and attractive station can generate increased tourism by encouraging a (return) visit from those who are passing through.

Within the UK rail network some stations, particularly in rural areas have few or no employees working at the station. This de-manning, often due to re-signalling schemes, was described negatively; as one adopter commented “the place basically died.” In other stations staffing hours are limited so the presence of adopters offers additional benefits. This is reflected in the opening interview extract to the paper when the adopter describes herself as a “public information system”. Similarly, other adopters are often asked for details on the “story of the line” or “quirky” facts about the surrounding area.

The adoption of Stonehaven station provides an interesting example of the role of the station as a gateway to tourist activities. There are a series of posters at the station displaying information for tourists on the activities that are offered in the town along with associated dates. As a result the adopters believe that the station is an “adjunct to the tourist office in the centre of the town.”
For some of the gardening adopters, care of the station is part of a broader enterprise as many are involved in national competitions such as Beautiful Scotland or Beautiful Britain. For these adopters the gateway role of the station extends beyond welcoming tourists to welcoming judges:

_They don’t always come by train, but the last two times when we have been in Beautiful Britain they have come here and this time they arrived at 4pm and they were gobsmacked you could say because they thought that this was the most beautiful station they had ever seen. They were taken to the hotel along the road but they came out at night to come back to the station to have a look at it._ (Liz, Uddingston)

Winning such awards are regarded as a further means of marketing the town/village to tourists and serve to legitimise the activities of adopters. The appearance of a cared for station along with adopters’ physical presence at the station was seen as central and contributing to a welcoming spatial narrative, described in the following section.

Aesthetics

The activities of the adopters have contributed to the transformation and regeneration of the stations. The language used to describe the station pre-adoption was littered with negativity; “it was an embarrassment,” “unloved and uncared for,” “dismal,” “uninviting,” “horrible place,” “awful,” and “terrible.” In contrast the stations are now seen as places to be proud of; they are “more cheerful,” “colourful,” and transformed with “the brightness and beauty of the flowers.” This is aptly summarised by Nancy at Wemyss Bay who suggests that adoption has “restored life and interest to areas of the station which had been in darkness for several years.” Adopters have their effort rewarded with feedback and compliments from visitors and local residents and in many stations, adopters gain pleasure when they see tourists taking photographs of the floral displays and buildings (see figure 5). This reinforces the importance of visual image in creating a sense of civic pride for residents (Jutla, 2000).

While undoubtedly the floral displays are prominent in the discussion of aesthetics, the regeneration of the station buildings themselves also contribute to aesthetic appeal. To illustrate, the adoption of two stations is based on the opening of art galleries in disused station buildings. One of the artist-adopters described a “shift in energy” at the station since the gallery opening and both described the significant effort that was involved in the transformation from redundant space to art gallery:
It is a great source of entertainment in a way that people keep coming in. I have had loads of visitors wanting to look round...I certainly get a lot of feedback that they like to see the place looking good because the windows were all rotten and rubbish, and you could see that the building was tatty, although that is not my responsibility, but just having it freshened, cleaned and occupied and the fact that it is going to have a gallery is quite nice too (Kirsty, Ladybank)

Importantly, this energy shift occurring at the station extends to other areas of the towns; a phenomenon described the following quotes:

It is like ripples on a pond, you know, if one person tidies up their patch then immediately the bit on either side looks a bit scruffy so if you do one good project it is amazing how it ripples out into the community and everybody will think, hmm, maybe I could do something like that..... in the beginning it was all done by us and now everybody takes a part, individual businesses look stunning, residents’ gardens are beautiful.....it is the kind of knock-on effect in the community (Sally, Pitlochry).

You are working towards a whole, you are working towards a bonny town and a bonny station and all the rest of it and you get to the stage where you are pretty fanatical, our wee group are pretty fanatical about things, they will challenge anybody that makes a mess, you know, and we have got the town thinking our way as well (Alan, Stonehaven).

Alongside contributing to the community as a gateway and through aesthetic, transformative benefits adopters also viewed adoptions as opportunities to represent the heritage of their community.

Heritage

The chief executive of the Railway Heritage Trust recognises that the Adopt a Station scheme plays an important role in the preservation and regeneration of railway buildings to make them fit for modern uses:

It tends to be the older stations that have the surplus rooms [they] tend to be bigger stations and obviously older stations tend to be listed. So, my interest is in Listed stations and the fact that the second of the Trust’s two objectives is to find a new use for redundant property, or redundant Listed structures and buildings, ties in very closely with what First ScotRail are doing with Adopt a Station (Andy S)

As illustrated throughout this paper, the adopters’ efforts to make the sites sustainable are varied and include cafes, art galleries and bunkhouses. Some of the station adoption projects also have links to heritage, for example several adopters have opened heritage centres, one group has created a mural at the station that depicts a key moment in the town’s history, and another has hosted a heritage-themed painting exhibition (see figure 6). Others place emphasis on preserving the history of the station itself by recreating the way it used to look:
The station used to be famous for its potted plants and hanging baskets, all the old photographs showed the station in the days when there were lots of staff and men who had time on their hands and were keen gardeners did it. There was a greenhouse on the station concourse at one time and several of the station houses had greenhouses attached to them. (Nancy, Wemyss Bay)

Current efforts at Wemyss Bay station aim to replicate and revitalise the appearance of the station. There are also visual displays in plant material to commemorate historical moments that are important to the local area. The adopters believe there are high levels of attachment to the station because of its position beside the ferry terminal connecting to the Isle of Bute. People “from far and wide have fond memories” of childhood holidays and associate the station with “escape,” “pleasure and excitement.” This suggests that the survival of stations is not only important in terms of preserving listed buildings, but also from more personal perspectives. Some stations have links to the visitors’ personal heritage, reinforcing Poria, Butler and Airey (2003) who recognise the importance of emotion for heritage tourism. Drawing on Urry (1990), they argue that some visitors come to “feel” rather than to “gaze.”

Adopt a Station provides an effective example of the role of the local community in historical preservation. The opening of a heritage centre at Cupar station offers an interesting illustration of how involvement can extend from adopters to the entire community:

Like most small heritage centres it will be open as many hours as we can manage but principally weekends, summer evenings, that kind of thing, so it will enable us to show artefacts and photographs. We have got numerous photographs and artefacts already and obviously it will help us to collect more, we hope, from the people that come in and remember that there are things in their family and whatever and hopefully that will strengthen the things that we have got, or already holding as collectors. But, far more than collectors as well we hope that it will develop the connection of Cupar Heritage with other projects in the town. (Cupar Heritage)

This reinforces the work of others (Aas, et al., 2005; Nuryanti, 1996) who have noted the custodian role played by the community in terms of heritage management. Government policy has also recognised the role of the public in protecting national heritage (Meethan, 1996). Alternatively the work of the community through adopt a station is also seen as creating heritage as much as preserving it. John Y in one interview was somewhat scornful of “the glory days of rail travel” and suggested that:

“they are when you want them to be and you can to an extent make them up...the golden age of rail travel which for a start might be rather dirty and the services might not be as frequent as today and they might be rather pricey perhaps and so on but if it makes you feel good hey”(John Y)
So in fact, the work of adopters is presented as a key initiative, giving life and meaning to areas of the community which in the past may have been perceived in more functional ways:

This is not, so far as we can make out, a traditionally, glorious station. There are not many sepia photographs of the glorious basket trees of Victorian times and what we hear this is a new reputation ...... the local press photographs [will comment] on baskets and the lovely gardens in Uddingston. It is all new; the heritage is now if you like (John Y)

The work of adopters within their local station appears to stimulate a broad range of benefits to the adopters, the firm, the wider community and other stakeholders.

Benefits

The tourism benefits of Adopt a Station have been highlighted in previous sections, in terms of stations as welcoming gateways to the town that are visually appealing and sometimes tourist attractions in their own right through the presence of heritage museums, tearooms and galleries. For example, Helen who runs a bunkhouse at Bridge of Orichy station suggests that “people are always overwhelmed I think when they come and stay here because it is a very different thing to do.” The benefits of Adopt a Station also extend beyond tourism.

The adopters mention a range of personal benefits including camaraderie and social contacts, the opportunity to engage with an activity that they enjoy such as gardening, satisfaction and pride in achievements, improvements to wellbeing and gaining respect from the local community. The sense of ownership of the stations created by the scheme empowers the community to the extent that they frequently viewed their activities as primary:

If we could extend further, our ambition, which we don’t tell ScotRail, is actually to be a bookshop through which trains run (Norman, Pitlochry).

Those adopters with a business interest also praise the benefits of the scheme, as one mentions “we cannot quite believe our luck that we have found this thing.” Lynette, who is opening an art gallery at Kinghorn comments:

Well personally for me it is a whole new change of life because I have committed myself to doing this, I have given up a job, I will be 55, I am retiring actually and going at a age when I can retire and I am trusting that they will let me stay here, obviously the lease is running out soon, it is leaps of faith for me all round but it means that I can be an artist all the time and run my own business and it is quite exciting, you know at a time when people are travelling, giving up, I am actually starting a new career so I find that very stimulating, slightly nerve-wracking but I know that I have got people that will come to my classes, I know they will (Lynette, Kinghorn)
Some of the benefits also spread to the community at large who may experience a renewal of “civic pride” in one of the town’s focal points. As noted above there is a ripple effect to station adoption, and other adopters believe that this creates a virtuous circle which ultimately reduces vandalism similar to the theory of broken windows. Some adoptions have also resulted in benefits for local charities. This takes a variety of forms. There may be a direct financial benefit such as the significant revenue generated through the sale of second hand book shops, or there may be promotional benefits whereby the involvement of charity groups at the station raises their profile.

There are also benefits for First ScotRail. As one adopter suggests, “adoption means not only keeping it nicer and tidier and prettier it also means that they have got other eyes looking after their stations.” These “other eyes” become an unofficial labour source, policing the station and alerting First ScotRail to any problems that need addressed, an aspect that is especially beneficial at those stations with limited staff. For example, one adopter suggests he is an “informal cleaner” and describes how he collects litter around the station grounds. This reflects the sense of ownership created by station adoption in that volunteers are willing to work in this way without any financial reward. Other benefits include positive public relations created by the scheme, an improved working environment for station staff and a more pleasant environment for passengers, both locals and tourists.

CONCLUSION

This paper has used the context of Adopt a Station to explore how local communities can contribute to the regeneration of social places, and in turn, tourism promotion in Scotland. Drawing on evidence from ethnographic research we introduce six themes which relate to the activities of the adopters around the stations and the benefits that they can offer.

Our research identifies the latent potential residing within our local communities to transform their local stations from places of transit to experiential places of consumption. The scheme enables residents to convert liminal spaces into places of entertainment, heritage, dining, and accommodation but crucially as gateways that simultaneously welcome and inform the tourist and local resident alike. This regeneration has obvious potential economic benefits, but benefits also go beyond this as it is through Adopt a Station that residents appear to recapture
the essence of their communities and are able to represent it to the outside world. This place commodification links the physical regeneration of the station buildings and gardens with the cultural regeneration in terms of the production of symbolic value (Meethan, 1996). The scheme appears to inspire communities and there is evidence that benefits ripple out from the gateway into other areas.

Our research represents an important counterpoint to existing theory on community participation. Many studies within the literature on tourism planning reach rather pessimistic conclusions with regards to the capabilities of local residents to make valid and worthwhile contributions to the tourism process. Ceding control of the stations to the community allows the resources, skills, and passion of the adopters to be used to their greatest effect. The scheme highlights the potential for co-creation when the community are offered the opportunity to feel a sense of ownership and empowerment through involvement in a place meaning creation process. Recent works on cocreation highlight the importance of giving the consumer freedom. Adopt a Station allows communities to showcase local culture and allows the offering to evolve organically. So whether it is through posters, floral displays, murals, museums or heritage centres the stations become dynamic representations of the culture, heritage and life of the community, unconstrained by planning processes and regulations.

The benefits associated with the scheme appear to be line with recent views of cocreation with adopters acting as a resource in the creation of the value proposition of the firm (Lengnick-Hall, et al., 2000) and improving quality in the exchange (Evans, et al., 2008). However, unlike existing views of cocreation which sees consumer involvement as a political form of power and exploitative (Zwick, et al., 2008) Adopt a Station appears to act as a catalyst to the community and their passion to represent the town or village in the most positive way to tourists.

The benefits outlined within our research could easily be viewed as idyllic, almost utopian. The schemes, however, were not without their challenges. Adopters in turn, highlighted problems relating to communicating with the wide range of organisations that they were exposed to within a complex franchise arrangement (not, it should be highlighted, with the administration of the scheme itself), there were some minor issues with vandalism and a lack of funds which restricted activities in some schemes. However, the simplicity of the scheme,
the willingness and passion of the community and the sense of ownership contribute to a successful community engagement scheme which represents a form of organic community tourism planning.

Although we have focused on the Adopt a Station scheme in Scotland our findings have broader implications. Other types of adoption schemes can be found across the UK involving other contexts (e.g. community gardens and other companies (British Telecom’s Adopt a Kiosk Scheme)) and these offer possibilities for research into promoting the local tourism offering. Future research might also explore the role of authenticity in the regeneration of historical places for tourism purposes and the various marketing communication techniques used to promote place identity and distinctiveness.

The Adopt a Station scheme offers some intriguing possibilities for tourism planners. Through the patronage of ScotRail, Adopt a Station offers the community groups legitimacy without bureaucracy. As a result activities are formalised and structured by the community with seemingly minimal involvement of the firm beyond that needed to ensure the smooth running of the day to day activities of the station and in this sense it is different to other guerrilla community projects. This freedom to create the tourism offering organically may come closer to Jamal and Getz’s dynamic and active participation and suggests that creating the community tourism product may be best achieved from within.
LIST OF REFERENCES


Simmons, J., & Biddle, G. (1997). The Oxford companion to British railway history from 1603 to the 1990s: Oxford University Press, USA.


Table 1: Adopted stations participating in the project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ref.</th>
<th>Station</th>
<th>Nature of Adoption</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Arisaig</td>
<td>Most westerly station in the UK, has community meeting room and flowers by Sonia Cameron. On Jacobite steam train route.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Barrhead</td>
<td>Features posters displaying schoolwork and art projects of pupils at Barrhead Academy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Bridge of Orchy</td>
<td>The West Highland Sleeper is a bunkhouse that serves the West Highland Way. Stations flowers also feature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Crianlarich</td>
<td>Famous station tearoom and flowers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Cupar</td>
<td>Flowers by Cupar in Bloom and Cupar Heritage Society have opened a heritage centre.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Glenfinnan</td>
<td>Station Museum, Glenfinnan Bunkhouse and Station Tearoom (both in disused railway carriages). Historical Water Tank and Snowplough. Landscaping and Flowers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Invergordon</td>
<td>‘The Long Goodbye’ is a mural depicting the departure of the Seaforth Highlanders from the station in 1939 and their subsequent war history including capture at Dunkirk and captivity in Germany. 8 community groups involved in gardening.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Kinghorn</td>
<td>Stationhouse and flat now home to Lynette Gray an artist who uses the station as a gallery and studio. She also looks after the flowers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Ladybank</td>
<td>An artist studio and gallery run by Kirsty Lorenz.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Mallaig</td>
<td>Extensive gardening and hanging baskets tended lovingly by Sonia Cameron.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Maxwell Park</td>
<td>Community meeting room and flowers by Pollokshields Heritage Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Neilston</td>
<td>Flowers by Neilson Development Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>North Berwick</td>
<td>Flowers by North Berwick in Bloom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Pitlochry</td>
<td>Flowers by Pitlochry in Bloom and Pitlochry Station Bookshop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Stonehaven</td>
<td>Tourism Posters and Flowers by Stonehaven horizon project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Uddingston</td>
<td>Station Café and Flowers by ‘Uddingston Pride’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Wemyss Bay</td>
<td>The Friends of Wemyss Bay station have a bookshop and exhibition space, tend to a huge range of flowers and have a community ‘mini-allotment project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>West Kilbride</td>
<td>Flowers by West Kilbride Community and Chu Chu’s Restaurant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Whitecraigs</td>
<td>Flowers by Peter McKinley</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1: Scotland rail map
Figure 2: Images of adoption projects (from left, bunkhouse at Bridge of Orchy, bookshop at Pitlochry, and artist studio at Ladybank

Figure 3: Funding at Glenfinnan
Figure 4: Community Gateway Images (from left: seaside theme at North Berwick, welcome to Pitlochry)

Figure 5: Station Aesthetics (from left, tub at Stonehaven, floral colour at Whitecraigs, palm trees at Mallaig)

Figure 6: Station Heritage (from left: Station Museum at Glenfinnan, Mural at Invergordon, Gallery and local heritage exhibition at Wemyss Bay)
Statement of Contribution:

1. We explore the community role in regenerating social places for local tourism promotion. By focusing on “Adopt a Station,” a community engagement scheme run by First ScotRail, we demonstrate how the local community can co-create services that enhance the tourist experience. Many studies on tourism planning reach pessimistic conclusions with regards to the capabilities of local residents to make valid and worthwhile contributions to the tourism process. Our contribution is to highlight the potential for co-creation when the community are offered the opportunity to feel a sense of ownership and empowerment through involvement in a place meaning creation process. Additionally, existing views of cocreation see consumer involvement as a political form of power and exploitative. We offer a contrast with a scheme that acts as a catalyst to the community and their passion to represent the town or village in the most positive way to tourists.

2. Our study methods follow a qualitative social science approach. In keeping with standard ethnographic practice, we employed multiple methods of data collection over a 2.5 year period. We recorded data through extensive field notes, photographic evidence, video capture, a combination of audio recorded and electronically captured interviews and large-scale collection of relevant artefacts and documents. Our research is informed by and should be of interest to various disciplines within the social sciences umbrella including sociology, tourism, marketing and geography. We build our theoretical contribution around themes of community, cocreation and urban regeneration which are all key concepts within the social science tradition.