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Revitalising Rural Scotland: Loch Fyne, Branding and Belonging

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Introduction

Much of the research in and around the geographies of events and branding have been dominated by cities, at the expense of more rural environments (Pike, 2009a, 2009b; Landry, 2006; Kavaratzis and Dennis, 2018). Lauded, in particular, as a way forward for the post-industrial city, events have been theorised as mechanisms for overcoming neighbourhood stigma, supporting community cohesion, and improving health and wellbeing, amongst other benefits (Smith, 2012). By delivering positive experiences, place and perceptions of place can be changed. It is theorised that distinctiveness of place is achieved when experience there combines aesthetic, escapist, educational and entertainment dimensions, offering varied opportunities to be, to go, to learn and to enjoy (Pine and Gilmore, 2011). However, even within a regional economic development framework, urban centres are most often studied as the driving forces in innovation and growth, with surrounding rural areas cast in a passive and residual role (Ward and Brown, 2009). However, the urban policy preoccupations of depopulation, stigmatised environments and changing economic conditions also present a challenge for many rural areas. While the rural imaginary evokes natural beauty, community and social bonds (Tönnies, 1955), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development has delineated the specific demand and supply challenges that rural regions face: persistent out-migration of the younger and most educated people, lower average labour productivity, lower levels of public service provision, and a lack of cutting-edge telecommunications and other infrastructure (OECD, 2006). This paper seeks to explore the potential of effective place branding and event management in a rural area by examining the Loch Fyne Food Fair in Scotland.

The following section of the paper offers an overview of the role of events and place management in rural areas. The next section outlines the methodological approach. After a brief introduction to the case study, the paper presents its core themes of branding and authenticity, community and the third space, and the experience economy. The paper closes by reflecting on lessons for effective event management.

Events and Place Management in Rural Areas.

There is a growing literature on the regeneration and sustainability of rural areas set within the fields of place management studies and festivalization research (Wilson, et al., 2017). A key focus has been on the contribution of events to destination revitalisation and competitiveness (Armenski et al, 2017; Armenski, et al, 2011; Kim and Dwyer, 2003). In what is considered a classic definition in the field, Ritchie and Crouch (2003: 2) suggested that destination competitiveness should be understood

on the basis of "its ability to increase tourism expenditure, to increasingly attract visitors while providing them with satisfying, memorable experiences, and to do so in a profitable way, while enhancing the wellbeing of destination residents and preserving the natural capital of the destination for future generations." Since then, the destination competitiveness literature, has become well established, but also shot through with inconsistencies over its definition, measurement and its legitimacy as a topic of research (Novias et al, 2018).

Such inconsistencies have not prevented scholars from exploring the importance of events to rural areas and to the communities who live there. A number of studies have complimented the economic impacts with more of an emphasis on social impacts. In their examination of the impacts of small tourism events on rural places, Alves et al. (2010) focused on the Cherry Festival in Fundão, Portugal, to demonstrate that perceived social impacts extend beyond the economic benefits. Through a series of personal interviews and questionnaires (with suppliers, organisers and local residents) the data highlighted the importance of community image, community pride, recreational opportunities and the promotion of organizations and businesses. This helped to improve the quality of local life. In view of these benefits, Alves et al (2010) recommend that, event organisers should consider social impacts as part of their overall assessment and place management strategies.

Although economic imperatives are a key driver in the deployment of events for regeneration purposes (Smith, 2012), they are not always the primary concern in event activity more broadly. In her exploration of Fête de la soupe, a grassroot festival in Charroux, rural France, organised around the making and sharing of soup, Ducros (2017) also shows that profit motives and economic outcomes are not dominant. More important is how the festival constitutes a space of relational building between place and people, between people themselves and an introspective moment over the past and future of place as "rural". A key aspect is the ways in which place gets (re)made in a rural village through participation in the festival, which, as it is rooted in vernacular food practices also regenerates sense of place and attachment to place. Although the annual festival does yield economic benefits, it is very much an opportunity for people to come together to promote their community identity and the rural area with which it is most associated. As France urbanised, soup retained its rural connections by remaining the basic dish of peasant communities (Mennel, 1985). According to Ducros (2017:308): "Soup serves as a cultural sign at different scales: national, territorial (*terroir*), local, rural, familial…The revival of soup through soup festivals may be another way for urban French to reconnect with a rurality that has been lost and for rural France to express

their identity to an outside and reinforce place attachment." Loch Fyne produce also has a strong rural identity, something which we discuss below.

Events, and the spaces where they are hosted, have also been conceptualised as "third places." (Waxman, 2006; Slater and Koo, 2010). Hawkins and Ryan (2013) highlight how the Falls Music & Arts Festival (Australia) and Festival of Lights (New Zealand), display the essence of third place. This included community spaces to connect with others in the community, neutrality where people can just be themselves with little or no demands and/or opportunities to build social connections and networks that contribute to growing social capital. Even though these festivals weren't exclusively linked to rural areas, they share many of the characteristics of rural counterparts: Place branding and event management played a key role in creating third places, which in turn promoted individual wellbeing, social inclusion and a sense of community. Another aspect of the study, which hasn't featured so explicitly in the work cited above is authenticity, something which cannot transplanted from one event to another. As we go on to show, authenticity is crucial to the success of place branding by which we mean Loch Fyne as an actual place and as a brand.

Place branding can also be considered in terms of its relationship to culture. Scaramanga (2012) points to the advantages of using art(s) and culture-based activities to promote a place. The argument is that culture plays a critical role as long as "authentic cultural elements" are produced by local residents. This chimes with previous work which suggests that, the single most dangerous aspect of cultural investment is that it simply does not sit comfortably in the context for which it is intended (see Jayne, 2004). In rural areas, culture is less about design and architecture and more centered upon community identity, food and beverage, arts and crafts, music and the beauty of the natural landscape. When made to work together, these elements can lend an authenticity to place branding and how it meets a number of needs as part of rural tourism. As Bessière (2002:1) notes, this is particularly true for gastronomy: "Identity markers of a region and/or as a means of promoting farm products, gastronomy meets the specific needs of consumers, local producers and other actors in rural tourism." This trend where productive relationships have been forged between rural tourism and culinary heritage. In cases where these relationships work in and through events, rural communities are able to involve and benefit from various place branding and management actors. Events can also form part of a rural strategy to adapt to outside forces as a collective, cultural and regional identity.

Methodology

The ethnographic methodological approach deployed was derived from the Chicago School of Sociology and from visual methodologies (Rose, 2016). Participant observation was conducted at the Loch Fyne Food Fair in Argyll & Bute in 2017. The data consisted of purposeful conversations with event organisers and social interactions with members of the local community and other event attendees, alongside extensive field notes and photographs. In order to develop our understanding of the Food Fair through the eyes of the local community, and others who were in attendance, researchers established positive relationships throughout the duration of the event, using methods which provided us with details suited to fine grained analysis. The approach stemmed from the Chicago School of Sociology and in particular William Foote Whyte (1943) which meant that as the researchers sat and listened they learned the answers to questions that might not otherwise have arisen. Following Rose (2012), analytic interpretations of the visual materials were grounded in the specific context and social circumstances of the ethnography.

Initial preparation involved studying the online program and mapping out what events were on and when. To meet retain the focus and meet the main aim of this paper, the researchers designed a schedule of participation all organised events. Contra Baudrillard's (1998) "simulacrum", we make no distinction between the real and the unreal; our photographs and the images used in promotional brochures are a reminder of the extent to which the Food Fair is dependent upon (the real place that is) Loch Fyne and its stunning imagery for authenticity. This chimes with a previous observation from Pinney (2004:8), who suggests it is important to be cognizant of 'not [just] how images "look", but what they can "do"'. For us this was connected with *how* we looked at our photographs *qua* our overall analysis. To do this we drew upon the work of Berger (1972:9) which suggests that, we never just look at one thing; we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves."

Findings and Discussion

The Loch Fyne Food Fair is Scotland's oldest and most established food Fair, happenning each May in Argyll & Bute, the second largest administrative area of any Scottish council.

Place Branding and Authenticity

In terms of both product and produce, the Fair can be considered extraordinarily eclectic, reaching beyond what might be thought of as niche Scottish territory, while

strongly signalling and managing to maintain a coherent regional identity. Outside the tent, Scozzese Wood Fired Pizza include Stornoway black pudding as a pizza topping; just inside, you can buy a sausage roll made with chorizo and Tamworth pork. A sense of coherence is generated through the Loch Fyne brand, which emphasises fresh, local and high-quality produce: the local, in this case, is an issue of identified origination, from the Loch Fyne or another rural context. Brands and branding are inherently entangled with ideas of place. Place branding can be considered as a distinct activity from place marketing; the former is largely demand led, with the needs and demands of customers as a starting point, alongside the corollary expectation was that places should adjust themselves in search of a "competitive identity" according to customer demand (Anholt, 2007; Pedersen, 2004). Insofar as place marketing and the more recent phenomenon of place branding are attempts to improve the economies of given geographical locations, they can be considered analogous. Proponents of both approaches accept that obtaining an effective brand will put a region on the map and bestow it with a positive identity and image. However, place branding takes as its point of departure the *identity* of places. Locational assets or unique selling points are used to create and sustain identity (Nilsson *et al.*, 2010).

In the case of specifically Loch Fyne branded products, including ales, whiskey, oysters, mussels, salmon and langoustines, the event can be considered as part of an ambitious effort selling Argyll & Bute by using local resources to project and strengthen regional identity. As Govers and Go (2009: 17) put it, "place branding is about representing a place by building a positive internal (with those who deliver the experience) and external (with visitors) image which leads to a brand satisfaction and loyalty, name awareness, perceived quality, and other favorable associations". As shown above, an authentic identity of place is critical to successful branding approaches. Claims to authenticity within the Fair are made through image, produce and language highlighting locally produced food, drink and crafts. Photographs of the surrounding area used in marketing local produce make no attempt to portray west Scotland bathed in sunshine. The evocation of a rural imaginary draws on what might be considered as a more wild, romantic landscape, in black and white, or using the grey and green tones that the visitor is likely to see. Within both the main and craft tents, signage, packaging and conversation reiterate product origination, often from around the Loch itself (Figure 1). The wood, from which one trader is hand-carving spoons using a small axe, is indigenous to the region and sustainably gathered and there is an emphasis on handcrafted, sustainable and recycled materials. While much of the produce can be considered traditionally Scottish, its treatment and presentation caters to cosmopolitan tastes referencing, for example, the smoking methods used or that salmon is 'double cured with beetroot.' Alongside

the epicurean register made familiar by restaurants and celebrity chefs, the branding of the food Fair itself should be considered, Fyne being a homophone for 'fine', a signifier of high quality. As well as recurring on Loch Fyne branded produce, the Fair also advertises FyneFest later in the year, a beer, food and music festival, which advertises local award winning produce and draws in craft beer makers from Europe as well as across the UK.

Figure 1: Branding and authenticity (Image credit: Julie Clark)

Community and Third Place

As one of the largest events in Argyll and Bute, The Loch Fyne Food Fair is a crucial event for providing a focal point bringing the relatively dispersed population together, promoted as "A feast of West Coast food, drink and entertainment for all ages." The event is the key site for showcasing an extensive regional culinary system called "Food From Argyll", which includes salmon, oysters, cupcakes, Whiskies at Inveraray, scotch eggs, Fyne Ales, brisket, truckle & loaf, coffee from Cardross, as well as Shawararama and marinated meats.

The event as a third place was the dominant social outcome for the Food Fair (Oldenburg, 1999; Hawkins and Ryan, 2013). Mingled throughout the site there was a "friendly and inclusive atmosphere", as everyone was "brought forth and consumed in the 'warm circle' of experience" (Bauman, 2001: 65) from a slightly different context. Many of the social interactions were random conversations between strangers and members of the local community, who more than help to answer questions and help everyone out:
"Everyone seems to feel welcome and there is a real family atmosphere….it's very safe. There are some non-Scottish accents, too….everyone is equal here"(fieldnotes). In this regard, the Food Fair is a rubric under which differences between people are concealed, or at least not made explicit. One participant described the Food Fair as "…a place where no one really stands out, nor do they want to which is a good thing, it makes you feel that everyone is on the same level and that everyone benefits from what has been laid on. This was why the wife and I came back." This quote supports a key observation from Dench (1986:182) which is that, the idea of community is "to share benefits among their members, regardless of how talented or important they are."

Another aspect which made the Food Fair work as a third place was its community feel and atmosphere. Organisers and community members told researchers that,

although the field site would accommodate expansion, the modest size of the Fair ensured its sustainability. Previous work by Alves at al (2010) demonstrates that, for small events in rural areas, the social impacts can extend beyond the economic benefits. This was also true of Loch Fyne as recognised by the organisers, who were also keen to ensure that the Food Fair remained an important meeting place for the local community rather than scale up in an attempt to increase profits.

Hawkins and Ryan (2013:197) note, "a key characteristic of third place is the break away from civil life"; however, third places cannot effectively function without being appropriated by their surroundings. Rural landscape perception research suggests that, the aesthetic contribution cannot be underestimated. The Food Fair's physical location in a Cairndow field at the head of Loch Fyne was part of its appeal (see Figure X), particularly for those who traveled from Glasgow and from other cities and towns.

Figure 2: View of landscape surrounding the location of the Loch Fyne Food Fair (Image credit: Gareth Rice)

As one of many visual representations which the researchers took during the field work period Photo 1 captures the visual impact of the surrounding landscape and enabled the researchers to a) 'see' the positive landscape features which give wider context to the Food Fair as a third place and b) appreciate precisely what the landscape offered the Food Fair attendees appreciate the absence of urbanisation, lushness, openness, fresh air and high relief. Remoteness and memories were particularly important to those from outside the local community. One participant told the researchers that they "loved the isolated feeling of the place." Another participant, who was originally from Glasgow but had moved to Edinburgh, said that, "The drive to here is part of the experience…I really feel like I am going somewhere and when I get here it's always worth it. This [Argyll & Bute] is where I first experienced rural Scotland and this event gives me an excuse to revisit every year. I bring my kids here now and they love it too".

The landscape is most familiar to the local community and provides a key reference point for Loch Fyne the brand. The place branding uses its geographical features as part of a wider rural imaginary which taps into and exports the natural beauty of the region. At the local level, these images connect the local community, with the Food Fair and the surrounding landscape: the Arrochar Alps, Ardgoil peninsula and sweeping hillsides and mountain passes are used to demarcate the Food Fair.

Loch Fyne and The Experience Economy

Of the four conceptual realms of the experience economy, the aesthetic environment and entertainment offer passive enjoyment, while the escapism of engaging with the Fair and educational opportunities bring the chance for active participation (Pine and Gilmore, 2011).

The Fair as an **aesthetic experience** begins prior to arrival: whether travelling by bus, coach, walking, cycling or private car, all approaches run alongside the eponymous loch, surrounded by imposing hills and the fast-changing cloud-scape that comes from being at the edge of the Atlantic Ocean. For many, the strong evocation of the beauty of the area though Loch Fyne produce will give this experience added resonance: the area and event has been signalled to the visitor as a wild space, where fresh, natural produce is caught and sold. Although an annual event of four decades standing, the site of the Fair itself is also resolutely temporary in style, set in fields between the hills and the Old Military Road. Parking means being directed into fields at the back of the tent that houses the Fair, rather than any hard standing. More on tents if not elsewhere? While the associated Loch Fyne Oyster Bar and Restaurant, and the small Tree Shop Garden Centre are nearby, from the site of the Fair it is the landscape, not the nearby built environment, which dominates. This landscape is a key part of the experience and there are always people outside, taking in the view, looking at the land, the sky, and breathing the air, regardless of rain, wind or sunshine.

The landscape also contributes to the **escapist** realm of the Loch Fyne Food Fair experience. For the visitor or tourist, immersion in the landscape also offers a means of getting away from day-to-day urban life. The environment of the Fair, the produce, and the workshop activities on offer foster a sense of acquiring membership of a quasi-rural community for the weekend. Many of the goods on offer are premium quality and relatively high end: oysters rest on a bed of ice beside heavy bottles; chalk writing on the board against the wall of the tent confirms that this is champagne, available alongside prosecco and more humble offerings. However, anyone can come in. There is no entry charge, no ticket requirement and a resultant sense of escapism in the village atmosphere generated by the interchange and discussion over produce and crafts.

Figure 3: Workshops

Speaking to the educational realm of experience, the active dimension of the Fair is further extended by the opportunity to participate in workshops. These events are

run throughout the day, in a smaller, annexed tent. There is no charge for any of the workshops; all that is required is to sign up in advance. The workshops are food and drink-based, with a strong, interactive component, whether consuming (e.g handling hops and tasting with the local Loch Fyne Ales company) or doing and creating (as in learning how to shuck oysters, make Scotch eggs or decorate cupcakes). Absorption and enjoyment are evident, as workshop participants make introductions over mutual interest and support with unusual activities. Quirky and distinctive experiences like these are a signature feature of the experience economy (Figure 3). With some workshops suitable for children, as well as adults, the small group environment (mostly around fifteen participants), also fosters social interaction within and beyond the workshops, allowing participants to build a network of acquaintance at the Fair.

Figure 3: Workshops (Image credit: Julie Clark)

The entertainment realm is represented at the Fair by a programme of live music at one end of the tent, showcasing both local talent, such as the band Heron Valley and music more associated with Scotland as a whole. Outdoors, a mix of different traditional Scottish bands offered entertainment, often incorporating a mix of adults and younger people playing bagpipes and drums. As conceived by Pine and Gimour (2011) entertainment primarily functioning as a passive experience, in effect, the *consumption* of dance, music or some other spectacle. While there is plenty of opportunity for this kind of experience, this underplays the role of entertainment at the Fair. Visitors participate in ceilidh dancing, as well as watching, many of the acts are local, with friends and family present and highly engaged, and the music itself offers further currency for social exchange. The festival atmosphere outside is further energised by the presence of children playing on fairground style attractions, getting their faces painted or running around as adults eat and drink or just sit and chat on picnic benches outside. In this sense, the entertainment itself offers a sense of participation, being part of the community and the festivalscape.

Conclusions

Competition and standardisation in global markets have reduced uniqueness and stimulated demands for authenticity and provenance. This has created a demand for authenticity, which events in rural regions are well positioned to meet. The Loch Fyne Food Fair in Argyll and Bute highlights a manifold disjuncture between place marketing and place branding, which in turn reflects the different approaches to how cities and rural areas seek to remain competitive. Cities often adopt the same strategies including the couching of global retail capital, securing the services of

'starchitects' to build signature buildings and regenerating old industrial areas to bring rivers back into vogue. These initiatives are most associated with place marketing. In rural areas by contrast, the emphasis is more on distinctiveness, authenticity and keeping events smaller in scale when compared with cities. This ethnography of the has generated three interrelated findings, all of which may be of value to event managers. First, the authenticity of the brand is critical. The evidence suggests a need for inter-professional thinking, combined with sensitivity to place branding in rural areas, in order to avoid the reproduction of borrowed cultural elements and practices, such as 'the Guggenheim effect' (Miles, 2007) or 'Doing a Glasgow' (Mooney, 2004) which have been synonymous with cities. Second, the long-term success and sustainability of the event was supported by the third place characteristics of the Food Fair, in that social impacts featured prominently alongside any economic benefits to organisers, the region and participants. The Fair was designed to provide an inclusive third space for community formation. Residents, visitors and tourists came together with local and visiting enterepreneurs, forming a quasi-rural community as well as supporting community cohesion around Loch Fyne over the longer term. Third, as a mature and well attended event, the Fair encapsulated all realms of the experience economy in one location. The aesthetic, escapist, educational and entertainment experiences on offer should not be considered in isolation from one another *qua* event management. The interdepence between these elements underpins place branding and a sense of belonging, securing the long term commitment of both visitors and locals alike.

Note
[1] The Times, 16.04.2018. "Scots will lose out on broadband deal, claims minister."

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Figure 1: Branding and authenticity

Figure 2: View of landscape surrounding the location of the Loch Fyne Food Fair (Image Credit: Gareth Rice)

Figure 3: Food Fair Workshops (Image credit: Julie Clark)

Introduction

Much of the research in and around the geographies of events and branding have been dominated by cities, at the expense of more rural environments (Pike, 2009a, 2009b; Landry, 2006; Kavaratzis and Dennis, 2018). Lauded, in particular, as a way forward for the post-industrial city, events have been theorised as mechanisms for overcoming neighbourhood stigma, supporting community cohesion, and improving health and wellbeing, amongst other benefits (Landry, 2008, Smith, 2012, Shone and Parry, 2013). By delivering positive experiences, place and perceptions of place can be changed. It is theorised that distinctiveness of place is achieved when experience there combines aesthetic, escapist, educational and entertainment dimensions, offering varied opportunities to be, to go, to learn and to enjoy (Pine and Gilmore, 2011). However, even within a regional economic development framework, urban centres are most often studied as the driving forces in innovation and growth, with surrounding rural areas cast in a passive and residual role (Ward and Brown, 2009). However, the urban policy preoccupations of depopulation, stigmatised environments and changing economic conditions also present a challenge for many rural areas. While the rural imaginary evokes natural beauty, community and social bonds (Tönnies, 1955), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development has delineated the specific demand and supply challenges that rural regions face: persistent out-migration of the younger and most educated people, lower average labour productivity, lower levels of public service provision, and a lack of cutting-edge telecommunications and other infrastructure (OECD, 2006).

This paper seeks to explore the potential of effective place branding and event management in a rural area by examining the Loch Fyne Food Fair in Scotland. The food and drink industry is a core focus of Scotland's economic development strategy, benefiting communities by making a significant contribution to the nation's economy though a £1bn visitor spend and as the lead international export (Scottish Government, 2015; 2018). Publicity campaigns and policy support have seen the industry transform in Scotland, from having a generally poor reputation prior to the first Taste of Scotland campaign in the 1970s, to supporting a range of attractions broadly classified as food tourism including food festivals, food trails, cooking holidays and farmers markets (Everett, 2012). Attracting a couple of hundred visitors each year, the Loch Fyne Food Fair is Scotland's longest running outdoor food festival, established in 1990. Held each spring in Argyll and Bute, the second largest administrative area of any Scottish council, the Fair contributes to the region's successful marketing campaign aimed at attracting visitors. In the first half of 2017, the region received over 1.3 million visitors, an increase of 13.1% on 2016. In the same period, visitor numbers to Argyll and Bute attractions across Scotland increased by nearly 7%, at a rate 2.4% greater than across Scotland as a whole (Argyll and Bute Council, 2018).

The following section of the paper offers an overview of the role of events and place management in rural areas. The next section outlines the methodological approach. After a brief introduction to the case study, the paper presents its core themes of branding and authenticity, community and the third space, and the experience economy. The paper closes by reflecting on lessons for effective event management.

Events and Place Management in Rural Areas.

There is a growing literature on the regeneration and sustainability of rural areas set within the fields of place management studies and festivalization research (Wilson, et al., 2017). A key focus has been on the contribution of events to destination revitalisation and competitiveness (Armenski et al, 2017; Armenski, et al, 2011; Kim and Dwyer, 2003). In what is considered a classic definition in the field, Ritchie and Crouch (2003: 2) suggested that destination competitiveness should be understood on the basis of "its ability to increase tourism expenditure, to increasingly attract visitors while providing them with satisfying, memorable experiences, and to do so in a profitable way, while enhancing the wellbeing of destination residents and preserving the natural capital of the destination for future generations." Since then, destination competitiveness literature has become well established, although challenged over inconsistencies. Novias *et al*, (2018) classify these as: ability of a destination to provide a high standard of living for the residents of that destination; the ability of a destination to increasingly attract and satisfy potential tourists and; sustainability as it applies to the environmental and social aspects of the destination.

Such inconsistencies have not prevented scholars from exploring the importance of events to rural areas and to the communities who live there. A number of studies have complimented the economic impacts with more of an emphasis on social impacts. In their examination of the impacts of small tourism events on rural places, Alves et al. (2010) focused on the Cherry Festival in Fundão, Portugal, to demonstrate that perceived social impacts extend beyond the economic benefits. Through a series of personal interviews and questionnaires (with suppliers, organisers and local residents) the data highlighted the importance of community image, community pride, recreational opportunities and the promotion of organizations and businesses. This helped to improve the quality of local life. In view of these benefits, Alves et al (2010) recommend that, event organisers should consider social impacts as part of their overall assessment and place management strategies.

Although economic imperatives are a key driver in the deployment of events for regeneration purposes (Smith, 2012), they are not always the primary concern in event activity more broadly. In her exploration of Fête de la soupe, a grassroot festival in Charroux, rural France, organised around the making and sharing of soup, Ducros

(2017) also shows that profit motives and economic outcomes are not dominant. More important is how the festival constitutes a space of relational building between place and people, between people themselves and an introspective moment over the past and future of place as "rural". A key aspect is the ways in which place gets (re)made in a rural village through participation in the festival, which, as it is rooted in vernacular food practices also regenerates sense of place and attachment to place. Although the annual festival does yield economic benefits, it is very much an opportunity for people to come together to promote their community identity and the rural area with which it is most associated. As France urbanised, soup retained its rural connections by remaining the basic dish of peasant communities (Mennel, 1985). According to Ducros (2017:308): "Soup serves as a cultural sign at different scales: national, territorial (*terroir*), local, rural, familial…The revival of soup through soup festivals may be another way for urban French to reconnect with a rurality that has been lost and for rural France to express their identity to an outside and reinforce place attachment." Loch Fyne produce also has a strong rural identity, something which we discuss below.

Events, and the spaces where they are hosted, have also been conceptualised as "third places." (Waxman, 2006; Slater and Koo, 2010). Hawkins and Ryan (2013) highlight how the Falls Music & Arts Festival (Australia) and Festival of Lights (New Zealand), display the essence of third place. This included community spaces to connect with others in the community, neutrality where people can just be themselves with little or no demands and/or opportunities to build social connections and networks that contribute to growing social capital (Rodriguez-Giron and Vanneste, 2019). Even though these festivals weren't exclusively linked to rural areas, they share many of the characteristics of rural counterparts: Place branding and event management played a key role in creating third places, which in turn promoted individual wellbeing, social inclusion and a sense of community. Another aspect of the study, which hasn't featured so explicitly in the work cited above is authenticity, something which cannot transplanted from one event to another. As we go on to show, authenticity is crucial to the success of place branding by which we mean Loch Fyne as an actual place and as a brand.

Place branding can also be considered in terms of its relationship to culture. Scaramanga (2012) points to the advantages of using art(s) and culture-based activities to promote a place. The argument is that culture plays a critical role as long as "authentic cultural elements" are produced by local residents. This chimes with previous work which suggests that, the single most dangerous aspect of cultural investment is that it simply does not sit comfortably in the context for which it is intended (see Jayne, 2004). In rural areas, culture is less about design and architecture

and more centered upon community identity, food and beverage, arts and crafts, music and the beauty of the natural landscape. When made to work together, these elements can lend an authenticity to place branding and how it meets a number of needs as part of rural tourism (See Torres, 2002; Cohen, 2007; Sims, 2009). As Bessière (2002:1) notes, this is particularly true for gastronomy: "Identity markers of a region and/or as a means of promoting farm products, gastronomy meets the specific needs of consumers, local producers and other actors in rural tourism." This trend where productive relationships have been forged between rural tourism and culinary heritage. In cases where these relationships work in and through events, rural communities are able to involve and benefit from various place branding and management actors. Events can also form part of a rural strategy to adapt to outside forces as a collective, cultural and regional identity.

Methodology

The ethnographic methodological approach deployed was derived from the Chicago School of Sociology and from visual methodologies (Rose, 2016). Participant observation was conducted at the Loch Fyne Food Fair over two days in Argyll and Bute in 2017. The rigour of our approach was demonstrated by our using different types of data and our data analysis procedure. This afforded greater modes of interaction and cognition between the data and increased the opportunity for interpretative insight leading to a more rigorous analysis process. During the analysis process, annotations and memos were created to record our developing interpretations of the data. The data consisted of purposeful conversations with event organisers and social interactions with members of the local community and other event attendees, alongside extensive field notes and photographs. In order to develop our understanding of the Food Fair through the eyes of the local community, and others who were in attendance, researchers established positive relationships throughout the duration of the event, using methods which provided us with details suited to fine grained analysis. The approach stemmed from the Chicago School of Sociology and in particular William Foote Whyte (1943) which meant that as the researchers sat and listened they learned the answers to questions that might not otherwise have arisen. To devise the themes outlined below we treated our ethnography and photographs as one body of data. Following Rose (2016; see also Rose, 2012), our coding analysis included the status of the photographs as inventories of the event and representations of Loch Fyne used in place branding.

Initial preparation involved studying the online program and mapping out what events were on and when. The researchers designed a schedule of participation organised events. This link between the event and the place is part of the wider

demand for more "authentic" tourist experiences (see Sims, 2009). By authentic, we don't just mean the Food Fair itself, but the multiple meanings that the tourists and visitors bring to it (see Cohen, 2007).

Findings and Discussion

The following section explores key themes emergent from the data.

Place Branding and Authenticity

Brands and branding are inherently entangled with ideas of place. Place branding can be considered as a distinct activity from place marketing; the former is largely demand led, with the needs and demands of customers as a starting point, alongside the corollary expectation was that places should adjust themselves in search of a "competitive identity" according to customer demand (Anholt, 2007; Pedersen, 2004). Insofar as place marketing and the more recent phenomenon of place branding are attempts to improve the economies of given geographical locations, they can be considered analogous. Proponents of both approaches accept that obtaining an effective brand will put a region on the map and bestow it with a positive identity and image. However, place branding takes as its point of departure the *identity* of places. Locational assets or unique selling points are used to create and sustain identity (Nilsson *et al.*, 2010).

In the case of specifically Loch Fyne branded products, including ales, whiskey, oysters, mussels, salmon and langoustines, the event can be considered as part of an ambitious effort selling Argyll and Bute by using local resources to project and strengthen regional identity. As Govers and Go (2009: 17) put it, "place branding is about representing a place by building a positive internal (with those who deliver the experience) and external (with visitors) image which leads to a brand satisfaction and loyalty, name awareness, perceived quality, and other favorable associations". As noted above, the link between authenticity and place is critical to successful branding approaches. Claims to authenticity within the Fair are made through image, produce and language highlighting locally produced food, drink and crafts. Photographs of the surrounding area used in marketing local produce make no attempt to portray the west Scotland as bathed in sunshine. The evocation of a rural imaginary draws on what might be considered as a more wild, romantic landscape, in black and white, or using the grey and green tones that the visitor is likely to see. Within both the main and craft tents, signage, packaging and conversation reiterate product origination, often from around the Loch itself (Figure 1). The wood, from which one trader is hand-carving spoons using a small axe, is indigenous to the region and sustainably

gathered and there is an emphasis on handcrafted, sustainable and recycled materials. While much of the produce can be considered traditionally Scottish, its treatment and presentation caters to cosmopolitan tastes referencing, for example, the smoking methods used or that salmon is 'double cured with beetroot.' Alongside the epicurean register made familiar by restaurants and celebrity chefs, the branding of the food Fair itself should be considered, Fyne being a homophone for 'fine', a signifier of high quality. As well as recurring attention to Loch Fyne branded produce, the Fair also advertises FyneFest later in the year, a beer, food and music festival, which advertises local award winning produce and draws in craft beer makers from Europe as well as across the UK.

However, in terms of both product and produce, the Fair can be considered extraordinarily eclectic, reaching beyond what might be thought of as niche Scottish territory, while strongly signalling and managing to maintain a coherent regional identity. Outside the tent, Scozzese Wood Fired Pizza include Stornoway black pudding as a pizza topping; just inside, sausage rolls made with chorizo and Tamworth pork are for sale. A sense of coherence is generated through the Loch Fyne brand, which emphasises fresh, local and high-quality produce: the local, in this case, is an issue of identified origination, from the Loch Fyne or another rural context.

Figure 1: Branding and authenticity (Image credit: Julie Clark)

Community and Third Place

The Loch Fyne Food Fair is a crucial event for providing a focal point bringing the relatively dispersed population together, promoted as "A feast of West Coast food, drink and entertainment for all ages." The event is the key site for showcasing an extensive regional culinary system called "Food From Argyll", which includes salmon, oysters, cupcakes, Whiskies at Inveraray, scotch eggs, Fyne Ales, brisket, truckle & loaf, coffee from Cardross, as well as Shawararama and marinated meats.

The event as a third place was the dominant social outcome for the Food Fair (Oldenburg, 1999; Hawkins and Ryan, 2013). Mingled throughout the site there was a "friendly and inclusive atmosphere", as everyone was "brought forth and consumed in the 'warm circle' of experience" (Bauman, 2001: 65) from a slightly different context. Many of the social interactions were random conversations between strangers and members of the local community, who more than help to answer questions and help everyone out:

"Everyone seems to feel welcome and there is a real family atmosphere….it's very safe. There are some non-Scottish accents, too….everyone is equal here"(fieldnotes). In this regard, the Food Fair is a rubric under which differences between people are concealed, or at least not made explicit. One participant described the Food Fair as "…a place where no one really stands out, nor do they want to which is a good thing, it makes you feel that everyone is on the same level and that everyone benefits from what has been laid on. This was why the wife and I came back." This quote supports a key observation from Dench (1986:182) which is that, the idea of community is "to share benefits among their members, regardless of how talented or important they are."

Another aspect which made the Food Fair work as a third place was its community feel and atmosphere. Organisers and community members told researchers that, although the field site would accommodate expansion, the modest size of the Fair ensured its sustainability. This is not to suggest that the concept of community should be treated uncritically. Previous work by Anderson (1983), Cohen (1985), Bauman (2001) and Delanty (2003) has analyzed the changing nature of communities. A common thread running through this work is the enduring nostalgia for the idea of community as a source of security, identity and belonging. This is partly due to Bauman's (2001) notion of 'liquid modernity' and its associated nomadism and competitiveness. Our data supports previous work about the ability of food and drinks (and the branding of them) to create a quasi-rural community by linking people, place and community. As noted by Sims (2009:328), this is because, "foods and drinks engage all the senses and have stronger connections with place because we have personal, sensory memories of consuming them in that setting."

Hawkins and Ryan (2013:197) note, "a key characteristic of third place is the break away from civil life"; however, third places cannot effectively function without being appropriated by their surroundings. Rural landscape perception research suggests that, the aesthetic contribution cannot be underestimated. The Food Fair's physical location in a Cairndow field at the head of Loch Fyne was part of its appeal (see Figure 2), particularly for those who traveled from Glasgow and from other cities and towns.

Figure 2: View of landscape surrounding the location of the Loch Fyne Food Fair (Image credit: Gareth Rice)

As one of many visual representations which the researchers took during the field work period Photo 1 captures the visual impact of the surrounding landscape and enabled the researchers to a) 'see' the positive landscape features which give wider

context to the Food Fair as a third place and b) appreciate precisely what the landscape offered the Food Fair attendees appreciate the absence of urbanisation, lushness, openness, fresh air and high relief. Remoteness and memories were particularly important to those from outside the local community. One participant told the researchers that they "loved the isolated feeling of the place." Another participant, who was originally from Glasgow but had moved to Edinburgh, said that, "The drive to here is part of the experience…I really feel like I am going somewhere and when I get here it's always worth it. This [Argyll and Bute] is where I first experienced rural Scotland and this event gives me an excuse to revisit every year. I bring my kids here now and they love it too".

The landscape is most familiar to the local community and provides a key reference point for Loch Fyne the brand. The place branding uses its geographical features as part of a wider rural imaginary which taps into and exports the natural beauty of the region. At the local level, these images connect the local community, with the Food Fair and the surrounding landscape: the Arrochar Alps, Ardgoil peninsula and sweeping hillsides and mountain passes are used to demarcate the Food Fair.

Loch Fyne and The Experience Economy

Of the four conceptual realms of the experience economy, the aesthetic environment and entertainment offer passive enjoyment, while the escapism of engaging with the Fair and educational opportunities bring the chance for active participation (Pine and Gilmore, 2011).

The Fair as an **aesthetic experience** begins prior to arrival: whether travelling by bus, coach, walking, cycling or private car, all approaches run alongside the eponymous loch, surrounded by imposing hills and the fast-changing cloud-scape that comes from being at the edge of the Atlantic Ocean. For many, the strong evocation of the beauty of the area though Loch Fyne produce will give this experience added resonance: the area and event has been signalled to the visitor as a wild space, where fresh, natural produce is caught and sold. Although an annual event of four decades standing, the site of the Fair itself is also resolutely temporary in style, set in fields between the hills and the Old Military Road. Parking means being directed into fields at the back of the tent that houses the Fair, rather than any hard standing. More on tents if not elsewhere? While the associated Loch Fyne Oyster Bar and Restaurant, and the small Tree Shop Garden Centre are nearby, from the site of the Fair it is the landscape, not the nearby built environment, which dominates. This landscape is a key part of the experience and there are always people outside, taking in the view, looking at the land, the sky, and breathing the air, regardless of rain, wind or sunshine.

The landscape also contributes to the **escapist** realm of the Loch Fyne Food Fair experience. For the visitor or tourist, immersion in the landscape also offers a means of getting away from day-to-day urban life. The environment of the Fair, the produce, and the workshop activities on offer foster a sense of acquiring membership of a quasi-rural community for the weekend. Many of the goods on offer are premium quality and relatively high end: oysters rest on a bed of ice beside heavy bottles; chalk writing on the board against the wall of the tent confirms that this is champagne, available alongside prosecco and more humble offerings. However, anyone can come in. There is no entry charge, no ticket requirement and a resultant sense of escapism in the village atmosphere generated by the interchange and discussion over produce and crafts.

Speaking to the educational realm of experience, the active dimension of the Fair is further extended by the opportunity to participate in workshops. These events are run throughout the day, in a smaller, annexed tent. There is no charge for any of the workshops; all that is required is to sign up in advance. The workshops are food and drink-based, with a strong, interactive component, whether consuming (e.g handling hops and tasting with the local Loch Fyne Ales company) or doing and creating (as in learning how to shuck oysters, make Scotch eggs or decorate cupcakes). Absorption and enjoyment are evident, as workshop participants make introductions though their mutual interest and support for one another, participating in unusual activities. Quirky and distinctive experiences like these are a signature feature of the experience economy (Figure 3). With some workshops suitable for children, as well as adults, the small group environment (mostly around fifteen participants), also fosters social interaction within and beyond the workshops, allowing participants to build a network of acquaintance at the Fair.

Figure 3: Workshops (Image credit: Julie Clark)

The entertainment realm is represented at the Fair by a programme of live music at one end of the tent, showcasing both local talent, such as the band Heron Valley and music more associated with Scotland as a whole. Outdoors, a mix of different traditional Scottish bands offered entertainment, often incorporating a mix of adults and younger people playing bagpipes and drums. As conceived by Pine and Gilmour (2011) entertainment primarily functioning as a passive experience, in effect, the *consumption* of dance, music or some other spectacle. While there is plenty of opportunity for this kind of experience, this underplays the role of entertainment at the Fair. Sensory experience and creative engagement are integral parts of the Loch

Fyne brand. Visitors participate in ceilidh *dancing* as well as watching, many of the acts are local, with friends and family present and highly engaged, and the music itself offers further currency for social exchange. The festival atmosphere outside is further energised by the presence of children playing on fairground style attractions, getting their faces painted or running around as adults eat and drink or just sit and chat on picnic benches outside. In this sense, the entertainment itself offers a sense of participation, being part of the community and the festivalscape.

Conclusions

Competition and standardisation in global markets have reduced uniqueness and stimulated demands for authenticity and provenance. This has created a demand for authenticity, which events in rural regions are well positioned to meet (Cohen, 2007; Sims, 2009). The Loch Fyne Food Fair in Argyll and Bute highlights a manifold disjuncture between place marketing and place branding, which in turn reflects the different approaches to how cities and rural areas seek to remain competitive. Cities often adopt the same strategies including the couching of global retail capital, securing the services of 'starchitects' to build signature buildings and regenerating old industrial areas to bring rivers back into vogue. These initiatives are most associated with culture and place marketing (see Miles, 2007). In rural areas by contrast, the emphasis is more on distinctiveness, authenticity and keeping events smaller in scale when compared with cities (Cohen, 2007; Sims, 2009). Our ethnography has generated three interrelated findings, all of which may be of value to event managers. First, the authenticity of the brand is critical. The evidence suggests a need for inter-professional thinking, combined with sensitivity to place branding in rural areas, in order to avoid the reproduction of borrowed cultural elements and practices, such as 'the Guggenheim effect' (Miles, 2007) or 'Doing a Glasgow' (Mooney, 2004) which have been synonymous with cities. Second, the long-term success and sustainability of the event was supported by the third place characteristics of the Food Fair, in that social impacts featured prominently alongside any economic benefits to organisers, the region and participants. The Fair was designed to provide an inclusive third space for community formation. Residents, visitors and tourists came together with local and visiting enterepreneurs, forming a quasi-rural community as well as supporting community cohesion around Loch Fyne over the longer term (cf. Delanty, 2003). Third, as a mature and well attended event, the Fair encapsulated all realms of the experience economy in one location. The aesthetic, escapist, educational and entertainment experiences on offer should not be considered in isolation from one another *qua* event management. The interdependence between these elements underpins place branding and a sense of belonging, securing the long term commitment of both visitors and locals alike.

Note

[1] The Times, 16.04.2018. "Scots will lose out on broadband deal, claims minister."

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