

## **Dreaming of drams: authenticity in Scottish whisky tourism as an expression of unresolved Habermasian rationalities**

### **Abstract**

In this paper the production of whisky tourism at both independently-owned and corporately-owned distilleries in Scotland is explored by focusing on four examples (Arran, Glengoyne, Glenturret and Bruichladdich). In particular, claims of authenticity and Scottishness of Scottish whiskies through commercial materials, case studies, website-forum discussions and ‘independent’ writing about such whisky are analyzed. It is argued that the globalization and commodification of whisky and whisky tourism, and the communicative backlash to these trends typified by the search for authenticity, is representative of a Habermasian struggle between two irreconcilable rationalities (Habermas, 1981:1984, 1981:1987). This paper will demonstrate that the meaning and purpose of leisure can be understood through such explorations of the tension between the instrumentality of commodification, and the freedom of individuals to locate their own leisure lives in the lifeworld that remains.

**Key words:** whisky tourism; Habermas; authenticity; Scottishness

## **Introduction**

Whisky tourism has grown to be an established part of Scotland's wider tourist trails, mirroring the visitor centres at vineyards in other countries (Hall, Sharples, Cambourne and Macionis, 2000), partly because of the globalization of blended whisky blends, and partly because of the quest for the true, supposedly authentic, cultural experience of single malt (*eg*, Jefford, 2004; McBoyle and McBoyle, 2008; Paterson and Smith, 2008).

This paper explores the (re)inventions of space, history and place associated with the highlands and west coast of Scotland and the unofficial whisky trail of distillery visitor centres (Gold and Gold, 1995; Martin and Haugh, 1999; McBoyle and McBoyle, 2008). In particular, claims of authenticity and Scottishness of Scottish whiskies are analyzed through a combination of Critical Discourse Analysis (Janks, 1997; Chiapello and Fairclough, 2002) and Discourse Tracing (LeGreco and Tracy, 2009): a multimethod, triangulated evaluation. In exploring authenticity in tourism, the paper will extend a theoretical framework of Habermasian rationalities to help understand the tensions between agency and commodification in the authenticity-in-tourism literature. Through this exploration of whisky, it is argued that the globalization and commodification of tourism, and the communicative backlash to these trends typified by the search for authenticity, is representative of a Habermasian struggle between two irreconcilable rationalities (Habermas, 1981:1984, 1981:1987).

Before any analysis is possible, a brief review of key literature is necessary. This will explore the two key theoretical concepts: Habermasian rationalities; Scottishness; and authenticity. After the literature review the

research methods will be discussed. Finally, the discussion will focus on a collection of discourse traces that are representative of the wider analysis.

## **Literature Review**

### a) Habermas

The work of Jurgen Habermas has been very influential within European critical sociology (Thompson and Held, 1982; Pedersen, 2008), however his polemical attacks against postmodernism have rendered him less acceptable to critical and cultural studies in the United Kingdom and the United States of America (though see Aboulafia, Bookman and Kemp, 2002). In critical studies of leisure, there have been three key theoretical projects applying a Habermasian lens: Scambler (2005) has proposed an instrumental framework to understand the development of modern sport and its relationship to commodification; Morgan (2006) has used the normative ethics of communicative agency to propose a new morality in sport; and Spracklen (2009) has used Habermas' rationalities to explore leisure at the end of modernity. The latter applies a Habermasian analysis to research data about leisure and the tensions between modern capitalism, instrumental consumption and communicative agency about leisure choices.

Although Habermas' writings range from political science (Habermas, 1992:1996; 2001:2006) to epistemology and ethics (Habermas, 1983:1990; 1991:1993), the fundamental Habermasian concern is to protect the project of modernity and provide a new critical approach to understanding society (Pedersen, 2008). For Habermas (1981:1984, 1981:1987), critical studies can be reconciled with liberal ideas about freedom by recognising the tension between

two irreconcilable rationalities: communicative rationality, which stems from human interaction and the free exchange of ideas (for example, through the Enlightenment); and instrumental rationality, which is a product of capitalism and the emergence of the modern nation-state.

The concept of communicative rationality has to be analysed in connection with achieving understanding in language. The concept of reaching an understanding suggests a rationally motivated agreement among participants that is measured against criticisable validity-claims... on the other side, it points to relations to the world that communicative actors take up in raising validity-claims for their expressions.

(Habermas, 1981:1984, p. 75)

Habermas balances historiographical caution about writing metanarratives with a desire to introduce and explain the slow submergence of the lifeworld of civic society, the Enlightenment project, by non-communicative and instrumental rationalities. For Habermas, market capitalism and bureaucratic states are two products of the same instrumental rationality:

The new structures of society were marked by the differentiation of the two functionally intermeshing systems that had taken shape around the organizational cores of the capitalist enterprise and the bureaucratic state apparatus.. the institutionalization of purpose-rational economic and administrative action.

(Habermas, 1985:1990, pp. 1-2).

Just as communicative rationality produces free, communicative action (Habermas, 1981:1984), it is these instrumental rationalities that constrain the ability of individuals to rationalize and act on anything other than commodified

things: so instrumental rationality leads to instrumental action, which leads to commodified leisure and passive consumption.

Capitalism is of a particular concern for Habermas because of its inherent opposition to democracy, and its insidious growth and globalization (Appadurai, 1986, 1996). In opposing the growth of global capitalism to the communicative rationality of democracy and the lifeworld, Habermas showed his critical theoretical roots, aligning himself with Adorno, Gramsci and indeed Marx on the question. As free markets grow and consume local economies, more and more power (economic, cultural, political) resides in a smaller number of trans-national companies. Furthermore, the globalizing economy pits the power of politicians against the power of bankers, and throughout the twentieth century Habermas could clearly identify the capitalist system at work in the removal of local, democratic freedoms and actions. Just as Adorno saw in capitalism the banality and blandness of conformity and the invention of the popular (Adorno, 1991), so Habermas warned of the moral bleakness of instrumentality that went with the commercialization of the public sphere (Habermas, 1983:1990).

#### b) Scottishness

Analyses of the discursive construction of Scottishness identify specific ‘mock-Jockery’ narrative content – clans, kilts, tartan, heather, English oppression – alongside more general sociological group identity formation through reinvention of history, construction of belonging through symbols and community formation (*eg*, Hague, 1994; Whyte, 1995; McArthur, 2003; Basu, 2007; Trevor-Roper, 2008; Blaikie, 2010; Macleod, 2010; McCrone and Bechofer, 2010). Cohen (1985) suggests that the concept of community is situated in a context that does not have

recourse to macrosociological explanations. He describes community as something that is symbolically constructed, as a system of values, norms and moral codes which provide a sense of identity to its population. The emphasis is on meanings that are shared by the population within boundaries raised by the understandings that link the members together. So, “the boundaries consist essentially in the contrivance of distinctive meanings within the community’s social discourse. They provide people with a referent for their personal identities” (Cohen, 1985, p. 117). Hence, this idea creates an ‘imaginary community’, which may be contingent with particular localities, but whose membership is bound only by symbolic boundaries, tacit knowledge and shared meanings. People make sense of what they observe from their own point of view, hence any interaction between people involves an exchange of symbols to enable one set of interpretations to be understood by the other members of the interaction: hence, the imaginary community becomes a place for the transaction of meaning, and access is achieved through an understanding of these meanings.

Anderson (1983) describes a similar community of meanings when he discusses the ‘imagined community’. But although there is a phonetic similarity, Anderson’s concept explores how a community in the present is defined by myths of the past it creates. In other words, the community makes a biased reading of the past to justify its values in the present, hence legitimising itself as a coherent community. One can see that the imagined community is also one that is created and defined by symbols, though these symbols are historically and geographically contrived: this is the Scottishness of Scottish tourism, based on invented traditions of Rob Roy and evocations of heather-clad hills (Hague, 1994; Whyte, 1995; McArthur, 2003; Basu, 2007; Trevor-Roper, 2008; Blaikie, 2010; Macleod, 2010; McCrone and Bechofer,

2010). For members of the imaginary communities, the imaginary community has become, as Cohen says, “a resource and repository of meaning” (1985: p. 118). Hence values associated with their understanding of the locality (Scotland) have become conflated with the imaginary community of single-malt drinkers.

### c) Authenticity

One of the most contentious, and perhaps over-used, analytical frameworks in the discipline of tourism studies is the concept of authenticity. As first sketched out in the work of MacCannell (1973, 1976), authenticity, something real or essential in a place or experience, was the ultimate goal of every tourist.

The touristic way of getting in with the natives is to enter into a quest for authentic experiences, perceptions, and insights... Tourists make brave sorties out of their hotels hoping, perhaps, for an authentic experiences, but their paths can be traced in advance over... what is for them increasingly apparent authenticity proffered by tourist settings.

(MacCannell, 1973, p. 602)

The morality of authenticity elides smoothly into a Western, middle-class sensibility of culture: the authentic is good because it runs counter to the homogenizing tendencies of globalization, because it encourages diversity and respect and cultural heterogeneity. MacCannell sees authentic cultures as existing, in a Goffmanesque sense, backstage. But of course for MacCannell authenticity is not something that can be grasped by tourists in any objectively *real* sense: the authentic is something ‘which is for them’, the tourists, merely *apparent*.

Although authenticity and the quest for it has played an important part in the research agenda for tourism studies (*eg*, Redfoot, 1984; Evans-Pritchard,

1987; Cohen, 1988; Urry, 1990; Entrikin, 1991; Hughes, 1995; Rojek and Urry, 1997; Wang, 1999; Halewood and Hannam, 2001; Aitchison, 2006; Belhassen, Caton and Stewart, 2008; Reisinger and Steiner, 2006; Steiner and Reisinger, 2006; Matheson, 2008; Andriotis, 2009), the concept has been the subject of much academic criticism and development. Wang (1999) undertook a careful analysis of the tourism research literature that claimed authenticity as a key concept, and found the concept to be carelessly applied and multiple in meaning. Authenticity seemed to mean too many different things, in too many different situations, for there to be one over-arching metatheoretical and analytical framework. Furthermore, the research itself separated out into three different schools of thought or paradigms, in which particular assumptions were made about the meaning and use of authenticity. Wang identified three types of authenticity used in the research literature, associated with these paradigms: object authenticity, where it is assumed (by the researcher) to be possible to find an external criteria of authenticness to judge some tourist experience; constructive (or symbolic) authenticity, where it is assumed (by the researcher) that there is no objective criteria of authenticity other than that constructed or shaped by the tourist and their notions of identity, culture and place; and existential authenticity, where postmodern notions of subjectivity suggest authenticity is an existential state of activity, where the individual strives for self-realization. This postmodern turn surfaced in the belated recognition of structural changes to society and culture underpinned by a shift to post-Fordist, post-industrial, postmodernity (Lyotard, 1975:1984). This shift in turn is related to wider globalizing trends in politics, trade, and culture. In the brave new world of globalization, the modernist paradigms of national, class and gender structures are swept away by the



hegemonic values of a post-modern free-for-all (Bauman, 2000). For leisure theorists, the evidence accumulating in the 1990s for globalization was evidence for the societal change to postmodernity (Rojek, 1995; Rojek and Urry, 1997). Wang's criticism of authenticity is typical of the turn against authenticity in tourism studies. What Wang and others such as Steiner and Reisinger (2006) object to is MacCannell's commitment to the objectivity of the authentic: in other words, tourism studies have undertaken a postmodern turn to reject the idea of anything objective or externally verifiable or good about this thing called the authentic.

Existential authenticity is also a product of the postmodern turn, and is the type of authenticity that Wang (1999) recommends in a normative sense for the tourism research programme. Where meaning has become so fractured, there is nothing left except the subjectivity of one's actions, and the struggle for self-realisation. This is postmodern ontology at its most individualized: the tourist becomes an outsider in an absurd universe, where there is no wider meaning to life, where only the choices she makes allow her some fleeting moments of Being. This existentialist authentic tourist subject is akin to Meursault, the main character in Camus' *L'Étranger* (Camus, 1942:2000), someone who comes slowly to the realisation that there is no structure or purpose to life, only the logical consequences of one's actions on one's own life. Where Meursault is an outsider because of his inability to lie (to fake the correct emotions for the funeral of his mother, for example), the tourist is an outsider because of her alienation from the fractured, meaning-less postmodern world. As Wang (1999: 359) suggests, following Heidegger, existential authenticity becomes 'a potential state of Being that is to be activated through tourism experiences... authentic experiences in

tourism are to achieve this activated state of Being within the liminal process of tourism.' By seeking out the transgressive, heightened, hybrid situations of liminality, the tourist finds some satisfaction through self-realisation and the making of meaning (Reisinger and Steiner, 2006). For many consumers of tourism, such situations are attained in the suspension of the rules of home and work in the anonymity of the destination: away from everywhere on the small island of Islay. For others, the liminality is expressed in the unreality or hyper-reality of the destination: the theme parks of the Disney company, for example (Baudrillard, 1986), or the Famous Grouse Experience..

Existential authenticity in tourism, then, is a reification of the self: the meaning and purpose of tourism becomes a quest for an activity that fulfils – albeit fleetingly – our search for identity, place and teleological satisfaction through the journey, the pilgrimage – whether Jerusalem (Belhassen *et al.*, 2008), a music festival (Matheson, 2008), or Scotland's distilleries. Belhassen *et al.* (2008)'s concept of *theoplacity*, for example attempts to reconcile the authentic with a phenomenology of felt, *reflexively real* experience in sacred places, what Halbwachs (1992) noticed in the Holy Land – a theme picked up elsewhere by Andriotis (2009). This idea of existential authenticity as the only felt authenticity can be seen in the Habermasian communicative discourse of the single-malt: it is *felt* to be something authentic by the pilgrims on the whisky trail to Islay, or Arran, or any of the other single-malt distilleries.

Following Wang (1999), it is clear that existential authenticity is based on a postmodern ontology of subjectivity: there is no true, authentic tourist experience, and no object by which such authenticity could ever be measured. All we have are narratives and stories about authenticity and place, and critical

analyses of symbolic construction and hegemony. Tourism becomes part of the trap of consumption, where there is no escape and no freedom other than acceptance of the commercial pact. In the rest of this paper, intersections between place, authenticity and community allow the debate about authenticity to move beyond such phenomenological approaches, through linking the authentic with the Habermasian communicative.

## **Methodology**

The empirical basis of the research follows the Critical Discourse Analysis framework applied by Santos, Belhassen and Caton (2008): analyzing textual data (*cf.*, Buzinde and Santos, 2008) around touristification of whisky in general from a range of sources and data collected through reflective, ethnographical experiences of visits to distillery visitor centres. Critical Discourse Analysis is the method of analyzing texts for their use in legitimizing, reifying or constructing hegemonic assumptions, attitudes and prejudices (Jank, 1997; Chiapello and Fairclough, 2002). The method has been criticized by Billig (2008) for a failure to take to task its own use of language-forms its early defenders suggested were legitimators of hegemonic, late capitalism (Fowler, 1991). However, for the purposes of this research the methodological tools of Critical Discourse Analysis proved to be effective in examining the construction of authenticity, Scottishness and the tension between communicative and instrumental rationality. The analysis began with asking the question: what is the nature or meaning of Scottish whisky communicated in this text? From this initial question, further qualitative iterations explored whisky as a signifier of Scottishness, single-malt as a signifier of

something authentic, and single-malt distilleries as signifiers of touristic settings where existential authenticity can be experienced. Specifically, the following textual sources were analyzed: advertisements in *Whisky* magazine in the two year period 2008-2009 (to establish a sense of the level of Scottishness); the text of two whisky annuals for the years 2008 and 2009; promotional material found on field trips in Scottish Tourist Information Centres or at distilleries themselves; fieldnotes from the ethnography; and one year (January-December 2009) of postings on an internet forum devoted to whisky.

The ethnographic element of the method involved two field trips to Scotland (see Figure One). The first, in two weeks of August 2008, involved visiting Islay and Arran and the distilleries on both islands, with an extended ethnographical reflection on Bruichladdich and Arran distilleries. The second field trip, in one week of August 2009, involved visiting Glengoyne distillery in the area of Loch Lomond. On each field trip, fieldnotes were made *in situ* and combined with an examination of the promotional material and websites of each visited distillery. Finally, from the fieldwork, a follow-up, qualitative, semi-structured interview was undertaken with a marketing officer from Arran.

Combined, these different methodologies provide what LeGreco and Tracy (2009) call Discourse Tracing, a triangulated range of methods applied to provide an account of discourses at a number of intersecting levels. Those levels are whisky writers, those in the industry at visitor centres and in marketing offices, the author as a researcher, and the serious consumers of whisky who write on internet sites. In this case, then, the Discourse Tracing allows a range of sources, voices, texts and other data to build up a reliable account ('trace') of

debates surrounding the construction of authenticity in the context of the Scottish whisky tourism industry.

There is, of course, an epistemological and methodological debate about the truth-value and utility for researchers of debates on internet forums (Fernback, 2007). There is no doubt that users of on-line forums do not necessarily represent the views of a wider population: users of forums are more likely to be passionate, opinion-setters (Eynon, Schroeder and Fry, 2009). There is no doubt also that users of on-line forums do not necessarily post what they actually feel about a particular topic. These problems, however, should not concern us. On the matter of representation, this paper does not claim to provide a definitive fan 'response'. Rather, this paper explores responses made by those fans who care enough about whisky to post on the forum at [whiskywhiskywhisky.com](http://whiskywhiskywhisky.com) – these fans are not representative of all fans, but they are *de facto* serious and passionate about what constitutes true whisky fandom.

### **Locating Leisure – Imagined Places and Real Tourism**

Whisky plays an important role in Scotland's economy. According to the Scottish Whisky Association, the lobbying group for the whisky industry in Scotland, whisky in 2010 was worth £4 billion to Scotland, partly as a result of exports, partly as a result of job creation and investment in visitor centres (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/10191267.stm>, accessed 31 May 2010). Blended whisky takes the largest share of the market: £2.4 billion export sales in 2008, compared to £0.5 billion of single malt (Ronde, 2009). Of the single-malt sales, 44.7% of the volume is produced by five distilleries, all owned by trans-

national corporations: Glenfiddich, The Glenlivet, The Macallan, Glen Grant and Glenmorangie. Whisky tourism has a share of that value: according to ScotlandWhisky, the Scottish whisky tourism organisation representing the industry, in 2009 1.27 million people went through the doors of distillery visitor centres, 8% of all visitors to Scotland, altogether spending £28.4 million in local economies (<http://www.scotlandwhisky.com/press-media/3262558/>), accessed 31 May 2010). McBoyle and McBoyle (2008) state that 46 of Scotland's 98 distilleries have visitor centres.

Scottish whiskies have been successfully promoted as unique, authentic brands since the whisky craze of the late nineteenth century, when the English and American *petit bourgeois* taste for brandy was hampered by successively poor grape harvests. Whisky makers saw a gap in the market: fuelled by the reinvention of the Highlands under Queen Victoria, who famously enjoyed a dram (single measure) of whisky (Pittock, 1995). Malt whisky produced by a single distillery was mostly considered to be too harsh for middle-class, London tastes (Paterson and Smith, 2008). The alternative grain whisky, much cheaper to make, and produced in huge factories, was tasteless. So the whisky-sellers in the late nineteenth century decided to blend the two products: malt and grain. The resulting blends – Johnny Walker, Teacher's, Famous Grouse – were an enormous financial success, and, backed by huge profit margins and claims of authenticity, branded whisky blends spread across the globe in the twentieth century (*ibid.*). But single malts were important for the blends, so the distilleries that made them were bought and sold between multinational companies (*ibid.*).

In the second half of the twentieth century, with a reaction against globalization and commodification (Spracklen, 2009), single-malt whiskies came

to be recognised as being more authentic than the blends (McBoyle and McBoyle, 2008; Paterson and Smith, 2008). Small businesses emerged that bought up spare stock of single malts and sold the bottled product. At first, the multinational corporations that owned many of the single malt distilleries failed to recognise the growing demand for those malts (and indeed, some single malts are still not available on the market): the predecessor of Diageo, for instance, closed a number of distilleries in 1983, among them Port Ellen on Islay (an island off the west coast of Scotland, pop. 3,500, with seven working distilleries in 2010). But the global demand for blended whisky has led to a global demand for single malt whisky, and Diageo now cultivates the demand for authentic single malts through careful promotion of its 'classic' single malt distilleries, all of which have visitor centres and guided tours (Gold and Gold, 1995; Martin and Haugh, 1999; McBoyle and McBoyle, 2008); as well as bottlings of 'rare' malts from distilleries that have tended to be used mainly as malt sources for blends, or distilleries that have ceased to exist (Jefford, 2004). Despite closing Port Ellen in 1983, for example, Diageo maintains a stock of Port Ellen single malt in its network of warehouses across Scotland. By carefully limiting the release of this stock to the market, it ensures there is a high demand for what is a taste of something that will soon no longer exist (*ibid.*).

Whisky tourism has grown to be an established part of Scotland's wider tourist trails, mirroring the visitor centres at vineyards and breweries in other countries (Hall *et al.*, 2000), partly because of the globalization of blended whisky blends, and partly because of the quest for the true, supposedly authentic, cultural experience of single malt (Basu, 2007; McBoyle and McBoyle, 2008). That quest is easily fed by marketing plans, extended car parks and well-stocked shops. In

August 2009 on a trip to the area of Loch Lomond, twenty-five miles north of Glasgow (see Figure One), I visited the independently owned Glengoyne Distillery (distillery capacity 1.1 million litres *p.a.*, visitor numbers c. 12,000 *p.a.*, see [www.glengoyne.com/distillery\\_news\\_events/news/?page\\_id=101](http://www.glengoyne.com/distillery_news_events/news/?page_id=101), accessed 31 May 2010) on what the website called the ‘Wee Tasting Tour’. With thirty other people, half of whom were tourists from Japan and Europe, I sampled a dram of the ten-year old and watched an introductory film before we were taken around the actual factory floors of the distillery buildings. The film, scored by Celtic music, starts with shots of the local countryside, along with the following narrative:

Under the hill and down the glen, there is a place like no other... How do you capture the spirit of the place? In Scotland, Scots have expressed the uniqueness of our countryside in whisky.

This conflation of place, uniqueness and alcohol sets the tone for the rest of the film. A potted history of whisky follows, along with a long dramatised account of Rob Roy hiding in the local countryside and being offered whisky to drink by every house at which he arrived. The film ends with an account of the modern production, with a final claim that the ten-year maturation process gives “Glengoyne all the subtle flavours of the water, ripened barley... even, some might say, the scent of the wind that blows down the glen”.

In the first week of August 2008, I went to Arran Distillery, crossing over to the island (Figure One). It is independently owned, with a distillery capacity 0.75 million litres *p.a.*, and visitor numbers of 50,000 *p.a.*, (see [www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk/arran/isleofarrandistillery/index.html](http://www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk/arran/isleofarrandistillery/index.html), accessed 31 May 2010). It is based in Lochranza (pop. est. 500) on the north-west coast of



the island of Arran, off the coast to the west of Glasgow. The visitor centre has a well-stocked shop, a café, and is an obvious draw for tourists doing the round of the island (estimated numbers *p.a.* for Arran and Ayrshire in 2008 were 0.75 million, see [www.visitscotland.org/pdf/tourism-in-ayrshire-arran\\_2008-provisional.pdf](http://www.visitscotland.org/pdf/tourism-in-ayrshire-arran_2008-provisional.pdf), accessed 31 may 2010). Arran is described in guide-books as ‘Scotland in miniature’, and Lochranza is clearly in the Highland part of the island fifteen miles away from the main port and resort of Brodick. There is a castle on the harbour and heather-clad slopes on three sides. But it is on the main road from Brodick, where the regular and frequent ferry from the mainland comes in with hundreds of coaches, cars and caravans; and there is another ferry from Kintyre that lands right in the middle of Lochranza. The distillery and the visitor centre are therefore well-placed.

One of the distillery’s employees, the marketing officer, travels around the world organising whisky tastings and attending whisky fairs. She explained to me why the original founder of the distillery settled on Arran and Lochranza:

He recognised they needed something a bit different. There was a lot of competition on Islay, with Arran he some connections, he had holidayed there... some of the water sources where the distillery was located were verified by Glasgow University to have the best pH balance for producing single malt of the type he wanted to produce.

The water source is clearly important for the whisky and the whisky’s marketing claims about purity and place: the importance of water and the land, the *terroir*, in creating the whisky’s taste. All the whisky is matured in Lochranza, in carefully selected casks, and the water comes from the hills above the distillery. The marketing officer stressed this by talking of “the beauty of the place, the

water source comes from underwater spring high up in the hills, flows down, where we take the water from... the softness of the water is important... to get that nice smooth, medium bodied single malt important to have that respect, so the spring comes down, and the elements it flows over, help soften it”.

As well as the water, the fact that the distillery is the only one on Arran is also seen as an important factor for its success, as it means there are no competitors for the tourist dollar. “Tourism is popular on Arran,” explained the marketing officer, “that meant we were able to start generating some cash income, obviously distilling takes a long time, stock maturing, we were not able to get income for that, so the visitor centre was built so people could come have tours...it is important for our business, hugely successful for visitors coming to Arran but also now we have more worldwide recognition, people coming to visit, whisky enthusiasts from around the world, where the whisky is being distilled, it’s very important in building our brand worldwide, to encourage people to come to see the source of it”.

On Arran’s position in the market, she admitted that Arran “as a small independent company do not have the marketing budget of White and Mackay and Diageo, can’t get into emerging markets... people will move off the blends to single malt, that’s when those markets will open up for us”. However, the distillery did have a national and international profile linked to its uniqueness, and, in foreign countries, its Scottishness:

We are nationally unique in that respect, in our situation, unusual that it is unpeated malt, people expect it to be peated (west-coast style). Globally, there are Indian, Japanese distilleries, even Swedish, but ultimately I find that you know Scottish malt whisky is the deemed... others are innovative

but the historical cultural aspect of Scotland is where whisky distilling began, that is one of the main things global. Also the actual country itself: when we go abroad and speak to people at festivals and tastings, they just love Scotland, they have such an affinity with it, they love everything about Scotland, and whisky is that central core for them, they love the beauty, so you know the tourism is very important as well, that goes back to the visitor centre, they come and visit and have tours. We were in France, I myself spoke French, not many of the people spoke wonderful English, I said you know, what would happen if someone [from Scotland's whisky industry] didn't speak French, they said people just liked the authenticity of the accents, that's all part of the package, the men have an edge on the women [by wearing kilts], abroad people will have kilts at the tastings just to be a part of it all.

This is a perfect example of the use of Scottish symbolism (the kilt, the accent) constructing existential authenticity: the *feeling* and sound of the words become more important than the meaning.

The balance between tradition and innovation at Arran is not unique to Arran – more and more distilleries are experimenting with different expressions, attempting to both use their stock efficiently and make profits, while at the same time keeping inside the rules and traditions of whisky making. Habermasian instrumentality, then, places pressure on free, communicative expression and innovation. On this innovation, she continued:

At the end of the day you are a company and you have to try to make money. Behind the story and the beautiful location we are still a business.

The innovation of the business and its links with tourism is, then, couched in the myths and traditions of Scotland (Anderson, 1983; Cohen, 1985): golden eagles, for example, symbols of Scotland's rural aesthetic and the invented tradition of the Highlands, are immortalised through replication *en masse* on Arran's whisky bottles.

### **Writing about Whisky**

There are a range of guides to single-malt whisky utilized by tourists and whisky fans (*eg.*, the famous guide by the deceased Michael Jackson, 2010). However, there are only two important *annual* books that inform single-malt whisky drinkers' tastes (Bourdieu, 1979:1986). The first is *Jim Murray's Whisky Bible*, written and published independently by Jim Murray. The introductions to his book set out his commitment to be independent of the industry, and his commitment to be objective in his judgement of whisky samples. At the same time that he claims to have an objective system, however, he also admits to having his own preferences and tastes. He favours Islay whiskies, peated whiskies such as Ardbeg, but he also supports independents like Arran. He is concerned with authentic taste, but also authentic experience: he does not like the use of caramel as a colourant, and claims to be able to taste its presence; he also seemingly dislikes much whisky produced in modern factories by the big multinational. He does not worry about expressing a negative opinion. On Diageo's Pittyvaich twelve-year old, a whisky from a distillery opened in the 1970s and closed, unlamented, a few years later, he writes (Murray, 2008, p. 191): "From fire water to cloying undrinkability. What amazes me is not that this is such bad whisky: we

have long known that Pittyvaich can be as grim as it gets. It's the fact they bother bottling it and inflicting it on the public".

The marketing officer at Arran believed that Jim Murray was "important for our marketing... a lot of people come to festivals that have their Whisky Bibles, and people that only drink a whisky that has a good score.. it's not the be all and end all for Arran, it's something to be used when we get a good score". Murray's scores, then, were seen by potential consumers of whisky as something unfettered by the industry: something more authentic, something that reflected Murray's communicative freedom. Yet at the same time, the industry was quick to use Murray's scores in their instrumental marketing when it helped them sell their products.

The second annual book is the *Malt Whisky Yearbook*. This is newer than the *Whisky Bible*, and is also independently published. Its editor is a European fan and collector of single malt whisky, Ingvar Ronde. It uses full-colour, glossy photographs that promote Scotland and whisky together in a 'tartanic' landscape of heather hills, lochs and white distillery buildings. It is much more supportive of all whiskies and whisky makers, and does not say a bad word about any distillery's bottlings. One of the whiskies loathed by Jim Murray is Diageo's Dufftown ("Rubbery, syrupy and sickly sweet" – Murray, 2007, p. 90). On the same Dufftown twelve-year old, the *Yearbook* (Ronde, 2008, p. 115) says: "Honeycomb and tinned peach and apricot in syrup on the nose, sharp and spicy clean barley on the palate, with some bitter orange notes in towards the finish".

Of course another important source of information for whisky fans is the internet. Hundreds of discussions take place on whisky web-site forums where new products are tested against the desire for authenticity, purity and taste. The

forums allow users to exchange knowledge and stories about distilleries, and to express opinions on all aspects of the industry. One discussion, for example, concerned the true whisky fan, and the way in which that fan was able or not to rise above the ‘mock-Jockery’ (*cf.*, Hague, 1994; Blaikie, 2010) of whisky packaging: the rural aesthetic of the Scotland of hills, heather and deer (often with some flourish of tartan) that appear on every other advert for Scottish whisky, even for whiskies produced in blending factories in Glasgow or matured in Kilmarnock. The first forum user was clear about the caniness of the whisky fans on the forum, facilitated by their good knowledge and taste:

To us that registered on a forum and talk about whisky, we may not be swayed by a package mostly because either we tried it, had something similar, had a sample, read some tasting notes, or read anything in general about it.

(yello to mello, Whisky Packaging, whisky chat forum, whiskywhiskywhisky.com, 1 June 2009)

This brought two telling responses. The first from someone identified as Nick Brown, countered that “I know some of us on whisky forums like to think that we are above the marketing tricks. I promise you, we aren’t... If anything, we are even more susceptible since we exchange lots of the marketing information between ourselves” (Nick Brown, Whisky Packaging, whisky chat forum, whiskywhiskywhisky.com, 2 June 2009). This user was clearly aware that knowledge and experience did not inoculate anyone against the disease of marketing, especially that associated with authenticity of Scottishness and purity. The other response contrasted expert taste with a stereotyped view of *hoi polloi* in lesser, foreign countries, and argued:

When we consider that ninety per cent of Scotch is exported and we look at the larger markets abroad, it is quite clear from a vast amount of research available, that consumers buy into elaborate and extravagant packaging (think Crown Royal [and others]). Quite simply, a lot of cultures deem this to be a status signifier - quite literally viewing whisky labels like designer clothing. They are magpies, to an extent. This of course is a large brush to brandish, but nevertheless it is a fact. If your whisky isn't in a shiny tin/box on a shelf in Greece, Portugal or the Far East for example, it will be dismissed.

(Del Sneddon, Whisky Packaging, whisky chat forum, whiskywhiskywhisky.com, 3 June 2009)

On the same forum, the idea of a tourist-focussed whisky trail for the Speyside region of Scotland (where there are dozens of distilleries) was rapidly mocked by the users: not because it displayed any lack of knowledge of where whisky was produced (Speyside is one of the traditional regions of Scottish single malt, and has its own style), but because the users of the forum could not believe that the typical foreign tourist arriving at Glasgow airport would visit the relatively unattractive north-east of Scotland, rather than the Highlands and Islands of the north-west. The users themselves were all quick to say they had visited many of the Speyside distilleries, including ones not open to regular visitors, but they saw their interest and taste as being something different from the Scottishness of the tourist industry: something different from the Scottishness of whisky adverts, for example. In other words, the users of the forum were keen to establish their Habermasian communicative freedom, which made their opinions more truly authentic than the instrumentalized consumption of the dupes taking in

by marketing tricks. What the fans believed on the forum was simple: they were not fooled by mock Scottishness, and they certainly did not believe in the authentic nature of whisky tourism's 'authentic experience'. For these fans, their own interactions with the Speyside distilleries were existentially authentic: encounters that validated their individuality, their taste, and their distinction (Bourdieu, 1979:1986). In the next part of the paper, this link between Scottishness, authenticity and Habermasian instrumentality is developed – but it is also appropriate to consider the way in which Scottishness is imagined through the social (communicative) construction of community.

### **Scottishness and the Home of Famous Grouse**

Scotland and Scottishness are seen by the tourist as being made authentic through the mediation of the global brand, and its relationship to heather, highland kilts, clan tartans, bagpipes, haggis and mountains (Anderson, 1983; Cohen, 1985; Hughes, 1995). There is nothing existentially authentic in the make-believe tartanicity of the whisky trail, no moment of individual self-realisation in the shopping centres selling whisky-flavoured fudge and sheep-themed blended whiskies. From a Habermasian perspective, what is at stake is the agency of individuals seeking to make sensible, rational explorations of Scottish history and Scottish whisky, and the instrumental imperative to constrain those explorations to a commodified, capitalised 'authentic experience'.

According to the whisky fans on the forum discussing Speyside, mentioned above, tourists visiting Scotland do not want to see a big factory on an industrial estate on the edge of Glasgow: to be authentic, the home of whisky



needs to be a ramshackle old building by a river or the coast, where the tourist can hear ghost stories and tales of old workers stealing new spirit by poking a straw through the bung of a barrel. So the owners of the ‘world famous’ Famous Grouse blend, seeing the rise of visitors to single malt distilleries, decided to create the Famous Grouse Experience (visitor numbers 100,000 *p.a.*, see [www.edringtongroup.com/media/news/pressRelease.asp?id=EDR-142009-35-00241](http://www.edringtongroup.com/media/news/pressRelease.asp?id=EDR-142009-35-00241), accessed 31 May 2010) at what they called the Home of Famous Grouse: the single malt distillery of Glenturret, which was owned by Highland Distillers (later the Edrington Group), which owned the Famous Grouse blend and brand. Glenturret single malt is just one small component of the Famous Grouse blend, yet the Famous Grouse Experience at the Home of Famous Grouse has taken over the distillery, and the hundreds of thousands of tourists who visit Glenturret, thinking of the funny animated grouse on the TV adverts, thinking of Scotland and heather and the tartan shortbread they have bought at the last coach stop, are seemingly oblivious about this invention of authenticity (Hughes, 1995; Jefford, 2004; Paterson and Smith, 2008). So, ironically, the whisky tourist makes the Famous Grouse Experience authentic by joining the pilgrim trail along with the millions of others who see in Glenturret Distillery a mythology of invented traditions and imagined community. As the marketing flyer for the Experience explains (“A Whisky Experience You Will Never Forget”):

Here at the Famous Grouse Experience, we offer a day like no other. You might say that a day with us is a whole new experience! It’s all in the blend, Scotland’s favourite whisky at Scotland’s oldest distillery. You’ll find us nestled in the heart of scenic Perthshire countryside, just outside Crieff, at our spiritual home, Glenturret.

Bruichladdich (independently owned, distillery capacity 1.5 million litres *p.a.*, estimated visitor numbers 12,000 *p.a.*) on Islay (see Figure One), like Arran, is a noble exception on the whisky trail that makes, matures and bottles its whisky in its distillery. It employs over 70 people on the island. On the same island, the multi-national corporation Diageo, the biggest company in the whisky industry, runs Lagavulin (2.25 million litres) and Caol Ila (3.8 million litres): despite their fine taste, these two whiskies are mainly matured away from Islay, in some faceless factory, and bottled like most single malt whiskies hundreds of miles from the distillery. Despite that, both distilleries have visitor centres (estimated visitor numbers *p.a.*: 12,000 for Caol Ila, 20,000 for Lagavulin), where the guides will tell you that it is irrelevant where the whisky is matured. Even Bruichladdich, for all its public display of tradition and loyalty to the local community, is dependent on people around the world buying into the ideal and drinking a large dram. In turn, Islay's tourist industry is dependent on those self-same whisky drinkers making the pilgrimage (McBoyle and McBoyle, 2008). So whisky is big business for the island, and the Port Charlotte hotel vies with its competitors in Bowmore to demonstrate its importance in the whisky experience: on the website of its owners it boasts:

the public bar serves excellent bar lunches and evening bar meals and has some of the finest malt whiskies in the world for you to sample.

(<http://www.milford.co.uk/scotland/accom/h-a-1729.html>,

accessed 29 September 2008)

The hotel is a stop on whisky tours to Scotland, and on a summer weekend you have to book ahead to eat even in the public bar, as the whisky tourists fight

to be fed alongside the bird-watchers and walkers who represent Islay's other tourist constituencies.

## **Conclusions**

Critical Discourse Analysis of the texts (Santos et al., 2008), combined with a Discourse Tracing approach (LeGreco and Tracy, 2009), allows some conclusions to be inferred from the collage of data provided and analyzed. The authentic in tourism is where we can see Habermasian communicative reason at work, in the agency of individuals attempting to challenge the restrictions of the tourism industry. In this paper, we can see the importance of arbiters of taste such as Jim Murray, or the contributors to the forum. Dissatisfaction with the constraints of package holiday brochures, or guided tours, leads tourists to reinvent themselves as travellers in a search for an authentic interaction with the destination. Unease with commodification leads individuals away from big corporations to small businesses. The industry responds by rebranding artifice as authentic experiences, but these exercises are always subject to the tension of criticism. So the Famous Grouse Experience may attract hundreds of thousands of customers, but the company behind Famous Grouse feels the need to pretend its product is as aesthetically pure as a single malt; and whisky fans feel the need to validate their individuality through taste. Whisky tourism in Scotland, then, associated already with a symbolically constructed community, resting on a historically imagined mythology (Hughes, 1995), becomes a place where notions of the authentic are related directly to Habermasian communicative discourses about the reality of taste, the construction of Scottishness, and the struggle over the meaning and

purpose of whisky consumption and whisky production. Where ever authenticity is claimed or debated, then, we can see the competition between Habermasian communicative and instrumental rationality.

Away from Arran and Islay, the whisky trail becomes unusual, because tourists want to visit the home of their favourite whisky, and blends, if they have a home, have it in the huge factories where they are concocted. But the tourist visiting Scotland does not want to see a big factory on an industrial estate on the edge of Glasgow. The strong critique of authenticity in tourism studies is predicated on the wider postmodern and poststructural turn in sociology and cultural studies. Following Wang's typology, it is clear that his constructive authenticity is based on a postmodern ontology of subjectivity: there is no true, authentic tourist experience, and no object by which such authenticity could ever be measured. All we have are narratives and stories about authenticity and place, and critical analyzes of symbolic construction and hegemony. Only existential authenticity provides some way of determining a moment of truth amidst the post-modern pilgrim landscape (Belhassen *et al.*, 2008; Andriotis, 2009), and even then such self-awareness is fleeting: the Self becomes a Janus figure, inner-directed through communicative reason and outer-directed through instrumentalized meanings, which are constructed through the purchase and consumption of rare single-malt whiskies. Tourism becomes part of the trap of consumption, where there is no escape and no freedom other than acceptance of the commercial pact. So the whisky tourist makes the Famous Grouse Experience authentic by joining the pilgrim trail along with the millions of others who see in Glenturret Distillery a mythology of invented traditions and imagined community (Trevor-Roper, 2008). Scotland and Scottishness are seen by the tourist as being made authentic

through the mediation of the global brand, and its relationship to heather, highland kilts, clan tartans, bagpipes, haggis and mountains. There is no other Scotland, no place that offers more authenticity, that we can experience (Blaikie, 2010). All the tourist sees is the mediation of myth, and the mythology of the authentic; unless the tourist is able to view the Experience through the lens of some supposedly ironic, postmodern gaze, in which case the sham of the experience is embraced and loved for its kitsch value (Basu, 2007; Blaikie, 2010). This postmodern gaze, of course, is itself a product of postmodernity and postmodern culture: when all things are fake, the fakes become real (Eco, 1986).

Perhaps by visiting a single malt distillery like Arran or Bruichladdich, one can feel superior to *hoi polloi* at the Famous Grouse Experience: but the owners of Bruichladdich, for all the romance of the Victorian distillery's resurrection, are not philanthropists. They have challenged the myths and tartan iconography of the Scottish whisky industry through the use of modern styles in their branding and marketing, they employ local people and make a show of avoiding artificial colouring and chill-filtration techniques, but there is a hard-nosed financial calculation in every claim to authenticity and purity. They have a visitor centre, too, where tourists are offered, for the cost of entry, a dram and a discount if they buy a bottle in the shop.

There is still a system, and someone still takes our money: the capitalist system of globalization (Appadurai, 1996) is inescapable, and authentic tourism experiences come with a price tag. *Pace* Habermas, Wang's (1999) existential authenticity operates in a communicatively rational way, but the rational discourse of authenticity in tourism is, as MacCannell (1973) noted, essentially instrumental in nature. These incommensurate rationalities remain unresolved. One can see,

then, that discourses around Scottishness in whisky and whisky tourism both define something *felt as real* in communicative experience, and something consumed through the apparatus of Habermasian instrumentality. The discourses traced in this paper demonstrate the way in which authenticity is marketized, how whisky tourists are still caught in a dialectic of control. It is at once the commodification of leisure expressed in the brochure, and the dream of liberty and the choice of the open road in a hundred Hollywood movies: as Cohen (1988) argues, the tension between desires, expectations of something tangibly authentic and the reality of the tourist's commodified experience. Tourism, then returns us to the paradox of leisure: the way in which it is both freedom and choice, and constraint and commodification.

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Famous Grouse Experience marketing flyer, published in 2009 for use in hotel welcome packs, found by the author at the Winnock Hotel, Drymen, 15 August 2009.

Glengoyne Distillery introductory video, purchased on DVD by the author on 15 August 2009 from the distillery shop.

**Figure One:**

**A map of Scotland showing the location of distilleries mentioned in the paper**

