Title: Sustainability and Small Enterprises in Scotland's Remote Rural 'Margins'

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Abstract: A critical yet timely commentary is offered on the nature of sustainability narratives in reference to current small business enterprise in remote Scotland with a key focus on 'place context' and the complex interplay of social and material resources. A review of the academic and policy literature supports an interpretative, qualitative approach to examining the digital media texts of various small island SMEs in Scotland that are most especially championing the localness and *placeness* of their product, and most especially using this as a coded referencing of sustainability, localness, community ethics and trust. The extent of 'co-production' narratives of sustainability informed by 'localness' in areas that are typically 'rural' yet particularly 'remote' - where 'margin' as an idea and as practice is appropriated and deployed to entrepreneurial effect - are demonstrated. 'Survival' is revisited and reflections on its place within enterprise narrative as 'margins' are redefined; remoteness is increasingly celebrated as a sustainable reality.

Keywords: enterprise; entrepreneurship; business and community development; remote rural; islands

Introduction

As the economy globalises, time-distance shortens, and monopoly capitalism reaches into parts of the earth hitherto untouched – all contested concepts with their specific strengths and directions questioned – so there are counter movements of localism and community. Much of the debate around these developments is^[A1] continuing with conflict between those seeking to protect essential services and producers and those advocating unfettered free trade. These – opposing forces are captured most strongly around TTIP (Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership) where the interests of multinational corporations are promoted over those of smaller enterprises, and so where monopoly capitalism promises cheaper but at the expense of variety through monopolistic competition. Within this environment, there has been a resurrection of the worth of indigenous, local and regional production, and so of enterprises embedded in the community.

This is demonstrated most clearly with the increasing interest in rural enterprises and entrepreneurship in recent times and the complexities emerging around how rural products such as food and drink but also art, craft and other expressions of cultural industry are variously emblematic of ideas of ‘localness’, place and indeed ‘national’ culture (Burnett and Danson, 2004; Wilson and Whitehead, 2012). While every country has its own unique landscape and cultural geography, for some it is the islands and remote coastal regions, and indeed more especially the *islandness* of such places that are often globally defining of the iconography of the nation space, not least as it informs key business and enterprise sectors. However, relatively little has been written on enterprise and entrepreneurship within the specific environments of remote islands. As well as having all the issues facing SMEs and new start-ups of rural areas anywhere, enterprises on islands tend to face different, additional and exaggerated problems. However, there is but sparse material published on these firms and on how entrepreneurs and agencies cope with the harsher business environment.

This paper introduces some of the issues inherent to doing business on islands and remote rural areas, with special reference to Scotland where such locations have iconic status and offer stereotypical images of the country and nation.

Island and remote rural enterprises and entrepreneurs – the literature

As we have demonstrated in earlier articles (Burnett and Danson, 2004; Danson and Burnett, 2014), and many will observe in other countries and urban contexts, this claiming of the natural and cultural heritages of the rural and non-cosmopolitan parts of the territory for national branding and marketing contrasts with their often stock depiction as traditional, backward and lagging. Islands as margins are seen as both ‘relic’ and ‘resolution’ to modernity’s challenges (Gillis, 2004). The counterpart to this peripheral and marginal role in the real - rather than virtual – economy for islands and remote regions is the revealed spatial preference of the dominant economic development paradigm of recent decades for large metropolitan areas and capital cities. Founded on agglomeration, clusters, connectivity, proximity and competitiveness, the drivers of the private service and financial economy create strong, irresistible centripetal forces attracting resources, power and activity to the centre and core of the economy (Danson and de Souza, 2012). This compares with the peripheralisation of remote locations; those establishing and running businesses on islands are especially disadvantaged from operating in areas of high costs, without the benefits of the financial and other drivers of competitiveness present in metropolitan regions (Danson and de Souza, 2012).

While innovation is not absent from the islands and rural areas (Davies et al., 2012) the expectation is that they are receivers of R&D generated and applied first in the more populated regions. However, looking across the North Sea from Scotland, there are contrasting examples in the experiences of comparative northern European locations where smart specialisation, innovation and resilience can be found, with key underpinning roles for social capital, relationships and cultural values and norms (Danson and de Souza, 2012). Work by such commentators as Baldacchino and Kelman (2014) has shown that, even with the advances in ITC and internet connections, the inherent disadvantages in conducting a business in remote locations continue to restrict their ability to compete due to high input costs and limited home markets and to grow through exports due to high transport costs. Nevertheless, it can be suggested that the very characteristics of remoteness and ‘otherness’ do provide some countervailing benefits to entrepreneurs in such places (Danson and Burnett, 2014; Burnett and Danson, 2015). There is value, therefore, in exploring whether islands offer the opportunity to forge a niche in a world economy where place and space are increasingly valued, and so to examine the extent to which the positive aspects of remoteness can outweigh the negative (Dubois, 2013).

There has been a growing literature across the world which focuses on studying islands on their own terms (Baldacchino, 2006; Fletcher, 2011; McCall, 1994), and yet which tends to consider islands not just as separate lands of otherness, but also as having a relationship to their mainland. They are frequently recognised as complex, layered and highly contested spaces of cultural and socio-economic distinction. Those not of or on islands and remote communities are in a dual and contrary position of being both ‘set apart’ from the opportunities and challenge of modern capitalism and yet integrally part of it (Nicolson, 2002). This has been argued especially in the status and development of the landward Highlands and the Islands of Scotland in its recent modern history, which have faced criticism and perception as quintessentially ‘backward’ and dependent (Burnett, 2011). Islands and other coastal locales - as spaces and cultural places - are often considered to offer ‘otherness’ and difference, not least in respect of tourism and culture (Baum, 1996; DeLoughrey, 2007), but also too in terms of environmental claims of ‘pristine’ and ‘isolated’ geographies (Hennessy and McCleary, 2011; Burnett, 2014). There is nothing simple about islands and indeed the discourse of islands – islanders and islandness - is a contested terrain that demands ongoing critique, (cf. Hay, 2003).

Whilst ‘isolation’ is a key descriptor or trope for many residents and entrepreneurs, and undoubtedly the reality for many aspects of island experience, environment and social

functionality, islands are also defined very much as spaces that are linked into and mapped onto relational activity and events around them. An increasing emphasis on social capital and networking in enterprise development means this is all the more apposite in studies of enterprises on islands (Atterton, 2007; Atterton et al., 2011).

In considering what sorts of businesses might be established and prosper on islands, the recognition that distance, isolation and peripherality are social constructions is important, therefore (Danson and de Souza, 2012), as use of myths and narratives can be applied to good effect in gaining that market niche. We would argue that the shifting nature of discourse and representation is worthy of exploration here, especially as it relates to the concept of 'islandness'. As well as our own recent work Danson and Burnett (2014), Baldacchino (2005, 2012) and Atterton et al. (2011) have been discussing island enterprises and entrepreneurship, complementing and seating this literature within broader explorations of rural and remote enterprise (see for example, Curran and Storey, 1993; Smallbone et al., 2003; Wilson and Whitehead, 2012). The message delivered in many of these publications is of a contradictory dual personality for remote rural areas and their enterprises: as spaces of both value and neglect.

In Scotland the archipelagos of the west and north – the Hebrides, Orkney and Shetland - have all variously been labelled as 'backward' or lagging (Devine, 2012; Harvey et al., 2002) in terms of economic dependency and culture, despite each group and certain individual island having been at the centre of major trading routes in former times and core to the UK economy (particularly with regard to Shetland) with the exploitation of North Sea oil and gas. In juxtaposition to this image of modernity, their respective island cultures have come to the fore during the last quarter century. Alternative lifestyles and tourism experiences have been promoted over this period too, with expanding interest in each islands' indigenous 'ways of life', histories and environment. This rise of an appreciation of cultural tourism, history and landscape has complemented well the shift to expanding celebrations of 'localness' in enterprise and consumption more generally. Scotland's island economies have been regenerating through a mapping of their specific strengths and attributes to the globalising market place for higher value holidays, wildlife experiences and cultural service provision in situ. Making use of their matrix of natural and cultural products, and services, has been leading to a greater confidence and empowerment of local populations and, potentially, entrepreneurs. Furthermore, the reliance on and reiteration of 'traditional' and artisan imagery obscures much of the economic exchange and merits closer analysis. Wilson and Whitehead (2012) with reference to their County Clare case study demonstrate how the 'local' product is arguably

more global in form. That is 'local' remains 'local' only as a *relic process* associated with past localised rural production activities, for example. Nonetheless, spatial differentials do persist in and of remote islands. Once epitomised throughout the twentieth century as remnants and margins, symptomatic of *under-development* (Carter, 1974), and 'problem' places (Burnett, 2011) the offshore island[A2] spaces of Scotland (and indeed elsewhere) still retain a strong discursive reference of 'localism' and an embodied and material everydayness, disadvantaged distinction of real time and distance costs, as well as environmental challenges such as weather and social pressures of remote service provision.

The questions arising from such developments are not unique to Scotland, and an interest in island entrepreneurship and enterprise, and the role of environment, cultural and natural heritage, can be observed in increasing numbers of island nations and regions (e.g. Britain and Greece by Armstrong et al., 2006; Vietnam, Seenprachawong, 2005; and globally Armstrong and Read, 2003; Baldacchino, 2010; Baldacchino and Kelman, 2014). Ireland has similar experiences and policies as Scotland in addressing island, peripheral and minority language small business issues, with research in institutions and the role of networking intermediaries (O'Gorman and Evers, 2011; Brennan et al., 2015).

Apart from the relatively recent consideration of the sustainability of islands - both in terms of their capacity to exploit their wildness and natural otherness, and their progressively fragile existence as climate change threatens the very existence of many, there are accounts of rural enterprises and entrepreneurs within some particular sectors engaging more proactively with expressions of islandness and localness as sustainable enterprise from and beyond margins. How place, and islandness especially, defines, informs and shapes the experience and path development of enterprises has been addressed in research on food and drink (Danson and Burnett, 2004), technologies including renewables (Munday et al., 2011; Hain et al., 2005) and ICT (Galloway et al., 2004, 2011; RSE, 2013). These have supplemented the more traditional studies on land based activities such as farming (McElwee, 2006), leisure and tourism (Kelman, 2007; Chalmers and Danson, 2012) within the general literature on rural businesses (Curran and Storey, 1993; North and Smallbone, 1996; Smallbone et al., 2003; Henry and McElwee, 2014).

A major consideration in determining the potential for local firms to establish and grow is the size of the market – an entrepreneur setting up with the aim of exporting to the mainland or overseas will face different challenges to a firm aiming to supply immediate residents and members of the local community, including incoming tourists. Research has shown that the

size of local markets in island and remote rural areas are limited by prevalent and persistently low average incomes and wage rates (Skerratt et al., 2014: 56), long and unsocial working hours (p22), vulnerability to national macro-economic conditions (p21), ageing and imbalanced populations (p39) with high net-outmigration of younger young people (p43), and some of the highest levels of multiple deprivation in Scotland (Skerratt et al., 2014: 39; McKendrick, 2014: 312). According to Kapasi and Galloway (2014), small and home-based businesses will be moulded, encouraged and dependent on their home labour and product markets and, even within the environments of islands and remote rural areas in Scotland, these display a variety of situations (Skerratt et al., 2014). SMEs in more urban, peri-urban or city locations have both more potential to grow by accessing a larger customer base as well as more potential competition to restrict their market expansion. Many of the basic issues urban entrepreneurs face will be similar to those in remote rural communities; however, attracting finance, securing property, recruiting labour, etc. and being able to overcome difficulties in fulfilling the fundamentals for start-ups will be more challenging where there are problems of distance, information, natural and other risks inherent to island locations.

It is recognised in the entrepreneurship literature, and especially as it pertains to rural enterprises, that micro and small business owners are in the main uninterested in growth; they are satisficers, content with sustainable lifestyle business with lower aspirations towards growing the business than the national norm (Galloway and Mochrie, 2006). However, as elsewhere, there are entrepreneurs who are driven by a desire to expand their activities in the pursuit of profit and further expansion. Furthermore, expectations are arguably shifting around norms of success for island based enterprises. Where previously it was common for many enterprises to be small scale operations offering a reasonable return but often coupled with additional household waged income, there is a widening and deepening of enterprise growth and entrepreneurial expectation, not least in Scotland, to have 'ambition', to proliferate product and to internationalise markets.

Strategically, governments have prioritised this latter motivation by seeking to promote innovation, enterprise and SME business growth in rural communities (DEFRA, 2012; Scottish Government, 2011). Instances of such policy approaches are offered by the most recent round of national and European programmes and initiatives. For example, in *Our Rural Future*, the Scottish Government (2011) has stressed the promotion of community and social enterprises and complement this support for new private and not-for-profit companies through embedding into the European Structural Fund programmes for Scotland an explicit link between

innovation in rural areas and economic development. The Scotland Rural Development Programme (SRDP) 2014-2020 promises ‘to assist in the sharing and implementation of innovative ways of improving working practices’ (Scottish Government, 2013). This is consistent with the new EU priorities for Rural Development which include ‘fostering knowledge exchange and innovation’ and ‘promoting social inclusion... and economic development’ (CEC, 2011). Another EU programme, which is dedicated to rural areas, is LEADER and this aims “... to increase the capacity of local rural community and business networks to build knowledge and skills, and encourage innovation and co-operation in order to tackle local development objectives” (Scottish Government, nd.). In the current period the LEADER programme in Scotland emphasises innovation, building social capital and networks to facilitate economic and social development, reinforcing the impacts of national and local initiatives (Dargan and Shucksmith, 2008).

These strategies and policy initiatives have been refined to meet some of the issues raised in the *OECD Rural Policy Review: Scotland* (OECD, 2008). As anticipated above, this report noted the over-concentration on land-based sectors on the one hand and revealed the challenges faced by SMEs in island and remote rural areas on the other. Informing the 2014-20 round of EU Structural Fund programmes for Scotland, this report recommended continuing support for rural SMEs through policies targeting the access to and deployment of technology, human resources development, and engaging cultural and social capital resources more productively.

This discussion of the strategic and policy documents being applied to support and encourage entrepreneurs and enterprises to be established and develop in remote areas of Scotland, through the regional development agency Highlands and Islands Enterprise and the local authorities (Burnett, 2011), suggests a recognition of the peculiar problems faced by SMEs on the islands, national and regional initiatives to support local innovation and to overcome some of the disadvantages of operating from such locations. Within the context of a resurgence in interest in the culture and heritage resources of these places, it might be expected that new ventures could be established on islands but still with economic and practical challenges to be overcome. As a final entry into the assessment of some examples of such start-up and growth firms, it is helpful to consider the importance of cultural and intellectual capital being expressed in the rural economies of the Nordic countries with their emphasis on the potential for ‘open’ and not closed networks of relationship, and the enhanced ‘new localization’ of technologically enhanced economies (Norden, 2013). In aggregate these factors could suggest that entrepreneurs might be able to establish particular types of export-oriented businesses which

are able to capitalise on the sense of natural heritage, environment and community, using the place as an asset in identifying a product or service that is elementally described by and for that place.

To ensure that the products and services being brought to market are acceptable to the discerning customers of islandness, the characteristics embodied in these offerings must balance ‘otherness’ with a contained cultural ‘remoteness’. Most can appreciate the experience of physical distance as both an attraction and a barrier to consumption from and on islands, but analogously the complexities of how local communities and individuals and incoming and offshore tourists relate to ideas of ‘peripherality’ and ‘distance’, and consequently to ‘remoteness’, need to be considered as potential barriers to market success. How island communities operate their networks of relationships with suppliers, consumers and with other remote communities (Danson and de Souza, 2012: 12) and mainland and overseas actors can be crucial in determining patterns of start-up and sustainable development. The islands off Scotland’s west coast illustrate this well as, for many decades and indeed centuries, various socio-cultural frameworks connected islands and communities within islands in various ways so that markets outwith the islands tended to be constrained to those communities, effectively extended to exiles on the mainland and beyond. In more recent times, firms and economic activities based on cultural and environmental assets have opened up new opportunities where the sense of locality and ‘localness’ can be key to an understanding and acceptance of island life, work and culture (Burnett and Danson, 2014). Again, there is the potential for conflict between the reality of the island as a lived experience of the local and the imagined, often rural idyll, of the distant consumer.

This demands that research on island enterprise and entrepreneurship requires contextualisation and qualification, which often requires embracing the particularities of island regions as ‘peripheral’ within a larger state, as exemplified by research on Japan’s ‘remote islands’, the Faroes and the Ålands in Europe’s northern periphery (Efimova and Kuznetsova, 2012). The following section illustrates some of the opportunities, challenges and complexities faced in establishing an enterprise which intends to utilise the assets of islandness and the unique environment from the outset by aiming at a luxury off-island market. By identifying the skills, networks and capital – intellectual, human, physical and financial – required to establish this business successfully, it should paint a picture of the otherness of enterprise creation, development and sustainability for entrepreneurs operating on islands.

The digital textual methodology

In terms of methodology we adopted an interpretative, qualitative approach examining the digital media texts of various small island SMEs in Scotland that are most especially championing the localness and *placeness* of their product, and most especially using this as a coded referencing of sustainability, localness, community ethics and trust. The methodology of textual interpretation is broadly attributed to a post-structuralist position of understanding meaning as *constructed through discourse* (discursive appropriation). In terms of understanding rural enterprise this has been particularly developed around critiques of consumption and the interplay within economies of time and space relating to production processes, value signifiers of taste (such as ‘Green’ or ‘authenticity’) informing consumer identity, and the reference of place both locally and globally (Lash and Urry, 1994). In this sense our analysis took the form of textual close reading of words, images and positioned relationships displayed and suggested in accounts displayed on company websites. Media texts such as online advertising and promotion texts become useful and necessary sites for analysis and critique (Hovland et al., 2008), but so too is the actual product packaging and artefact itself (c.f. Burnett and Danson, 2004).

Consumer products generally and in this case the island based products of food, drink, craft, tourism but also energy and biomass, for example, can all be increasingly understood as sites for interrogation and research analysis of *meaning*. In this way, assumptions and ideological inferences are demonstrated within textual account and offered as both a performance and expression of rurality and island small local enterprise realities. Images of the product itself, its locational production reference as well as the referencing of nature, localness and *islandness* are offered. These include the privileging of statements, iconography and stories (narratives) of raw product states, employees and owner personnel shown ‘at work’ *in situ*, as well as offering a tendency to provide historical narratives that locate the current production in wider socio-economic histories of society and culture, and by inference adding further value. That is, the narratives make the product and the enterprise more *meaningful* to a range of increasingly informed, discerning and ‘providence hungry’ consumers (Nava et al, 1997).

Our research has sampled from a range of current food, drink, craft, tourism and other online web promotion (websites) of Scottish island based enterprises. The digital platform offers audiences a complex package of visual and written text that frames to consumers (audiences) a story of the product, its elements, its values and its place specific references. Key conceptual

ideas such as local, sustainable, natural and heritage are noted, as are suggestions of implied distinction and difference of the product as a result of its island credentials.

Case Study: Hebridean Seaweed and Ishga Spa Products

This enterprise displays many of these features of a successful start-up on a remote island off the west coast of the mainland of Scotland. *Ishga Spa* products are produced by the *Hebridean Spa Ltd. Company* based in Lewis, in the Western Isles, also known as the Outer Hebrides. The company was established in 2010, emerging onto a wider consumer stage as a new island derived product when a high quality city hotel and spa business located in central Glasgow introduced 'detoxifying sea weed baths to the spa menu' using fresh Hebridean seaweed. *Ishga* as a brand derives its name from uisge, the Gaelic word for water, and in this it offers an expression of both 'relic' and reinvention of Gaelic language and cultural heritage of the Hebrides. From the outset, therefore, it was using island ingredients but also island 'place' references as essential to the product. The entrepreneurial core was a small team of islanders from Lewis who had each formerly left their island communities to gain significant levels of education, training, to then return 'home' and with considerable mainland work experience in marine science, beauty therapy, and seaweed industry backgrounds, partnered with luxury leisure, spa management expertise to create a signature range of spa products. Confidence in the islands raw product quality base and an insight to diversify were also key factors. The *ishga* spa business is itself an integral tie-in to an already established raw seaweed harvesting and processing enterprise, namely the *Hebridean Seaweed Company* that had already been established in 2006 on Lewis, successfully expanding to become the largest UK based seaweed processor and providing the initial drive via key personnel and considerable island product development experience to inform and underpin the *Ishga Spa* product enterprise.

To relate to its luxury customer base, the company has been positioned strategically through a quality brand with digital marketing. This is promoted with an accessible and strongly visualised narrative to a range of clients and stakeholders including Scottish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA), other environmental agencies, local, regional and national business development agencies, as well as the intended markets of consumers. The market comprises the potential stockists and the users of the products; they are attracted to and captured by the narrative for the seaweed products such as the *ishga* range which present a message of quality, unique origin as well as personalised 'local knowledge base' production (as evidenced by the websites and other sites of narrative consulted, described in the methodology section above). The company offers a strong well-articulated story of its production process. There is a verbal

and visual positioning of the products in a clear time and space dimension - the raw material seaweed (*Ascophyllum nodosum*) is grown naturally in clean waters, and harvested all year round, at both high and low tide, throughout the Western Islesⁱ. The seaweed is naturally widespread, it is a large, common brown alga, relatively easy to harvest as it is most especially found in sheltered coastal inlets, and moderately exposed shores.

The commercial exploitation of seaweed has a long history, therefore, and it has long significance in the cultural and socio-economic history of the island and coastal regions of the North Atlantic, not least in the Hebrides. There is evidence dating to pre-history of harvesting through the Viking era and throughout the modern period, confirming its key role in the heritage – natural and cultural of the region. The company makes full use of this historical ‘time’ to locate the product comprehensively in the imagery of consuming ‘provenance as past’ as detailed in the *Hebridean Seaweed* company’s own provenance narrative.ⁱⁱ This historically informed narrative positions seaweed as a necessary supplement to limited diets of subsistence, then latterly a staple and key resource for crofting households. The historical crofting economy was typified by a pernicious rural poverty, low waged economies of manual work coupled with the inherent precarity of economic conditions coupled with legacies of mass emigration and community ‘crisis’, signified by eventual market collapse of various industries in Scotland’s coastal and island communities, not least the kelp and seaweed industries themselves (Gray, 1951; Burnett, 2011). Consequently, the legacy of ‘margins’ is writ large in island community consciousness and contemporary responses to peripherality offer insight to shifting accounts of development and differing outcomes and measures of success. Although formerly defined if not necessarily understood as ‘unskilled manual labour’, the seaweed enterprise of this company in 2015 speaks of the ‘hand harvesting’ of the raw materials required, for example. Such lexical and discursive shift from what was once seen as a low grade low skilled and certainly low paid activity to now increasingly positioned as a ‘good work’ rural role of sympathetic, eco-cultural and sustainability island stewardship is noted here.

The repositioning of seaweed from a bulk extraction material to that of ‘artisan’ product and the nuanced and symbiotic relationship between ‘man and nature’ that thrives on the necessity of ‘hand labour’ is emblematic of wider island enterprise shifts to re-appropriate past economic histories for current commercial gain. Explicit here is a presentation of historical knowledge and production legacies that offer consumers a more informed sense of product authenticity and provenance. Implicit here is the appropriation of a cultural history and a legacy of failed economic development subject to the complicities and inequities of modern global capitalism

being overturned in current times by new, innovative and *sustainably aware* private enterprise suggestive of symbiotic trust relations, team led responses to local opportunities and a strongly articulated underpinning narrative of a broader ethos of collective community gain. The collective community benefits arise from the situating of the production on the island, generating jobs and incomes ‘back home’ when the enterprise could have been located on the mainland where costs would be lower and distribution easier.

If we look more closely at *Hebridean Seaweed* it provides a story of key expertise that has significant local networks, and *tacit* knowledge with strong cultural referencing along with stakeholder-informed benchmarking relating to product quality, process, and narrative is evident throughout. The key terms we would expect to see in an analysis of the Third Italy, Silicon Valley etc – e.g. trust and cooperation, tacit knowledge - are presented here as elements required for commercial success from a remote rural location (Danson and Whittam, 1999). It involves a combination of individual and collective support, ownership and investment, aligned to both commercial interests but crucially too the contextualised shared custodianship ethos of place and region. Awards from the national environmental agency SEPA confirm the high regard and success of the consistent narrative of the enterprise as being sector benchmarked and indicative of ‘national’ good practiceⁱⁱⁱ.

The company’s location is employed explicitly on its website and publicity material to articulate both environment and natural resource with cultural histories and socio-economic realities of the local and wider ‘regional’ experience. The processing factory and business headquarters are located in Stornoway within a serviced industrial and business enterprise site but encompassing the wider geography of the islands, the company’s wider industry process involves a much greater area. The raw seaweed is harvested from a number of sites throughout islands with a workforce employed both at the processing site and at the coastal sites. The location mapping of the seaweed itself informs the place branding - with images that show how and where it is extracted from remote locations. The localness and islandness of product is visibly articulated to a global (digital) world. It is useful we contend to consider more fully how certain enterprises and their products that most especially require and indeed promote ‘remote place’ are core to their business ethic are in turn mediated in reference to a range of narratives of wider regional stakeholder interest and social good ethos including offering a personalised linkage of product to place. In short, both Ishga Spa and Hebridean Seaweed offer just two examples of how remote islands today are both doing ‘good business’ and are good for doing business.

Discussion

Some of the examples in our previous research (Burnett and Danson, 2004; Danson and Burnett, 2014), confirm the tensions and conflicts inherent in much of the discussion about enterprises and entrepreneurship on island and in remote places. In some cases of island products the narrative employs specific rural imagery yet there may be no reference to local ingredients or to their elementary local nature. Contrary to this, industrially produced iconic goods such as Scottish salmon or Scotch whisky regularly appropriate rural images for marketing and labelling and will make much of the particularity of place and ‘local’ specificity (Burnett and Danson, 2004).

In the case study of *Hebridean Seaweed* and its associated unique products, it is apparent that their products have been competitively mapped to place, located and imagined for the consumer. Others have enshrined a uniqueness of an iconic product through a protected designation of origin, geographical indication or traditional speciality guarantee providing exclusive rights of use to producers of the concerned product^{iv}. Scotch whisky again is one such example, as are other food stuffs already protected in Scotland including Arbroath Smokies (PGI), Orkney and Shetland Beef and Lamb (all PDO), Scottish Wild and Scottish Farmed Salmon (both PGI). Welsh Laverbread^v, Cornish Clotted Cream, Jersey Royal Potatoes and Blue Stilton similarly are examples from elsewhere in the UK.

After six years of campaigning and pursuing the processing, in 2011 Shetland secured PDO status for ‘Native Shetland Wool’ the first UK non-food product to do so. This has been heralded as a key breakthrough for this product specific to Shetland but with positive implications for other remote and island wool and textile producers elsewhere^{vi}. It may be that we might see other products such as art and craft – jewellery, wood, textiles - or bio-refined goods such seaweed or plant bio-mass may well follow.

A recent report from the European Commission (CEC, 2013) has recognised: “the challenges that the agriculture on islands faces and their impact on the qualities/characteristics of island products.” It continues that as islands “tend to be very different, and as those qualities/characteristics are normally due to factors present on a given island, it seems **unrealistic to establish specific characteristics common** for all island products” [original emphasis]. The complexity of island place in particular is noted by the report: “While these islands are very diverse in geomorphological, natural, demographic, cultural and administrative terms, some broad common features can be identified.” These are noted as follows: many islands are mountainous; their climate is often naturally maritime; their location entails ‘peripherality’ and

poor accessibility; their natural capital is unique and fragile; their demography is usually dynamic (except for smaller islands, which tend to be affected by depopulation); they benefit from a strong cultural identity; and in many cases, they have an autonomous administration. These present themselves as the sorts of characteristics discussed in this paper and which offer the opportunity for contradictory futures: enterprising and entrepreneurially where the localness and otherness is appreciated and can be commodified, but always under threat given their individual challenges and fragility of their environment.

The descriptions of both *Hebridean Seaweed* and *Ishga Spa* products has provided evidence of the idea of remote place branding and origin narratives as key to the positioning of goods in terms of signifiers of quality (provenance), and experience (meaningful identity); a trend set to continue:

From the overall scenario of the “traditional products” we can state that the worldwide positive trend in demanding the above goods is foreseen to grow in the near future, due to a deep ongoing sociocultural transformations [...] This aspect represents an important development alternative and income opportunity for mountain regions and other disadvantaged areas, especially in rural regions, creating at the same time a valid offering to the growing demand for “safe”, natural goods with quality characteristics and unique origin and productive processes, seen as vehicles of culture, history and local traditions. (Lusso et al., 2005)

Conclusion

Although there has been increasing interest in rural enterprises, relatively little has been written on enterprise and entrepreneurship in the specific environments of islands and remote mainland locations (Baldacchino, 2005; Burnett and Danson, 2004, 2014). ‘Survival’ has been a key ‘modernity’ trope for Scotland’s rural remote places. People living and working in peripheral regions such as the Highlands, and the island archipelagos of Shetland, Orkney, and the Hebrides, have been frequently represented in both policy and cultural texts as ‘tough’ and necessarily adaptable communities surviving ‘against the odds’ of the geography, environment and economies of Scotland’s remote places. What was once initially a counter-narrative, the shift towards a greater emphasis on ‘enterprise’ and ‘sustainability’ agenda has firmly impacted on the nature of work and leisure within all spaces but not least it has informed policy and opportunity within remote rural landscapes.

This paper has contributed to addressing the gap in the literature and to extend our previous analysis of the challenges faced by enterprises these environments (Burnett and Danson, 2014, 2015). Often applying rural imagery to promote their goods and services, they face a contradiction of a persisting impression of uncontested rural idyll while actually embedded in a reality of a community, spatially distanced, environmentally fragile, and often with low living standards and challenging economies.

The examples referred to and the case studies presented here offer some insights into the complexities and opportunities and challenges of remote and island enterprises. has informed policy and opportunity within remote rural landscapes. Previous work on enterprises in island and remote rural areas (Burnett and Danson, 2004, 2014) demonstrated the need to avoid a simple transfer of sectoral and national strategies and policies to peripheral and marginal regions, demanding further exploration of behaviours and attitudes to island enterprise and entrepreneurship both from within and without the local environment.

Coping with the harsher business environment and other difficulties of running a business in such environments needs to be balanced against the access to assets and resources offered by these locations. As always, further case study work is required to deepen understanding of the implications of such contextual and strategic considerations. However, the research reported here has implications for communities, development and business support agencies. The evolution and transformation of these remote and fragile economies is under-researched and the policies of the core and urban applied without recognition of the different requirements and challenges faced in the periphery. Informing the policymakers and practitioners should add value to their operations and strategic interventions.

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ⁱ Hebridean Spa Ltd has agreements in place with the Crown Estate and local private estates to exclusively harvest *Ascophyllum nodosum* throughout the Western Isles. The company also works closely with Scottish Natural Heritage and SEPA to ensure the seaweed harvesting is sustainable and environmentally friendly. Harvesting takes place all year round and the cutting is carried out either manually using a sickle or mechanically using a seaweed harvesting boat. Source: <http://www.ishga.co.uk/harvesting-and-process/>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.hebrideanseaweed.co.uk/history.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.hebrideanseaweed.co.uk/14.html>

^{iv} http://economie.fgov.be/en/entreprises/Intellectual_property/Trademarks/quality_labels/#.U52vDOJil1I

^v https://whitehalladmin.production.alpha.gov.co.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/267371/welsh-laverbread-spec.pdf

^{vi} <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-scotland-business-15696331>