‘It’s a funny thing that they were all bad men’: cultural conflict and integrated tourism policy in Shetland, UK

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Abstract: The municipal authority of Shetland (Scotland) uses tourism promotion as a carrier for holistic brand messages and as a tool of paradiplomacy. This comes into conflict with Shetland’s local identity concept, which discourages community engagement with certain types of tourism and heritage development and clashes with the tourism promotion’s wider aim attracting immigrants. Although the increasing sophistication of place branding offers genuine opportunities for sub-national island jurisdictions in particular, concerns can be raised regarding the effectiveness and appropriateness of moving tourism promotion too far in the direction of paradiplomacy without real focus on the desires of the local community.

Keywords: Shetland; tourism; islands; branding; identity; immigration.

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1. Introduction

Although islands have long been recognised as presenting a special appeal for tourists (Baum et al., 2000), it is only recently, with the emergence of island studies per se, that island tourism has been studied in relation to its insularity. Island studies is an interdisciplinary field that holds that islands possess their own dynamics and in many ways amplify the effects of generally prevalent cultural and economic processes. This field’s internationally comparative approach has proven especially valuable in researching island tourism. Nevertheless, the scope of tourism policy has expanded at all levels of government over the past decades, and as a result, the scope of ethnographic research concerning tourism has had to expand as well. The present paper considers the integration of tourism promotion into wider economic development policy in Shetland, UK and how this affects and is affected by the local community.

2. Globalisation at the edge of the world

Around 1,200 years ago, Norwegian Vikings settled in the North Atlantic archipelago of Shetland and drove out, exterminated, or absorbed its indigenous population. Even these indigenes were the product of millennia of interaction with the Scottish mainland, with Pictish culture and Christianity finding a few centuries’ foothold in the islands before being replaced by the Scandinavian religion. The Northern Isles (Orkney and Shetland) were integrated into the Norwegian kingdom around the year 875, and over the following centuries, they functioned as a hub for trading, raiding, and cultural exchange, at times holding sway over much of Northern Scotland and the Western Isles. Lowland Scottish influence increased in the mid-13th century, and the Northern Isles were pawned to the Scottish crown in 1468–1469 (Crawford, 1987).

Shetland continued to play a role in the international economy in the early modern period: Its fishery served Hansa merchants, then the Dutch. Even in the dark days of the truck system, when Shetland’s farms and fisheries were controlled by large-scale landowners, the local economy was integral to the European herring trade. The 1886 abolishment of the truck system benefited common Shetlanders, and the continued growth of the town of Lerwick led to the emergence of a politically radicalised urban working class (Cohen, 1983). Although economically marginalised, Shetland was never quite isolated from outside influences, even if it did stand in for The Edge of the World in Michael Powell’s 1937 film.

Reliance on fishing and crofting changed in the late 1960s with the discovery of North Sea oil. The municipal authority successfully agitated for jurisdictional reform in the UK parliament, thereby negotiating an economic settlement for disruption caused by construction of the oil terminal at Sullom Voe. The money thus acquired was channelled into trust funds that even today act as proxies for the local government, sidestepping national and EU public funding regulations. Even discounting the trusts, the Shetland Islands Council (SIC) plays a large role in the local economy, employing about 9.5% of the population, far exceeding council employment rates elsewhere in Scotland.
3. Challenges and opportunities for small islands

Disproportionately large governments are common for sub-national island jurisdictions (SNIJs) like Shetland. Jurisdictional borders often reflect natural borders, with the result that SNIJs like Årø (Denmark), Lefkada (Greece), Isles of Scilly (England), and Orkney (Scotland) are all the least-populated jurisdictions of their type in their respective states. Additionally, SNIJs are frequently responsible for more matters than are their mainland counterparts simply because geographical discontinuity necessitates a degree of self-sufficiency regarding issues like healthcare, transport, education, and energy.

The reality of self-sufficiency and unitary local government often grants SNIJs de facto attributes of sovereignty (Karlsson, 2009). This is true both for SNIJs with relatively exceptional degrees of de jure jurisdictional capacity (competence to make decisions) such as Faroe (Denmark) and Jersey (UK) and for those with relatively typical autonomy such as Majorca (Spain) and Bornholm (Denmark). The gap between sovereign small island states (such as Malta and Iceland) and SNIJs is narrowed from the other direction as well: The de facto sovereignty of small island states is constrained by their size. Among the sovereignty-sapping obstacles shared by island jurisdictions in general are high transport costs for goods and people, low skills differentiation, high levels of emigration, poor economies of scale, poor economies of scope, and a surfeit of geopolitical and industrial clout (Baldacchino and Pleijel, 2010). Confronted by the same sorts of problems, islands are turning toward the same sorts of solutions, and a distinctive conception of best practice in tourism is emerging across the island jurisdictional spectrum.

Although islands face special challenges, a number of the factors placing them at a disadvantage in some contexts could give them an edge in the global market in others. For instance, disproportionately large island governments are prone to stifle internal competition and artificially prop up uncompetitive sectors (Baum et al., 2000). Regarding island politics, Armstrong and Read (2000, p.289) comment that:

“There is a growing debate concerning the issue of whether there are advantages in economic management that are associated with being small. On the one hand, it can be argued that governments can respond quickly to economic change. There may well be great strength arising from the build up of social capital within small states, such as the networks of trust and norms of reciprocity that are also found in some subnational regions of European states. On the other hand, the frequency of direct contact between decision makers and their constituents may encourage nepotism and clientism.”

The extent to which small island policymaking processes are viewed positively as the result of ‘the build-up of social capital’ or negatively as ‘nepotism and clientism’ depends largely on the desirability of the policies in question. This is because anticompetitive tendencies – whether the result of legitimate consensus building or
disreputable patronage – can increase the efficacy of projects that benefit from unity of vision: Small economic size can enhance the relative impact of individual investments.

One example of where disproportionately large island governments may hold competitive advantage is the field of place branding. It is not simply a case of geographical boundedness and small size (‘islandness’) making island communities easy to conceptualise and represent as unitary branded entities. Small size also increases the power of governments to impose a brand from above (to ‘induce’ the brand) (Leseure, 2010). For instance, the Isle of Man’s ‘Freedom to Flourish’ place brand campaign benefited from a relatively small community that could be relatively easily consulted on the content of the brand and relatively easily targeted in the subsequent marketing of the brand. Anecdotally, the establishment of the brand was made easier by the partial overlap of the Isle of Man’s political and industrial spheres: Simply by nature of the jurisdiction’s small size, there are direct links between those responsible for commissioning the brand and those who serve as the primary brand representatives and have the most to gain from the brand’s success. Again, whether these processes are positive or negative depends on one’s feelings about the particular place brand. Thus, there are those who see ‘Freedom to Flourish’ as a shining example of community involvement in place branding (for example, Audsley, 2010) and those who see it as an undemocratic attempt to change local culture in the interest of the business community (for example, Lewis, 2008).

Whether the benefits of small size outweigh the disadvantages is a moot point since European island jurisdictions tend to require disproportionately large governments for adequate services provision. Certainly, many island jurisdictions have sought to make the most of their mixed blessing.

4. The impetus for integrated tourism policy
Tourism has replaced primary industries such as fishing, farming, forestry, and quarrying as a core competency for many island communities that depend on tourism to support otherwise-unsustainable infrastructural development and large service and cultural sectors that benefit resident populations (Baum et al., 2000). Furthermore, municipal authorities often hope that good infrastructure and varied shopping and entertainment options will draw immigrants and help retain young people who might otherwise choose to emigrate.

European island jurisdictions increasingly use destination marketing to carry holistic brand messages and act as targeted phantom marketing for ends other than tourism promotion. SNIs and marginalised states have long used tourism marketing for paradiplomacy, ‘a field of international interaction apart from the conventional channels of international diplomacy’ [Bartmann, (2009), p.54]. Discussing paradiplomatic bodies such as tourism offices and trade initiatives, Bartmann (2009, p.56) explains:
“Para-diplomatic missions may even stretch the cosmetic features of the mission to simulate full diplomatic status, even though the actual accreditation falls well short of legal recognition, typical of the activity which Martin Lubin terms ‘proto-diplomacy’. [...]”

“They do allow a non- sovereign jurisdiction to reach out beyond and around the metropolitan centre to engage in independent exchanges with the outside world.”

The ostensible remit of such paradiplomatic bodies does not always exactly coincide with their aims. For example, both contested governments (such as the former dictatorships of Spain and Greece) and newly independent states have used tourism to boost their economies and gain political legitimacy (Ioannides et al., 2001).

Tourism planning is increasingly being integrated into wider development policy and serving as a tool for paradiplomacy, a trend linked to the enhanced prominence and sophistication of place branding. Many place brand theorists and practitioners are keen to differentiate branding from marketing: Simon Anholt, for example, regards ‘place branding’ as a misnomer, preferring ‘public diplomacy’, and there is a general desire to see place branding at least in part as a form of product development (Anholt, 2008; Jaffe and Nebenzahl, 2006; Govers and Go, 2009). Despite this, place branding often finds expression in marketing tools and materials so that the public frequently sees the promoted brand through the prism of its associated logo, colour scheme, style guide, and other marketing elements, regardless of whatever product development work has gone on in the background (Audsley, 2010).

This sort of holistic branding frequently aims both to enhance a jurisdiction’s attractiveness to tourists and to increase inward investment, community cohesion, and jurisdictional capacity. The marketing tools associated with such branding now dominate the tourism promotion materials of many European islands, highlighting the extent to which official tourism advertising is being used as a brand carrier. For instance, around Britain, the Isles of Scilly, Shetland, Jersey, Guernsey, Isle of Man, and Isle of Wight have all begun producing heavily branded tourism brochures during the past eight years. These brochures are more than just visually coherent; they also promote quality-of-life issues. Lifestyle promotion markets a community as a pleasant place in which to live and work and as a safe business partner (Baldacchino, 2010). This paper seeks to show how the SIC has pursued these aims through place branding as well as some of the difficulties arising from attempting to induce a brand that conflicts with the desires of a portion of the local community.
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5. Methodology
This paper’s data comes primarily from extensive ethnographic fieldwork undertaken in Shetland in 2007, including semi-structured interviews with over 70 Shetland residents, both natives and immigrants (‘immigrant’ denotes any incomer to Shetland, even one from the UK mainland). My contributors represented a wide social, geographical, and age range, with a prevalence of individuals above 50 years old. Although I conducted formal interviews with only two youths, my employment as a youth club worker allowed me to gauge the feelings of the islands’ younger generations. Shetland’s main town, Lerwick (pop. 7,000), provided around half of my contributors, with the remainder coming from Scalloway, South Mainland, and the islands of Yell, Unst, Fetlar, and Fair Isle.

Figure 1 Map of Shetland
Besides being a participant observer, I undertook personal, digitally recorded interviews that covered a variety of issues in order to identify links between various elements of the local identity. All contributors discussed:

1. what makes Shetland unique
2. how Shetland has changed over time
3. how Shetland relates to Scotland and the Nordic world
4. immigrants to Shetland.

Aiming to gauge historical awareness and interest, I also spoke with most contributors about Shetland’s cultural history. Interviews averaged between 45 minutes and two hours in length, with some significantly longer interviews at the upper end of the spectrum. Although semi-structuredness reduces the statistical usefulness of interview data, this type of interview permits a deep understanding of the cultural processes at work within a community and aids in the discovery of unknown variables. Most interviews took place in contributors’ homes, and their conversational tone allowed me to reach many of my objectives with minimal prompting. Interviews were later selectively transcribed, reflecting local dialect where necessary. For the sake of comprehensibility, I have not reproduced dialect in the present paper’s quotations.

The large number of interviews and their relative unsuitability for quantitative analysis means that their combined data most often simply forms the backdrop of the present paper. Where I use expressions such as ‘most Shetlanders feel...’ or ‘few Shetlanders believe...’, it is with the awareness that absolute certainty regarding these statements would be impossible to achieve in practice. My generalisations should be taken as statements regarding prevalence of opinion, not as claims that the Shetland community is a monolithic entity; indeed, I quote a number of individuals whose views diverge markedly from those of most of their peers.

6. Official and grassroots Shetland brands
Dedicated efforts to develop Shetland’s brand began in 2002 with the Shetland local economic forum’s ‘Shetland 2012’ economic strategy document, which aimed “to radically rethink our approach to economic development [...] [so] Shetland can continue to have a prosperous economic future” (Shetland Local Economic Forum, 2002). In reaction to “a ‘scattered gun’ approach being taken to marketing issues in general, both at individual business and at a strategic, Shetland level” (Henderson, 2005), the document suggests improving Shetland’s brand as part of an integrated strategy to boost the tourism industry and to add value to primary and manufacturing sectors like fish farming, fish processing, and knitwear production (Economic Development Unit, 2008c). The SIC subsequently contracted the London- and Bahrain-
based Corporate Edge consultancy to develop Shetland’s place brand.

Corporate Edge tried to divest Shetland of some of its pre-existing ‘traditional’ brand elements. Indeed, many Canadian and Northern European SNIJ governments feel that while associations with old-fashionedness and rural idylls may attract some visitors (Baum et al., 2000), they are not conducive to attracting investment and immigrants. The assumption is that peaceful, tradition-steeped brands need to be counterbalanced by high-tech brand elements (Baldacchino, 2010). Indeed, such composite branding is so common among Canadian and Northern European islands as to be nearly universal: Consciously or not, the attempt is to replace one generic brand with another generic brand (Grydehøj, 2008a).

In line with these trends, Corporate Edge’s 2003 branding positioned Shetland as ‘a small, clever country’. It sought:

“to reinstate the Shetland brand for the 21st century. Externally [the brand] must persuade the world to buy what Shetland offers. And internally it must inspire the people of Shetland to unify behind that offer and deliver its promise. [...] Shetland is in danger of being seen as a ‘pre-modern society’: simple, admirable but lost in a time warp.” [Lodge, (2003), pp.4–6]

For Corporate Edge, “the brand is all about communicating the best of Shetland present and future. Images of the past [...] do not communicate established brand values” [Corporate Edge, (2003), p.8]. Commonsense though bringing the Shetland brand into the 21st century might sound, we are obliged to ask whose 21st century Corporate Edge has in mind. The perceived desires of perspective consumers do not necessarily match those of the local community. Over the past century and a half, Shetland has developed a distinctive local identity concept rooted in a feeling of Norse heritage. The archipelago’s 1469 transfer to Scotland is seen as pivotal to Shetland’s cultural history. In fact though, few Shetlanders identified themselves as particularly Norse around the time that the islands’ Scandinavian language disappeared completely in the end of the 1700s [Cohen, (1983), pp.317–318]. Pro-Norse feeling was preceded by anti-Scottish sentiment, which cast Scottish landowners and ministers as the villains behind Shetland’s early modern decline.

Over the course of the 1800s, literary and anthropological influences from mainland Britain imported Viking romanticism into Shetland. This process peaked in the late-19th and early-20th century writings of the novelist, poet, and popular historian Jessie M.E. Saxby. In Saxby’s historical narrative, the valiant Vikings vanquished their Pictish predecessors (here imagined as dark-skinned, pygmy savages) and enjoyed an age of freedom and prosperity until their lands were stolen by grasping Scots. Saxby innovatively used racial anthropology to dehumanise Shetland’s pre-Norse inhabitants and to differentiate contemporary Shetlanders from both the English and the
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Scots. Although Saxby is rarely read today, her historical narrative remains in place, forming the backdrop for many Shetlanders’ sense of the past.

As a result, when it comes to branding Shetland as a forward-thinking community, outsiders are not alone in associating Shetland with a ‘pre-modern society’; the prevailing local identity concept is anti-modern, self-consciously informed by Norse romanticism. Consider, for example, the altogether grassroots branding undertaken during each workshop in the local Metasaga leadership development programme:

“Here too, the Sea, the Sky and the weather dominate. Our culture, our heritage surrounds us, shelters us, and determines who we are. We are Norse, Vikings, people of the North Atlantic. Our Myths are of Norse Gods, trolls, giants and Finn Folk. Our Saints are Olaf and Magnus.” (Coutts, undated, pp.7–8)

While actual genetic inheritance is not the critical issue, some Shetlanders today echo Saxby in speaking of ‘the blood of the Vikings’ and present genetics as a marker of Norse identity.

Back in 2002, Corporate Edge’s focus groups – consisting of key players in Shetland government, tourism, and industry – found “considerable anxiety about the ability and willingness of Shetlanders to deliver the [brand’s] quality promise” [Lodge, (2003), p.5]. They were right to be concerned: The resultant brand came to be seen as a failure by the local community, in part, as I have argued elsewhere (Grydehøj, 2008a), on account of its downplaying of Norse identity. Lacking local support, the brand could function only as a marketing tool, which is how it is used today in Shetland’s official tourism promotion materials (Henderson, 2005, 2008).

7. Branded heritage development

Although little work is being done explicitly with the Corporate Edge-developed Shetland brand today, that initial branding process has informed a range of other SIC initiatives. In 2009, the VisitShetland tourism board became independent of the nationwide VisitScotland tourism body, further enhancing the SIC’s ability to use VisitShetland for public diplomacy. This move was a long time coming: Already from the start of VisitScotland’s administrative existence in 2002, the SIC had insisted that Shetland possess a distinctively branded tourism body. Even this proved problematic, for the tourism authority’s street signs nevertheless bore VisitScotland’s thistle logo. Stephen Simpson (2007), formerly Customer Services Supervisor at VisitShetland, points out that “Almost without exception, they’ve been defaced. And there is no vandalism here in Shetland, but those signs have all been vandalised. And it’s obviously a political, a cultural thing”.

A fully independent VisitShetland is free to put up its own signs and to engage in policies of its own choosing. While an independent VisitShetland may work to promote
Shetland alone, community hopes that the SIC will promote a community-centred vision of Shetland may be misplaced. This is best illustrated by the case of Shetland’s Iron Age archaeology (unmatched in Northern Europe except in Orkney), which is one of the island’s unique selling points for tourists. There has been consternation in the SIC that visitor numbers at Shetland’s archaeological sites remain relatively low, yet Orkney has been successful in promoting its sites. This has traditionally been seen as a matter of insufficient marketing, both within the community and internationally (Hamilton, 2008). There are, however, other issues are at play as well.

For instance, while Orkney possesses both impressive pre-Norse archaeology and impressive Norse archaeology, Shetland’s visually impressive sites are all either pre-Norse or multi-period sites that are perceived locally as primarily pre-Norse. As we have seen, Shetland’s prevailing historical narrative begins with the islands’ settlement by the Vikings and tends to ignore or actively denigrate the indigenous population that the Vikings killed or displaced. Shetland’s integrated tourism policy though actively seeks to inspire both visitors and locals to appreciate pre-Norse archaeology. Thus, for example, the Old Scatness multi-period archaeological site (owned by the Shetland Charitable Trust) possesses participatory interpretational features that promote a sense of inheritance of the archipelago’s pre-Norse culture (Grydehøj, 2010).

This is not merely an exercise in supporting tourism infrastructure. Evidence of the SIC’s sophisticated integrated heritage planning can be found in the creation of the Economic Development Unit’s ‘Heritage tourism investment programme: 2007–2012’:

“Activities included in the Shetland Heritage tourism investment programme (HTIP) will have strong links to other resources important for tourism, such as music and recreation. The programme will also contribute to Shetland’s wider aims for developing culture and heritage, such as improving quality of life, physical regeneration, and attracting people to live and work in Shetland. [...]”

“Shetland’s heritage is fundamental to the islands’ identity and culture.” “Tourism is a developing industry in Shetland and heritage is its principal asset.”

“Shetland’s heritage is a major economic asset in a wider sense, since it is a tool for strengthening the islands’ reputation for distinctiveness and high quality among those who may wish to buy our products, move here or invest here.”

“Shetland’s heritage has the potential for substantial further development.” “Local funding options particularly for large-scale developments are limited in the short term.”

“Public investment in heritage is one of the keys to building private sector
confident and willingness to invest.”

“As well as producing economic benefits, developing Shetland’s unique heritage assets will result in visible benefits for local residents, building confidence, and in the provision of educational opportunities.” [Economic Development Unit, (2008a), pp.1–2]

One of the HTIP’s objectives is to “develop [,] reinforce and apply a strong brand identity for Shetland’s Heritage Sector”. Just as we could ask earlier whose future Corporate Edge had in mind, we can ask here whose ‘Shetland culture and heritage brand’ is being discussed. That of the community (Norse intangible cultural heritage) or that of the world at large (pre-Norse built heritage)? In fact, the HTIP is trying to do everything at once, mentioning initiatives as disparate as supporting local museums and creating “a world heritage class visitor centre at old Scatness Broch” (Economic Development Unit, 2008a, 2008b).

Whatever the aspirations of the Economic Development Unit, few Shetlanders see pre-Norse heritage as ‘fundamental to the island’s identity and culture’. Even if they did so, it would still be problematic to attempt to use local heritage sites to encourage overseas tourists, not to mention investors and immigrants. We shall see below that there is tension within Shetland concerning even the passive participation of tourists in a local calendar custom; attractive though some heritage may be to outsiders, there is a feeling among many Shetlanders that local culture is explicitly not for external consumption. As Ronström (2008) has noted, the trouble with trying to attract outsiders to heritage that is embraced by locals is that globalising heritage does not complement community ownership; it complements the ownership of whoever wants to be an owner. There are thus multiple reasons why we should not be surprised that community engagement in Shetland’s pre-Norse heritage sites remains limited. This phenomenon is rooted in Shetland’s unique history. The unique histories of other communities can lead to different attitudes toward built heritage. For example, people in Orkney tend to embrace their islands’ pre-Norse archaeological sites (Lange, 2007).

Few Shetlanders are actively opposed to tourism, which is seen as important to the local economy. Tourism is not, however, seen as being a part of the local economy requiring emotional engagement. This impedes SIC attempts to involve community members in developing archaeological tourism, in acting as brand representatives.

8. Oppositional identity in Shetland
The relative success of Shetland tourism in recent years suggests that, though the situation may not be ideal, the tourism industry can get by without active local support for heritage projects. There are deeper concerns though involving the SIC’s paradigmatic use of tourism and tourism marketing.
It is not just that Norse identity makes it difficult to enthuse Shetlanders about heritage sites and tourism initiatives that seek to market the islands to investors and immigrants. As in the late-Victorian era, Norse romanticism is expressed both to valourise Shetlanders and to denigrate Scots. My interviews showed that anti-Scottishness is integral to many native Shetlanders’ understanding of the community’s history. For example, the 63-year-old tour guide Elma Johnson (2007) describes the aftermath of the 1469 pawning of Shetland thus:

Elma Johnson: “But, um, this happened, of course, and funnily enough, there were nothing changed for about a hundred years, a whole hundred years goes past. And then, the first men started to come, to Shetland.”

Adam Grydehøj: “From South?”

Elma Johnson: “Yeah. From Scotland and, um… I think it’s a funny thing that they were all bad men. Very few good ones. And I think that the reason for that is that it was just a bunch of characters who’s hanging about the palace, and people were probably, Queen Mary, etc. were probably fed up with them, sent them north. But it’s a funny thing that they were all sort of bred the same way. Kind of odd, that. They were the Nevins and, and, uh, came here first. And then, there was, of course, the Stewarts. The Stewarts intermarried and became, that was through here, through the big house up on the hill here.”

As a tourism professional and magnificently skilled storyteller, Johnson revels in telling visitors about the islands’ past. Her views on the historical arrival of the Scots, however, mirror her attitudes toward Shetland’s development following the coming of oil, and she can lament that the village in which she lives is now full of immigrants from mainland Britain rather than Shetland natives.

The use of Norse identity to differentiate Shetlanders from mainland Scots is clear in the annual Up-Helly-Aa fire festival, which – with its Viking-costumed revellers and burning replica longship – provides the iconic images of Shetland for both locals and outsiders (Brown, 1998). Although the festival is a major tourist draw, it is also a liability: The Economic Development Unit has researched the extent to which Shetland’s brand was damaged by public displays of anti-outsider sentiment at the 2005 Up-Helly-Aa (Henderson, 2005). It is no coincidence that the VisitShetland promotional materials include virtually no Norse imagery.

One particularly vitriolic contributor, who grew up in Lerwick and has worked in the tourism industry, directly links Up-Helly-Aa with racism when discussing some Shetlanders’ Norse romanticism:
“It’s transposed nationalism in some cases. It’s a psychological problem that they feel a desperate need to believe in something, and their own country, own community, own profession, background doesn’t satisfy them. And they search for an ideal. And that may be a romanticised Nordic-Shetlandism, but that’s a medical phenomenon as much as a cultural one, I would have thought. […] You’re just studying a strange cultural phenomenon. I’ve been studying it myself for a long time without making any sense of it. I don’t know if I want to believe it, but the ‘[Viking] blood’ thing is very interesting because at the time when Up-Helly-Aa was starting and all this late-19th century Viking enthusiasm, this is the time of Wagner. It’s the time of Aryan philosophers. And there are common roots with Nazism and Up-Helly-Aa. Very strong common roots. The belief in a superior race, the Teutonic race, the Aryan race. It’s an instinctively antisemitic movement. It’s really very nasty indeed.”

This individual’s opinions are not mainstream, and it should be noted that Shetland’s late-19th century racialism never developed into a philosophy resembling Nazism. Nevertheless, my contributor’s statements are the result of frustration with what he sees as a closed-minded, backward-looking strain within the Shetland community.

Figure 2 Viking-themed revelry on the morning of Lerwick’s 2007 Up-Helly-Aa © (see online version for colours)
Many Shetlanders regard the sort of ‘thuggish xenophobia’ (Morton, 2005) displayed at the 2005 Up-Helly-Aa as unrepresentative of true local sentiment. It is pointed out that, ever since the oil era, the archipelago’s population has included a great many immigrants. Indeed, Shetland’s Viking identity has an aspirational character for immigrants, many of whom see themselves as inheritors of Norse cultural heritage simply by virtue of living in Shetland, without recourse to genetic/ancestral pretensions. Many of these same incomers though complain about antagonism toward immigrants.

9. A double bind

One expression of this is the use of dialect to exclude incomers. Although the Shetland dialect is a form of Scots with Norse influences (Barnes, 1998), many Shetlanders hold that it is a primarily Scandinavian language. A number of my contributors speak insultingly about – at times even laughing at – incomers who attempt to learn how to speak the dialect. Malachy Tallack (2009) comments on this phenomenon:

“What strikes me as odd, particularly given the level of concern many people feel about this trend [of declining dialect use], is the degree of hostility that still exists towards the idea of people who were not born in Shetland learning and speaking dialect themselves. […]

“There is still a very strong antipathy towards non-native dialect speakers. This is most often manifested in a quiet tutting or cringing when an individual is brave enough to give it a go, but in private many will go further and suggest that it simply should not or even cannot be done (I have heard it said, in all seriousness, that folk without Shetland genes are physiologically incapable of pronouncing Shetland words).”

At the same time, however, most of my native Shetlander contributors accuse mainland Scots of having tried – and sometimes, still trying – to kill off the dialect. Thus, on the one hand, immigrants’ lack of respect for dialect is presented as a lack of respect for Shetlanders in general while on the other hand, portions of the community exert social pressure to prevent outsiders from becoming insiders by using dialect.

Stephen Simpson, a native of the far north of Scotland, admires Shetlanders’ attempts to preserve their dialect yet is not exactly sanguine about local pride in general. Describing what he perceives as the thoughts of the typical Shetlander, Simpson (2007) says:

“They just feel, ‘Well, I’ve lived all my life here on an island. OK, so, you’ve come here, and I know you like it here, and you’re contributing and so on, and you’re going to die here and so on, but at the end of the day, you know, you can never be a real one, because you weren’t born and brought up here. And it’s as simple as that’.”
Simpson tells me about his arrival to the islands 16 years earlier:

*Stephen Simpson:* “The people had this great community spirit and feel to them, and also within one or two days, I was rabidly taken down to earth with the Scottish thing. There was no Scottish symbolism, and I was seen as a, a south person, which was a complete surprise to me, a complete inversion to everything I thought in my head up until that point. I, I automatically thought that people who came up from the Central Belt of Scotland, ‘Those are the Scottish guys’. [...] And for me to be treated like that was such a shock. At times, it’s been very, very hurtful. For example, I remember being in a pub close to here quite earlier on, quite early on in my life here. And I could hear young guys in the corner, and they were mocking the way I spoke. They were repeating things I said and saying things the way I said it. And I was really, really, really hurt by it. [...] Like, when I speak to my mum and dad, I do tell them that there is a dark side to it and that the people here have an attitude towards people who are not from Shetland.”

*Adam Grydehøj:* “So, it’s not something which is specifically anti-Scottish, but it’s anti-outsider in general?”

Stephen Simpson: “Oh, no, no, no. I think it’s specifically anti-Scottish. I think that’s exactly what it is.”

These dynamics may be in play in the 2009–2010 debacle involving Shetland’s chief executive David Clark, who left his position (with a post-tax settlement of £250,000) after just nine months on the job, attributing his departure to his having been ‘bullied, harassed and subjected to racism because he is not a Shetlander’ (Riddell, 2010). The counteraccusation of some that the job never should have gone to a non-Shetlander in the first place only supports Clark’s contention, as do internet discussion forum comments along the lines of ‘Get Dave Clark on the boat south from where he came’ (Newlands, 2010).

In light of this, it is little wonder that the SIC does not wish to promote Shetland’s Norse identity to outside consumers. In their content analysis of VisitShetland promotional materials, Koivunen and Hynes (2009) show that Shetland is being marketed as an unpeopled landscape. This ‘come here, and get away from it all’ marketing strategy is common for islands, and it would likely be relatively harmless if perspective tourists were its only audience. As we have seen, however, the tourism policy’s parapleomatic aims mean that tourists are just one audience for tourism promotion, and Shetland’s brand development processes since 2002 have explicitly sought to attract investment and immigration. It thus makes sense that, concurrent with its efforts to market Shetland as a place of escape, the SIC is working to strengthen its high-tech jobs infrastructure, for example by ensuring the availability of internet broadband in rural areas (Grydehøj, 2008b).
However, policies designed to reverse rural depopulation may be viewed with suspicion by the very communities they are designed to serve. Part of the reason for this is that while some immigrants are criticised for attempting to enter the communal sphere, other immigrants are criticised for not integrating into it, for seeking a kind of social isolation that is seen as antithetical to Shetland’s community spirit. One of my contributors, a man in his early 40s living in rural Shetland, expresses the common complaint that socially unfit individuals immigrate to Shetland either in a misguided attempt to escape their troubles or because they feel they can exploit Shetland’s welfare system:

“A lot of this folk that’s moved in, because they’re individuals or individual families and stuff, then they’re just going and signing on at the doctor and occasionally going to the shops. They’re not really taking part in very much, you know? I mean, a lot of them come here because they’re running away from something else or because they don’t fit in somewhere else or fallen out with everybody else somewhere else. Again, because the Scottish Homes is dishing out houses, for want of a better word, they give them to folk that have the most points, which means that don’t work, never wanted to work, getting all the benefits. So, you get all the big points, so therefore you, you come here because you know this is the place where there are the most benefits available. You know, the Council will look after you or whatever. You know, you’ll get whatever you need.”

Regardless of the truth behind these accusations, they are sufficiently widespread to indicate the negative preconceptions confronting incomers to Shetland. Immigrants are thus in a double bind: If they seek to use their skills in the local community, they are liable to be labelled as interfering and overbearing, as the archetypal Scot who comes in and tells the locals what to do. Yet if they keep to themselves (either as a result of commuting to work elsewhere in Shetland, of being self-employed, or of being unemployed), they are likewise seen as part of the problem of rural decline.

10. Conclusions
These sorts of problems are present in many island communities. For instance, Lange (2007, p.103) describes the cold welcome given to some immigrants to Orkney, and my recent fieldwork in the Isle of Wight likewise shows that, even in the absence of an oppositional local identity, natives often exclude themselves from activities involving incomers. That this is the case even in islands that do not possess a relative economic advantage over their neighbours suggests that similar expressions of anti-immigrant sentiment in Shetland do not merely involve a desire to exclude others from the community’s oil wealth. It must also be recalled that this sense of local identity emerged at a time when Shetland was still severely disadvantaged compared with the UK as a whole.

The SIC’s paradiplomatic aims for its tourism policy mesh poorly with the prevalent local identity, which may welcome economic growth but not necessarily at the cost of
enticing more immigrants to move to Shetland. The islands’ oppositional identity not only impedes the marketing of pre-Norse heritage attractions, it more fundamentally argues against further opening Shetland up to outside influences. Whether this kind of anti-outsider feeling is ethically defensible is beyond the scope of this paper. Regardless, the SIC should recognise the failure of nearly a decade of branding from above, of trying to induce an official place brand that runs counter to local sentiment. Whatever the solution, it cannot be to pretend that the clash is non-existent, that it is sufficient to encourage immigrants to come to the islands and be a part of its culture without first determining what that culture is and without engaging with the local population to learn how immigrants can be accepted as contributing to the community. Even in a place like Shetland (an SNIJ with structural advantages when it comes to branding), wealth and small size prove no replacement for democratic involvement when it comes to developing the island product as a whole. There are, indeed, signs that lessons are being learned and that the new Promote Shetland body is seeking to match its nuanced brand strategy with equally nuanced community interaction.

Though integrated tourism development holds potential, extending the benefits of tourism policy may also extend its risks. In extreme cases in which tourism becomes a stalking horse for other interests such as investment and immigration, policymakers should not be surprised if the reaction of the local community has as much to do with these other interests as it does with tourism. Even where the paradiplomatic aspect of brand-led tourism promotion is sufficiently subtle as to escape the notice of most community members, it may be worthwhile to question the ethics of promoting forms of development that do not necessarily serve what much of the local community believes to be in its interests. When tourism promotion is not really about tourism promotion, it may deserve to be publicly considered on its own merits.

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