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Scottish Wilderness Rejuvenated: The Regional Identity of Scotland as a Tourist Destination in *The Scots Magazine* 2017–2018

Abstract

Vital academic debates concerning national and regional identities have recently been conducted in the trans-disciplinary field of Tourism Studies, in the context of today's identity-based economy. Tourist destinations compete on the market by promoting their place identities constructed in response to the needs and tastes of tourism consumers. Scotland, long preoccupied with her historically complicated cultural identity, is also involved in projecting a commodified regional identity. The following analysis of a sample of *The Scots Magazine* texts, approached here as elements of Scotland's coordinated destination marketing, demonstrates the ascendancy of revived and discursively renewed wilderness as the dominant identity marker of the region.

Keywords: Scotland, wilderness, *The Scots Magazine*, destination place identity, identity-based tourism

1. Introduction

Like many small countries involved in ethnopolitical conflicts with great neighbouring powers, Scotland and the Scots have for centuries been concerned with preserving and strengthening their cultural identity. Since the Scots became a "stateless nation" after the union with England in 1707, the identity of their country as a region of the United Kingdom has been particularly problematic and defined around different markers: literature, language, religion and nationalism (Brown; Szymańska and Korzeniowska). Other Scottish identity markers and expressions debated recently in the context of political devolution in the UK after 1997 and the emergence of a supranational European identity involve sports, popular historical myths, territoriality and regional institutional structuration (Bairner 45–68; McLeod; Brown 2012; Clayton).

The present contribution to the cultural reflection on Scotland's identity concerns the sphere of tourism. Located at the intersection of Media and Tourism

Studies, it deals with tourism promotional media as sites where many types of identities are made and unmade. The material under scrutiny involves eighteen monthly issues of *The Scots Magazine* – the entire year 2017 and the first half of 2018 – treated as cultural texts in which a particular type of Scotland's place identity as a tourist destination is constructed. The notion of place identity is understood here as “a combination of selected physical attributes of a destination with a system of meanings and values attached to them by means of carefully planned discursive operations” (Garzone 30–31). Consequently, the employed analytical method is that of multimodal discourse analysis, which consists in looking jointly at the visual and the verbal aspects of the magazine content, applying relevant semiotic, narrative and sociolinguistic tools (Dann; Jewitt). On the basis of the identified place-making strategies it is argued that *The Scots Magazine* perpetuates the ‘old’ regional image of Scotland as Britain's wilderness in a discursively uplifted form adjusted to the tourism trends and practices of the 21st century.

A fact well recognised in today's Tourism Studies is the commodification of local cultures and landscape resources as a result of the global expansion of tourism as a valuable sector of economy bringing growth and development to many countries and probably the most popular leisure activity of the 21st century. Selling places and experiences as tourism “products” requires effective marketing and promotional operations focused on the construction of distinctive and competitive place identities of whole countries, regions and localities (Kneafsey; Dredge and Jenkins; Ritchie and Crouch). Scotland is no exception to this rule and her destination marketing organisations (DMOs) creatively participate in the highly competitive struggle for potential visitors to the region.

However, the identity effect of the activities designed to strengthen Scotland's positioning on the tourism market has not often been addressed lately. The available studies tend to concentrate on the relationship between tourism development and Scottish national identity, the perpetuation of the older image of “tartan” Scotland and the mechanisms of the Scottish heritage industry (McCrone et al.; Butler; Bhandari 2014, 2016), while the latest place identity constructs have not received sufficient attention. A useful attempt to follow more recent tourism place-marketing strategies for Scotland by reinventing its regional identity comes from Stephen J. Page, William Steel, and Joanne Connell. In their analysis of the photographic imagery in Scottish 2004 holiday brochures promoting the then niche adventure tourism to the region, the authors signal a revival of the Victorian image of Scotland's landscapes as “wild and untouched by humans” (54). The present examination of a leading glossy Scottish-interest magazine 14 years later reveals, as the once nascent adventure tourism sector has become one of the country's main drawcards (“Adventure Tourism in Scotland”), that a re-wilded regional identity of Scotland in an up-lifted version has been reinforced and is currently put forth to the public on a broad scale.

2. *The Scots Magazine* and Tourism Destination Marketing

With a monthly average readership of over 178,000 in mid-2018 (25,109 print-only copies sold; also available as a digital edition), *The Scots Magazine* – a B5 format glossy of about 130 pages – enjoys the position of the world’s best-selling Scottish-interest publication focused on Scotland, her people, places, culture and leisure (“The Media in Figures: Scots Magazines’ Circulation Figures”). Although it is a quality regional magazine not allocated under the travel periodical category, much of its content in fact promotes Scotland as a destination to both the domestic and overseas reading public. Today’s marketing synergy and collective omni-channel tourism campaigns often blur the distinction between the promotional and other media. This is visible in *The Scots Magazine*, where in addition to much of the editorial content, a strong indication of its tourism promotional function comes from the frequent advertising of visitors’ accommodation, tourism operators, gastronomy, architectural heritage, cultural events, guidebooks, as well as tourist gear. Hence, the image of Scotland as a tourist destination projected by the magazine can be treated as both organic, i.e. transmitted unintentionally via a medium ostensibly unconnected with the regional DMOs, and induced, i.e. purposefully constructed in agreement with the current marketing policy adopted by the tourism agencies and operators (Ferreira Lopes).

There are three factors well understood by tourism providers and managers today: that this branch of the global economy is characterised by a growing number of new destinations; that these developments go hand in hand with an increasing diversification and competition among them; and that the role of the media in this struggle for uniqueness cannot be overstated. Modern mass media linked up with all the new technologies are imperative for the economic success of local, regional and national tourism industries. The powerful effects of media communications can bring sweeping changes of attitudes and behaviour among tourists and tourism providers. Thus, tourism promotion media constitute a rich and dynamically evolving terrain for observing from many disciplinary perspectives the strategies of creating unique destination identities (Morgan and Pritchard; Cano and Prentice; Getz and Fairley; Kumar; Ayalew).

Even when approached from the cultural point of view, tourism’s affinity to the economy and its trends must not be forgotten. One such important analytical advance of the 21st century, with tremendous impact on promotion and advertising, is the appropriation of identity theories for economic models of behaviour and the emergence of the concept of identity-based economy (Akerlof and Kranton 2000, 2010; Bond et al.; Reed et al.). The applied economist Marien André argues that tourism is quintessentially an identity-based branch of economy as “on the one hand it spreads a destination’s international reputation (stressing its differentiation as an added value) while on the other, it generates direct economic activity” (18). In fact, long before the concept of identity-based economy was coined, identity

had been an important issue in the study of tourism. Like many social scientists before them, modern Tourism Studies researchers assume that the identities of both tourists and hosts are dynamic constructs “shaped, re-envisioned, and manipulated in tandem with encounters with others and in response to broader economic, ecological, and political factors” (Adams 450). This statement applies not only to people, but also to places. Place-making, or the production of distinctive and competitive place identity at national, regional and local levels involves the transformation of physical geographical spaces into marketable tourism products (Dredge and Jenkins).

3. Wilderness in Tourism Promotion

Clarifying the concept of wilderness in the 21st century is not an easy task due to the contested meaning of the word. The European Parliament resolution of 3 February 2009 on Wilderness in Europe expressed strong support for the strengthening of wilderness-related measures and recommended a development of an EU wilderness strategy. The European Wilderness Society, an international nonprofit non-government organisation, is a response to the EU call. Founded in 2014 with the mission to identify, manage and promote European wilderness where it still exists, it defined wilderness as “the native habitats and species, [...] large enough for the effective ecological functioning of natural processes, [...] unmodified or only slightly modified and without intrusive or extractive human activity, settlements, infrastructure or visual disturbance,” with no human extraction, no human intervention and where dynamic natural processes take place (“European Wilderness Definition”). In 2013, under an EU contract, a group of experts indicated 522 areas in 27 EU countries with a potential to meet the European Wilderness Quality, none of them in the UK (Kuiters et al. 34–36). However, Scottish National Heritage had already been formed in 1992, an executive non-departmental public body of the Scottish Government responsible for the country’s natural heritage, particularly the protected areas in Scotland accounting for 20% of its total area. The SNH identified “42 wild land areas following a detailed analysis in 2014 of where wildness can be found across all of Scotland’s landscapes” (“Wild Land Area Descriptions”). The applied criteria were more people-friendly than the EU ones and ruled that such lands should “have largely semi-natural landscapes that show minimal signs of human influence, [...] bring significant economic benefits – attracting visitors and tourists, [...] offer people psychological and spiritual benefit, [and] [...] provide increasingly important havens for Scotland’s wildlife” (“Landscape Policy: Wild Land”).

While politicians struggle for a functional definition of wilderness, many researchers point to the multiplicity of meanings attached to the concept. They tend to see it as a social construction, “a kind of meaning certain people give to the

landscape” depending on the value they attach to environmental goods: historical, indigenous, ecological, ecotouristic, etc. (Williams 125). The academic discussion on the meaning and standards of wilderness in Europe also resonates with the doubts expressed by some environmentally-conscious Scots. Jim Crumley, a celebrated Scottish nature writer, argues that the SNH criteria of designating Wild Land Areas in Scotland are based on “essentially emotional responses to those lands by people,” without paying attention to what nature chooses for itself to prosper (54).

The strategy of promoting destinations as wilderness is neither new nor invented in Scotland, although in Britain it is most often linked with the Knoydart Peninsula in the Western Scottish Highlands. Accessible only by boat due to its harsh terrain and remoteness, it is a paradise for hill walkers, mountaineers, wildlife enthusiasts, and recently also for mountain bikers. Yet this fact does not prevent other areas in Britain from promoting themselves under the wilderness label, as did the authors of the guidebook *England's Last Wilderness – A Journey Through the North Pennines* (Bellamy and Quayle), or the mountain hiker and blogger Mark Horrell, who reported his trip to the Cambrian Mountains under the title “The Welsh Wilderness.” Since 2013, Ireland has had an independent tour operator called *Wilderness Ireland* offering “a range of adventure holidays, tours and incredible wilderness experiences” (“About Wilderness Ireland”). Outside the UK, wild destinations are even more numerous. Many of them are recognised as or call themselves Europe’s last wilderness, like, for instance, the Polish Białowieża forest (Gross). Iceland has built its tourism campaigns on nature-based attractions and wilderness characteristics, particularly of its Highlands (Sæþórsdóttir et al.), and Lapland has romanticised itself in the same way (Pedersen and Viken). It seems that in recent years Scotland’s DMOs have also re-discovered the country’s old “wilderness” label as a driver for success on today’s competitive tourism market.

4. *The Scots Magazine*: Analysis

For practical reasons, three regular sections of the studied *Scots Magazine* issues were selected for close reading and detailed analysis in search of the verbal and visual discourses of wilderness: the front covers, the opening photographic section “Great Scottish Journeys” and the monthly column “Wild About Scotland” by Jim Crumley, Scotland’s leading wildlife expert and author. Two elements of the covers were analysed in detail: the main images and coverlines. Each cover is dominated by one big photograph taking up almost the entire space. Thirteen of those pictures show landscape: ten of them mountains and lochs at different seasons of the year, and four rugged coastlines. The remaining five show landscape with single objects of human material civilisation (a bridge, lighthouses and small boats). Content analysis revealed a total absence of people, of human

settlement, farms and fields, cattle, historical and industrial buildings, roads and vehicles. Two photos contain allusions to the human presence in the shape of a distant winding path in a glen and a single trail of boot imprints in the sand of an empty beach.

A qualitative-semiotic analysis of the cover images revealed other regularities. They are all dramatic photos of sweeping landscapes or breathtaking and poetic landscape shots that capture the drama as well as splendour of Scottish nature, mostly in the Highlands. Contemplated jointly, they constitute a kaleidoscope of images featuring inaccessible rocks, smooth lake surfaces, wind-shaped dunes and virgin snow creating the impression of a remote land unspoiled by human intervention or even presence. Yet, the Scottish wilderness from the magazine's front covers is also friendly and romantic due to the omnipresent sun, the visual cliché prevalent in tourism promotion texts (Dann 194–195). It is never the full tropical sun on a brightly blue cloudless sky, to be sure, as it is usually captured during the golden hour, when the landscape is bathed in magical reddish yellow light, or just after sunset, with a soft pastel-toned glow over everything, or behind clouds, with the help of tinted solar filters. The cumulative effect of those images is that of the warmth, seduction, magic and beauty of Scotland's remote wild areas.

The visual discourse of wilderness represented by the cover photographs is linguistically enhanced by the matching lexical register of the coverlines:

- 1a. Island adventure: *Go wild* for the Outer Hebrides. (June 2017)
- 1b. The *wild North*: Discover Scotland's most magnificent landscapes. (Oct. 2017)
- 1c. Winter in the Highlands: The *savage beauty* of our *wildest season*. (Dec. 2017)
- 1d. Harris & Lewis: Journey to *the edge of the world*. (Feb. 2017)
- 1e. *Wild country*: Discover how John Muir Trust protects our most treasured landscapes. (Oct. 2018) (emphases mine)

The multimodal discursive operations identified in the section "Great Scottish Journeys" serve the construction of Scotland as wilderness in a similar way. This opening section of each magazine issue typically occupies 5 pages and consists of about 8–10 photographs of different sizes, the first one invariably an impressive double-page spread. The monthly editions of the series are devoted to different parts of Scotland, often connected by some element, for instance places along the North Coast 500 route in the issues of July–November 2017; places on the A83 road from Tarbet to Lochgilphead (May 2017); or places on the West Highland Way, a popular long-distance walking trail (April 2017). The quantitative analysis of 18 editions of "Great Scottish Journeys" yielded 146 photographs altogether, only 11 of them showing people, mostly hikers. Yet unlike the cover pictures, as many as 112 feature man-made objects: roads, historical and rural/ farm buildings, fishing trawlers, boats and small ports, albeit always seen in the distance and dominated by pristine landscape.

The verbal part of each section consists of two regular text boxes, a quarter of a page each: one containing a brief description of a photographed route and the other, entitled “Fact File,” presenting a list of regional tidbits. Moreover, each photograph is provided with a caption in tiny print at the top or at the bottom. Those short text pieces depict Scottish places as wilderness by means of specific attributive adjectives in the noun phrases denoting elements of the landscape, such as “enormous skies,” “huge mountains,” “some truly wild scenery,” “wild moorland,” “savage beauty of the landscape,” “colossal mountains [...] and rugged coastline,” “jagged peaks,” “craggy cliffs,” “peace and solitude,” “unspoilt Galloway coast” and many more in the same vein. Like the iconic sun artistically captured in the photographs, the vocabulary of wonder and admiration serves as a linguistic strategy of making the Scottish wild spaces alluring and inviting: “gorgeous sandy beach,” “stunning views,” “a necklace of beautiful beaches,” “magnificent vantage points,” “an incredible vista,” only to mention a few. Scottish scenery itself is expressively described as “breathtaking,” “dazzling,” “exquisite,” “superb,” “enthraling,” “astonishing,” and “head-spinning.”

The third magazine section explored for evidence of the discursive rewilding of Scotland was the five-page long section “Wild About Scotland” found in all the examined issues except April and August 2017. A close reading of some features in the section reveals that its title is a play on words fusing the informal phrase “to be wild about something” with Scotland’s wildlife, as those articles are entirely devoted to the celebration of regional wild fauna and flora. Jim Crumley, the author of them all, expertly writes here about animal and plant species living and growing in the wild. The articles are all based on the authors’ personal encounter with and research on a particular animal/bird/fish in a particular territory. Unlike the sections analysed above, “Wild About Scotland” is only slightly dominated by photographs, which make up from half to two-thirds of the feature, but each edition opens up with a spectacular double-page photo of the story’s “protagonist.” Despite the poetic, sentimental and occasionally exalted style, there is no lack of in-depth information in the main texts, each ending with a short list of essential facts. The structure of each feature of the series is similar, although the elements never appear in the same order: the circumstances of the author’s encounter with the animal/bird/plant, its graphic description, information about its ways and habits, history, current population and status in Scotland and a call for action if a problem of the species survival or wellbeing is observed.

In addition to his fixed topics of “native habitats and species” and “havens for Scotland’s wildlife” (to use phrases from the official wilderness definition), Crumley conveys the wilderness effect by means of much more subtle narrative and stylistic techniques than the attributive phrases found in the previous sections. Here are some textual examples:

- 2a. It helps if you realise that some of them [trees in Cairngorms pinewoods] will remember the brush of wolf fur 250 or 300 years ago [...]. (Jan. 2017, 46)
- 2b. Such is the power of our wildcat that it can [...] convince us of just how crucial the Scottish wildcat is as a wilderness presence. (March 2017, 44)
- 2c. They [whooper swans] turn up here in October and stay [...] well into April, and I think of them as the very soul of wildness. (July 2018, 66)

These and many more similar passages construct the image of Scottish nature as timeless, tranquil, wise, living its own life and persisting despite human intervention. Crumley sees Scotland's wilderness not necessarily as remote, inaccessible and void of people, but often at your fingertips. This kind of not-so-wild wilderness is likely to appeal to prospective tourists interested in non-extreme outdoor activities.

The vast array of photographs in "Wild About Scotland" show wildlife and landscapes in close-up and from a distance, static and dynamic, during all seasons of the year. Yet they all have one thing in common: no humans and no traces of material culture. This selection principle makes Scotland much more of a wilderness than the accompanying texts. Thus the two modes used jointly by Crumley to promote Scotland's wildlife meet both the strict and the more relaxed European criteria of wilderness.

The strategy of constructing Scotland's place identity as wilderness is also visibly present in the magazine's middle part "Outdoor Scotland" targeted at readers interested in sports, adventure and recreation in the open, particularly in its regular sections "On Your Bike" and "Take a Hike," two pages each. Although they have not all been closely analysed here, the SNH criteria of wilderness echoing in the randomly selected fragments are those concerning significant economic benefits through attracting visitors and tourists as well as psychological and spiritual benefits experienced by visitors:

- 3a. [A hiking trail] is worth the effort for *the solitude found by walking* through the Forest of Atholl. (Dec. 2017, 69)
- 3b. This hidden singletrack treasure may be rarely used, but it certainly *delivers the feelgood factor*. (March 2017, 76)
- 3c. *The excitement of riding* in such a place was hard to contain, and *we didn't stop smiling*. (Sept. 2017, 78) (emphases mine)

Many photographs in both sections routinely show landscapes, and while "On your Bike" frequently features riding or resting bikers, the hiking sections show no people whatsoever, hikers or locals.

The Scots Magazine image of wild Scotland fits well into the marketing strategy of many tourist organisations and institutions that stay in business by selling the region in the same way. The independent tour operator *Wilderness Scotland* specialises in offering adventure holidays in the most remote regions

of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland and claims to “know the wild places of Scotland better than anyone” (“About Wilderness Scotland”). *Wilderness Travel*, a global tourism operator evolved from a small American agency in California, had an “Islands and Highlands of Scotland” offer in the season 2018 advertised as a “fabled realm of mist-shrouded crags and heathered moors” and “wild seascapes” (“Highlands and Islands of Scotland: Hiking the Outer Hebrides and Isle of Skye”). Although the offer of *VisitScotland*, the national tourism agency for Scotland, is much more diversified and segmented, the marketing appeal of Scottish wilderness underlies its holiday programmes promising the experience of “deep lochs, high mountains, a dramatic west coast, beautiful beaches, historic castles, quaint Highland villages, diverse nature and wildlife” (“12 Day Highland Explorer”) as well as “[h]uge horizons and white sands backed by wild hills” (“Length of the Outer Hebrides”). The perpetuation of Scotland’s destination place identity as wilderness is an evidently collective promotional effort, in which *The Scots Magazine* plays its part.

5. Conclusion

It seems that after a period of Scotland’s identity-building projects centred around the revival of Scottish Gaelic, the celebration of Scots as a literary medium, as religion, sports, the kitschy tartan version of the Highlands clan culture and regional politics after devolution in 1999 and Brexit, the cultural image of Scotland as wilderness has re-emerged in the field of tourism. Yet its current commodified version constructed for the sake of promoting tourism to the region differs significantly from Scotland’s savage, dreadful and hostile wilderness dominating English 18th- and 19th-century travel writing (Bhandari 39–44). The “wild” Scotland of the 21st century is inviting, hospitable, accessible and alluring any day in the year. It offers the experience of physically challenging and spiritually beneficial recreation in a terrain undisturbed by undue human presence. This kind of wilderness does not imply Scotland’s underdevelopment and backwardness, as in earlier centuries, but positively distinguishes the region as committed to the conservation of its unique environmental heritage and ready to share its natural beauty with visitors. It promises both active and contemplative pleasures. In times of growing demand for sports, adventure and ecotourism and for high value attached to unique experience in exotic and remote settings, accompanied by the desire for experiential learning, this revived identity construct of Scotland is likely to pay off on the increasingly crowded European tourism market.

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