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EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

Rural Tourism: Insights from the North Atlantic

Context – Accelerating Demographic Movements and Their Impact on Rural Areas

One main and accelerating demographic movement the world over is from low-density rural communities to high-density urban and suburban concentrations, from outlying archipelagos to central island towns and cities, from smaller islands to larger islands, and from islands to mainlands. Policy-makers laud the benefits of clusters and mega-cities and question the wisdom and sustainability of scattered communities (Courchene, 2005; Porter, 1990). Peripheral locations – particularly remote rural and island communities – are among the hardest hit by these contemporary mobilities, risking outright depopulation. Their communities lobby frantically for some sustained attention by distant policy-makers, and for investment in employment, educational services, health care, or transportation infrastructure to stem the tide of outward migration. Meanwhile, residents tend to vote with their feet: to the "unemployed, underpaid, or under-appreciated", going away just makes "a lot of sense" (The Economist, 2005). Meanwhile, and in stark contrast to this scenario, other similarly peripheral locations find themselves attractive to visitors, secondary residents, and mainland retirees, resulting in large spikes in their seasonal (typically summer) populations, strained infrastructure, property price increases, and increasingly gentrified communities (Boissevain & Selwyn, 2004; Clark, Johnson, Lundholm, & Malmberg, 2007; Müller, 2007). This sounds like a catch-22 case of "damned if you do, and damned if you don't".

This is the dilemma that rural tourism finds itself in, as part of a broader scheme for rural development and regeneration. Rural tourism presents an exciting opportunity for showcasing local culture, history and landscape, flora and fauna, and food and drink; offering relaxing or reinvigorating escapes to travellers who are mostly sedentary city dwellers; creating some diversified local employment in a variety of related services, ranging from accommodation to culinary services, guides and drivers; and promoting a more humane, small-scale friendly tourism industry. Here, in principle at least, a global industry aligns and supports local practice (Butler, Hall, & Jenkins, 1997; Carson, Carson, & Lundmark, 2014; McAreavey & McDonagh, 2011).

We are pleased to provide readers of *SJHT* with a rich compendium of carefully selected and edited papers that critically review various facets of rural tourism drawn from the broad North Atlantic. We use this opportunity to congratulate the *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism* on its 15th anniversary. Nothing would be more appropriate than doing so by contributing to the knowledge dissemination about rural tourism in the North and hopefully stimulating more researchers to explore this rich academic field in even more detail.

Conceptualising the North Atlantic

In recent decades, the North Atlantic has become a significant reference point for community activists, policy-makers, and scholars from the region interested in exploring and supporting initiatives in favour of socio-economic sustainability. The region, in spite of a rich diversity of cultures and political systems, shares a history of Viking exploration, unfolding in a cold climate where food can be scarce and where livelihoods depended on both fishing and farming for survival. Mining and other extractive industries have brought guest workers and foreign investment, challenging traditional social and economic structures. Low population densities threatened community viability in the service economy; and remoteness from centres of power often means that rural settlements must function in a policy vacuum. Into this mix, rural tourism brings in a different kind of visitor and a different kind of entrepreneur. How does this rural version of tourism differ from the mainstream format? Will it lead to a more sustainable rural economy? What are the impacts of this economic development on gender relations, environmental conservation, hospitality services, traditional food and drink, and landscape management? And what can we expect to happen in the medium term, based on the current climate change scenarios?

These are some of the burning questions to which various authors are attempting answers in this collection. These are authors who initially presented their papers at the 9th biennial *North Atlantic Forum* (NAF) meeting, held at Hólar University College, Hólar, North Iceland, in the municipality of Skagafjörður, in mid-June 2013, and under the general theme of *Rural Tourism: Challenges in Changing Times*. Here, in the enduring shadow of the single imposing steeple of Hólar Cathedral – the sun does not set in North Iceland at that time – some 80 presenters from the broad North Atlantic – from Prince Edward Island, Cape Breton Island, and Newfoundland in Canada, across to Greenland, Iceland, Faroes and Shetland, and then to Ireland, Scotland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and Åland – met and deliberated the challenges of rural tourism, with particular reference to peripheral regions. The academic and administrative staff at the Department of Rural Tourism, at Hólar University College, acted as our gracious hosts.

The NAF is a meeting of scholars, graduate students, policy-makers, community leaders, municipal representatives, and other policy-makers who, since 1998, have met once every two years to facilitate research, exchange information, and promote shared initiatives on various policy fronts that have included health service delivery, green energy, municipal reform, and seasonal cold water tourism (NAIP, 2010). The NAF is a direct outcome of the *North Atlantic Islands Programme* (NAIP) that was pioneered by the University of Prince Edward Island (UPEI), Canada, in 1994, then in

collaboration with NordREFO (now NordRegio, the Nordic Centre for Spatial Development), based in Stockholm. The 10th NAF will follow in Summerside, Prince Edward Island, Canada, in mid-September 2015.

Content Review

In this special issue, tourism in rural areas is discussed from multiple perspectives. The papers address major themes in tourism studies: mobility, climate change, destination development, and tourist experience.

Nature and landscapes play important roles in tourism in the North. Three of the articles deal explicitly with these issues. The article *Whizzing through the High North: Motorists' psychological experience of the countryside* (Dahl & Dalbakk, 2015) takes the readers on board vehicles driving long distances on highways and passing through varied natural landscapes. Their main research question is to what extent the landscapes passed by are perceived by the tourist as interesting and evoking a feeling of curiosity; that is, he or she prefers experiences with *eudaimonic* qualities. This implies travelling with an openness to explore and seek out experiences that are novel and complex. Of special interest is the concept of attention restorativeness, that is, a recovery from fatigue caused by extended attention demands, which they expect to predict interest and curiosity. Restorativeness is postulated to be greatest when we experience four key qualities in our relation to the environment: a sense of being removed from everyday demands, a feeling of being in a place that we can step in and out of, a natural feeling of fascination, and a good match between what the environment demands of us and our own capabilities.

Supplementing the aforementioned is the article *Landscapes lost? Tourist understandings of changing Norwegian rural landscapes* (Vinge & Flø, 2015). This discusses the process of spontaneous reforestation and how interviewed tourists understand and value this change. Many Nordic rural landscapes face a situation called spontaneous reforestation: as mowing and grazing have almost come to an end, scrub and trees thrive. To investigate how tourists understand and make sense of the landscapes they visit, manipulated photo technique of the past and probable future development of the landscapes were brought into the interview to aid the respondents' reflections. Landscape elements that the tourists perceived as threatened were preferred over those experienced as plentiful. Understanding of their everyday landscapes is used by the tourists to make sense of the landscapes they visit.

The next article is titled *Implications of climate change for rural tourism in the Nordic Region* (Nicholls & Amelung, 2015). By using the Tourism Climatic Index as an analytical tool, this paper highlights a range of potential scenarios for outdoor tourism activity in the 2020s, 2050s and 2080s. The paper's results suggest that substantially longer periods of desirable climatic conditions may be in store for the foreseeable 21st century, particularly in the southern and eastern parts of the Nordic region. The authors also review the adaptive capacity of tourism actors in rural communities (tourists, service providers and government) in light of these forecasts.

The reader who find this interesting is recommended to continue with *Nordic slow adventure: Explorations in time and nature* (Varley & Semple, 2015), which is a

theoretical discussion of some implications of the concept of *friluftsliv*, literally meaning outdoor life, for research and development of sustained tourist experiences in nature. They discuss current forms of adventure tourism against the backdrop of accelerating, technology-driven "hypermodern" life and some of the cash-rich, time-poor market segments who pay for such convenient adventure tourism experiences. Moreover, the importance of the temporal, natural, corporeal, and philosophical dimensions of being, journeying, and living outdoors is addressed. The Scandinavian concept of *friluftsliv*, gently co-existing with nature, is seen in relationship to central ideas deriving from slow food movements.

There are two articles in this special issue that contribute to the highly specialised field of horse-based tourism, while also belonging to two different main traditions of tourism research: service and nature conservation. In *Riding high: Quality and customer satisfaction in equestrian tourism*, Sigurðardóttir and Helgadóttir (2015) report on a survey of equestrian tourists from a traditional viewpoint of customer satisfaction or experienced service quality. This paper continues the work on quality in adventure tourism by applying tried and tested measures of service quality (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1985) to the specific case of visitor satisfaction in equestrian tourism. Here, service quality meets human animal relations, adding another dimension to the concept of experience in equestrian tourism. Meanwhile, in the article *Equestrian tourism in national parks and protected areas in Iceland: An analysis of the environmental and social impacts*, Schmudde (2015) contributes to a debate that has generated much interest: the issue of nature conservation and multiple stakeholder use of designated conservation areas, such as nature parks. Horses have in some studies been identified as part of the problem of trampling, invasive flora and fauna, and as actors in stakeholder conflicts on trails and recreation areas (Newsome, Smith, & Moore, 2008). Schmudde interviewed stakeholders on perceived impacts of equestrian tourism in Iceland; her findings indicate that horses are perceived as less of an environmental threat than previous research on the issue suggests.

This is followed by Engeset and Heggem (2015), who engage with the destination development literature from the entrepreneur's point of view. Their paper, *Strategies in Norwegian farm tourism: Product development, challenges, and solutions*, reports on a qualitative study among tourism entrepreneurs, foregrounding the strengths and positive contribution of lifestyle considerations in the sustainable development of rural tourism businesses. Next, in *Performing gender and rurality in Swedish farm tourism*, Heldt Cassel and Petterson (2015) explore with their interviewees the shifting gendered identities of farm work and service work in the farm tourism setting.

Two papers from across the Atlantic Ocean suggest that the rural tourism issues raised are not unique to the Nordic countries. In *Exploring heterogeneous tourism development paths: Cascade effect or co-evolution in Niagara*?, Brouder and Fullerton (2015) interview marginal tourism stakeholders involved in a world tourist destination at the Canada–US border and report on the diversity of trajectories of development that are possible in a rural region. Then, and based on more interviews, Lemelin, Koster, Bradford, Strickert, and Molinsky (2015) provide evidence of sceptical resident stakeholder views on conservation and tourism development from another peripheral destination in their paper *People, protected areas and tourism: Place attachment in Rossport, Ontario, Canada.* These mixed views and concerns are echoed in Svels

(2015) and her paper *World Heritage, tourism and community involvement: A comparative study of the High Coast (Sweden) and Kvarken archipelago (Finland)*, a text based on an attitude survey and focus group interviews with residents in UNESCO World Heritage Site communities located in a transnational region.

Finally, the last two papers in our collection differently explore the role of aesthetics in rural destination development: the visual in Nordbø and Prestholdt (2015) *Norwegian landscapes: An assessment of the aesthetical visual dimensions of some rural destinations in Norway*, where Visitor Employed Photography involving both residents and guests is used to access the experienced visual quality of the built environment rural tourism. Baldacchino (2015) rounds up the collection by appealing to our sense of taste and "traditional cuisine" by critically discussing the role of the local food movement in the staging and construction of island tourism destinations from the broad North Atlantic in his *Feeding the rural tourism strategy? Food and notions of place and identity.* There is, in more ways than one, much food for thought in this collection.

We acknowledge that the material in this collection sends out different signals about the promise of rural tourism in these challenging times: from euphoria associated with an economic strategy that can turn around a sputtering economy, to a sense of fatalism and disillusionment that any benefits from tourism may trickle away to powerful vested interests (and not trickle down, to local communities). The truth is more nuanced and complex, judging also from the rich variety of stakeholders engaged in different (and possibly multiple) ways and to different extents in the tourism business, and having their own, equally diverse, understandings of nature and representations of rurality. We earnestly hope that you will find at least some of these papers as exciting and insightful as we have.

Godfrey Baldacchino
Sociology, University of Malta, Msida Campus, Msida MSD 2080, Malta
Island Studies Teaching Fellow, University of Prince Edward Island, Canada
Visiting Professor of Island Tourism, Università di Corsica Pascal Paoli, France

Guðrún Helgadóttir
Department of Rural Tourism, Hólar University College,
Hólar, IS551 Sauðárkrókur, Iceland
Tourism Management, Department of Economics and Information,
Telemark University College, Bø i Telemark, Norway

Reidar J. Mykletun
Norwegian School of Hotel Management, University of Stavanger, 4036 Stavanger, Norway

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