

## **The role of local perceptions in the marketing of rural areas**

### **Abstract**

In this paper we explore the ways that two rural counties are marketed, both as locations for enterprise and for tourist appeal. Secondary data sources and expert interviews provide the basis for a comparison of approaches in each case. To analyse marketing communication from the Cornish and Northumbrian tourism and regional development agencies, the Interaction Model of Communication and principles underpinning Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) are used.

This research enables us to evaluate the fit of the marketing rhetoric against the perceptions and lived experiences of samples of business owners drawn from each county. A particular focus is apportioned to in-migrant business owners as they have had perceptions of their destination both before and after moving. We discover that social factors are highly significant, meaning that place marketers must engage with local communities as well as their external target audiences.

This deeper understanding of the ways in which perceptions of place identity and reputation influence decision-making provides valuable insights for local marketers, particularly in rural areas. Beyond marketing, the findings demonstrate the inter-relationships between social and economic influences for rural businesses and also contribute to our appreciation of the role of mobility in the rural economy.

### **Keywords:**

**Word Count: 7,579**

## **Introduction**

The aim of this paper is to explore approaches to the marketing of rural regions and their influence on local economic development. Existing research in the field of place marketing focuses principally on urban areas and nations, overlooking the potential of rural areas to attract tourists, financial investment and entrepreneurs. With reform to policy-making structures in the UK, notably the abolition of Regional Development Agencies (RDAs), the responsibility for promoting economic development is being devolved to county, district and town or city councils. As such, the rural parts of each council stand to lose out, being viewed as peripheral or marginal rather than as substantial areas of untapped economic potential.

Anholt (2007) notes that while many organisations promote countries and regions, they seldom operate in a co-ordinated way, although one common theme in the marketing of rural areas is the dominance of touristic elements. Tourism-related organisations have been promoting rural areas to wide audiences for many decades but this paper raises the question of whether over-emphasis on tourism can be detrimental to other forms of economic development. To test this view, tourism marketing strategies and enterprise-focused initiatives are compared for the counties of Northumberland and Cornwall. Marketing and branding strategies are also contrasted with the lived experiences of business owners operating in each county to investigate the impact of external perceptions of place on their business activities. In particular, a sample of in-migrant business owners are studied to assess the factors that attracted these entrepreneurs to the area and to enable a deeper evaluation of the external perception of each area, the extent to which marketing played a role and their real experiences once they had moved.

The work builds on earlier research into the perceptions and entrepreneurial tendencies of in-migrants to each county (Author & Author, 2011) by considering the impact of marketing strategies used by regional policy organisations. The regional development agency for the North East has used the slogan ‘Passionate People, Passionate Places’ since 2005 and its campaign has ‘successfully raised the profile of the region’s quality of life offer as well as positioning North East England as a great location to invest, do business, live, work and visit’ (One North East, 2011). This regional image strategy sits alongside a separate tourism marketing plan to create a holistic policy framework for promoting the region. Our analysis also covers the work of Northumberland Tourism, one of the sub-regional destination marketing organisations set up by One North East that aims to build the tourism brand through co-operation with other key players in the county’s tourism sector.

By contrast, VisitCornwall recognise that its county brand is ‘largely one-dimensional and closely linked with tourism, leisure and, by association food’ (VisitCornwall, 2011). This is widely accepted to be problematic in terms of successful regional development since it masks the economic dynamism that the area has, providing an image of a place that is ‘behind the times’ (VisitCornwall, 2011; Author, 2010). In order to counter unhelpful images, the EU Convergence funded branding programme aims to help innovative Cornish businesses to showcase their work on national and international levels (CornwallBrand, 2011).

The contrast, both in terms of lived experiences and external perceptions, makes these particularly valuable case studies for comparing marketing strategies that are more or

less weighted towards tourism. Also, each county is heavily rural with extensive areas of protected land either as National Park (in Northumberland) or areas of outstanding natural beauty (both counties), each has an economic history dominated by primary activities and each occupies a peripheral location with respect to the rest of England. The belief that economic, social and environmental factors are more closely intertwined in rural areas (Reimer, 1997; Author & Anonymous, *forthcoming*) adds further complexity to their portrayal.

The notion of a sense of place is intrinsic to rural communities and is developed through a combination of factors such that communities feel a sense of ownership. Aitken and Campelo (2011, p. 927) describe ‘sense of place’ as being created by the interactions of rights, roles, relationships, and responsibilities. As such, questions about the ‘ownership’ of places and their representations are critical. A product is owned by a company which employs marketers to raise its profile but a rural area is defined by the people living there and their social interactions, raising fundamental questions about the validity of externally or institutionally dictated marketing strategies.

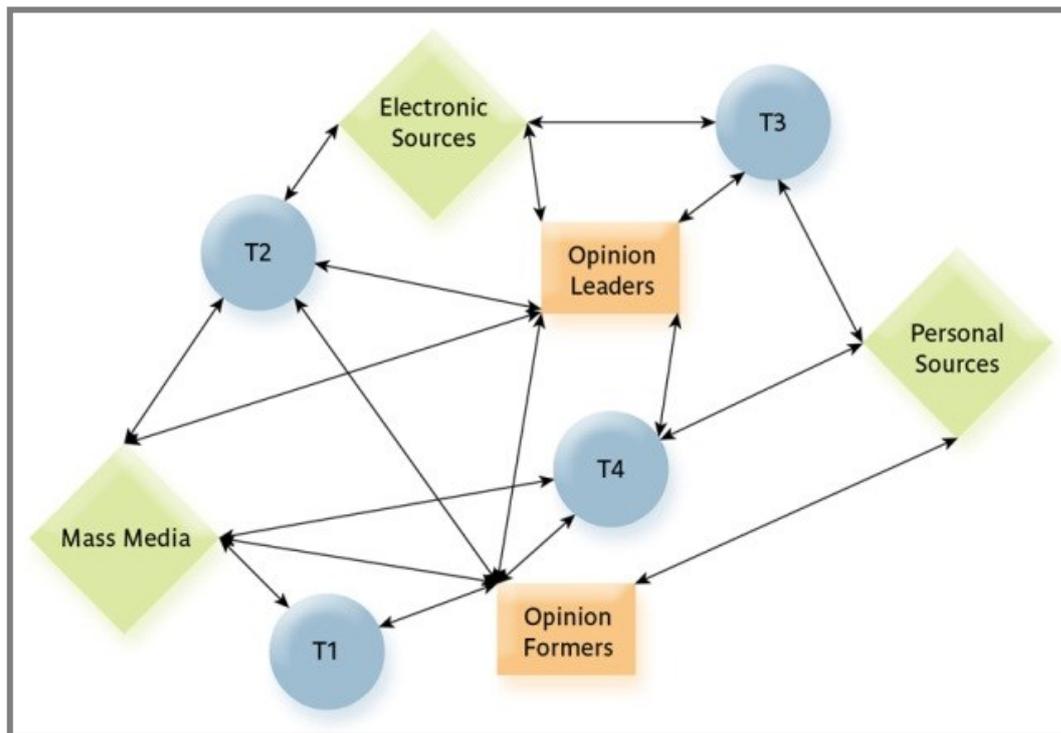
### **Place Marketing Approaches and Impact**

Marketing has moved through various eras over the last century with a shift in attention from the marketing of corporations, services and fast moving consumer goods (McDonald, Chernatony & Harris, 2001), through to a more recent focus on place marketing and social marketing (Wilkie & Moore, 2003; Kotler, 2005; Kavaratzis, 2004). Ward and Gold, (as cited in Hopkins, 1998, p. 66) define place promotion as: *‘the conscious use of publicity and marketing to communicate selective*

*images of specific geographic localities or areas to a target audience*'. Hopkins (1998) further asserts that places can be seen in similar terms to commodities so can be marketed in the same manner. One problem with this definition is that it is biased towards 'promotion' while other factors such as place, price, and product remain essential components of an integrated marketing communication (IMC) approach (Keller, 2001).

Keller (2001) offers six dimensions on which IMC can be analysed: 1) coverage, 2) contribution, 3) commonality, 4) complementarity, 5) robustness, and 6) cost. Coverage concerns the proportion of the audience who are reached by the marketing communications, and whether there is overlap between the communication offerings. Contribution includes the ability of the communication to achieve the desired response from the target audience. Commonality is the extent to which all elements of the communications mix reinforce one another, and are able to share meaning. Complementarity is associated with the extent to which different linkages can be emphasised by individual communication elements. Robustness concerns whether the communication can work for customers with and without prior knowledge of the product/service. Finally, cost can be measured against the efficiency and effectiveness of the marketing communications. In relation to place marketing, a robustly integrated marketing communications strategy should be more effective in attracting inward investment and tourism. Additionally, higher community buy-in to place marketing could be achieved if this integration extends to internal businesses and communities who then adopt a similar marketing approach to that taken by regional development agencies.

**Figure 1. The Interaction Model of Communication**



The Interaction Model of Communication, illustrated in Figure 1 (Baines, Fill and Page, 2008, p. 438) builds on earlier models of marketing communications to take into account the flow of marketing communications from the sender, via mass media (e.g. radio, television), electronic sources (e.g. SMS texts, internet), and personal sources (e.g. word of mouth). Encompassed in the flow of these messages are points of interaction, where different individuals, as opinion leaders or opinion formers, can exert an influence on the direction and flow of marketing messages.

Frameworks of this nature emphasise that marketers need to be aware of the flow of their marketing messages and the factors that can interrupt or enhance the intended delivery and interpretation of their messages. What is perceived by various audiences and the actions taken by them should be in alignment with what was intended by marketers, if the marketing communication can be deemed a success. In terms of place marketing for example, the end-customers should recognise that a rural location

is an area worth visiting if tourism-related messages are to be successful; likewise businesses may wish to inwardly invest in an area if the business-related messages successfully highlight the benefits of (re)locating to that area.

The importance of place marketing in relation to rural tourism is emphasised by Sharpley (2002) and Wang and Pfister (2008) who each recognise that it can bring about economic and social development and regeneration. Additionally, place marketing can encourage business development in rural areas, improving employment opportunities in the area and generally encouraging inward investment (Richardson & Gillespie, 1996). The problem with marketing in this particular context is that it is often difficult to establish a direct link between marketing efforts and tourist arrivals or business development in a given region (McKercher, 1999). It is not as straightforward as marketing a product and monitoring sales, making it more challenging to secure marketing investment by regional agencies in tough economic climates (Northumberland Tourism, 2010).

### **Place Identity**

Until now, use of the term 'identity' has been deliberately avoided. This is because the language of sociologists and cultural geographers is subtly different from that of marketers, who also recognise distinctions within their own disciplines (Balmer, 2001). To analyse the marketing of rural places in relation to the lived experiences of business owners, this linguistic and ontological dichotomy must be addressed.

Sociologically speaking, identity is associated with a sense of belonging. Individuals imagine themselves as belonging to some wider entity, whether a local community,

common interest group, minority group, class etc, and by inference they therefore do not belong to other identities (Turner, Abercrombie & Hill, 2006). Extending this idea to place identity, Proshansky (1978, p. 155) explains that it is,

*‘the dimensions of self that define the individual’s personal identity in relation to the physical environment by means of a complex pattern of conscious and unconscious ideas, beliefs, preferences, feelings, values, goals, and behavioral tendencies and skills relevant to this environment’.*

What is clear is that identity is about the people and their relationships with places and ‘Because it implicates the self, identity has consequences for cognition, affect, and behaviour’ (Devine-Wright & Clayton, 2010, p. 267). Duff (2010) notes that to experience place is to be affected by place, highlighting the importance of emotional and social geographies in this context.

Marketing, however, is by definition demand-focused and identity is taken to be something that can be created and used to communicate certain qualities and beliefs encapsulated by a firm or product. For example, corporate or brand identities have been recognised as a strategic resource and source of competitive advantage if managed effectively (Melewar & Jenkins, 2002). Following this logic, to market a tourist destination, marketing strategies will portray the destination in a favourable manner in order to build sentiment so that ‘few tourists visit destinations without some partially developed notion of the type of setting they are visiting’ (Chung, Kyle, Petrick & Absher, 2011, p. 1041). The difficulty for place marketers is that ‘We are all engaged in the making of places through the telling of stories and myths and the promotion of images, whether from within or outside those places’ (Pritchard &

Morgan [2005, p. 72] cited in Mayes, 2010, p. 6); it is not just the preserve of marketing strategists or communicators.

Teller and Elms (2010, p. 14-15) note that ‘the urban place – including retail agglomerations – can be, and needs to be, grounded in evidence’, adding,

*‘an understanding of the nature of the underlying attractiveness antecedents can allow place marketers to capitalise on the urban product’s characteristics that are most significant and, consequently, most valued by the place user group of consumers actually patronising an urban place’ (ibid, p. 15).*

This can be extended to rural areas where arguably the ‘attractiveness characteristics’ are more strongly cherished and local communities are more concerned with the importance of place. Place is after all ‘a negotiated reality’, constructed by a purposeful set of actors laying claim to certain places while at the same time places themselves develop and reinforce these social constructions (Ley, 1981, p. 129).

The purpose of an identity in a marketing sense is to promulgate a strong external perception, of a brand, destination or company. Unlike the sociological concept of identity, the effect of a marketing identity can be measured through market research and consumer surveys. Logic follows that an external perception or image can then be manipulated (Hatch & Schultz, 1997); i.e. if the image is weak, action can be taken to change a company or brand identity. While a logo, slogan, colour scheme or mission statement can be deleted, if we are applying this concept to places the communities, natural environment and history all remain in the consciousness of local people and contribute to the perceptions of others. As such, when assessing marketing approaches to the promotion of regions, a more nuanced approach is

required. The notion of ‘image’ in this sense remains something that is perceived by outsiders but in a cultural sense, image is something that is often not real – the rural idyll (Brace, 2003) being the classic representation of this.

While corporate identity is used by management to express key visions and strategies to external audiences, organisational identity ‘refers broadly to what members perceive, feel and think about their organisations. It is assumed to be a collective, commonly-shared understanding of the organisation’s distinctive values and characteristics’ (Hatch & Schultz, 1997, p. 357) making it more closely aligned to the socio-cultural approach to place identity. Drawing the concepts of organisational and corporate identity together, Alsem and Kosteljik (2008, p. 910) assert that, ‘Since an identity can only be trustworthy if it is actually realized: an identity should always be based on a companies’ [sic] core competences.’ For place marketing to be trustworthy, the same holds true – the socio-cultural place identity has to be integral to the marketed identity and viewed as one of the territory’s ‘core competencies’.

A further challenge of applying marketing strategies to territories is highlighted by Anholt (2007, p. 4) who states ‘people assume that promotional techniques are being used to ‘sell’ the country and not surprisingly they don’t like the sound of that.’ To have the right to ‘sell’ anything requires ownership in the first place and if we translate this to rural areas, which are known for strong informal networks and social values (Reimer, 1997; Rosenfeld, 2002), the idea that ownership of the cultural identity or territory lies in vested in others becomes even more controversial. Where the marketing messages originate from organisations outside of the rural communities in which people live their lives, for example city-based development agencies, the

dichotomy is exacerbated. That said, the positive emanations of social capital in rural areas have been associated with a plurality of cultural identities and diverse networks of social relationships (Lee, Arnason, Nightingale & Shucksmith, 2005) and these are integral to the territory that is being marketed. It is from this context that we explore the marketing of Cornwall and Northumberland as places for tourism and business investment, to understand whether the social angle can be better integrated into marketing strategies.

### **Methodology**

In the following analysis, the experiences and perceptions of a mix of local and in-migrant business owners are contrasted with the messages and images suggested by place marketing policies detailed above. This is based on qualitative interview data gathered in Cornwall and Northumberland between 2007 and 2009.

**Figure 2.**

**Cornwall and  
Northumberland**



### *Analysis of Marketing Messages*

To be able to contrast the primary research findings with the marketing messages of the two regions, key marketing documents pertinent to each region were located and analysed. These documents were within the public domain, and were located through internet and database searches and through searches of the archives of the regional development agency for Northumberland and Cornwall. Thus, the documents analysed are those which are readily available to the public (including researchers, business owners and potential tourists). All documents were reviewed systematically for content related specifically to the six characteristics of IMC and for information on elements related to the Interaction Model of Communication.

### *Primary Research*

The Cornish research encompassed 32 interviews with in-migrants and longer-term residents, business owners, employees and decision makers in the fields of place

branding, economic development and business support. In Northumberland interviews were conducted with a sample of 40 business owners comprising an equal split between the retail, tourism/hospitality, manufacturing and professional services sectors and a 60:40 split of in-migrant and local business owners, skewed towards in-migrants.

In each study region, interviews were conducted on a semi-structured basis, exploring in particular how respondents perceived their local economies as places to do business. Among in-migrants this extended to understanding the local factors that influenced their migration decisions. Most interviews took place on a one-to-one basis and lasted between 45-75 minutes, following a general question template. There were some differences in focus between the two initial projects but this does not detract from the potential for rich comparisons of how perceptions of place vary in each region and among locals' and in-migrants' entrepreneurial motivations.

### **Place-Marketing Strategies in Cornwall**

Cornwall has been very successful in marketing itself as a tourist region for several decades (Perry, 1993; VisitCornwall, 2011). Deliberately promoted at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in an attempt to find alternative business sectors in response to the decline in mining industries, tourism became an essential fall-back position when other industries such as fishing and agriculture, suffered similar struggles during the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Perry, 1993). Mass tourism began in the 1960s, and the popularity of the region as a visitor destination through the 1970s and 1980s meant that lots of people 'know where Cornwall is' in relation to the rest of the UK (Author, 2010), even if that perception is purely of the region as a 'nice place to go on holiday'. The 1990s saw a

significant repositioning of strategic emphasis away from what had become the traditional bucket and spade holiday, to cater for the needs and requirements of the contemporary visitor (Perry 1993). However, linked to the dominance of its association with the visitor experience, there now appears to be a general local policy admission that tourism activity was over-emphasised, to the detriment of other sectors (Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Economic Forum [CISEF], 2006).

While the tourism industry contributes around 22% of the region's total employment (South West Tourism, 2009), there is wide recognition that much of the employment offered is low skilled, low wage, and seasonal, which is not economically sustainable (CISEF, 2006). Further, strategic leaders have had to consider future direction very closely with the arrival of European Union Objective 1 funding in 1999. This layer of support is only offered to regions within less than 75% of EU average GDP, and the inclusion of Cornwall as one of the poorest parts of the EU emphasised its economic difficulties, bringing into question the sufficiency of tourism as the dominant economic activity. This provided the opportunity for a major rethink of strategic direction. It was identified that under the Lisbon Treaty, the EU economic focus should be given to prioritisation of the knowledge economy (Kok, 2004), which was founded on the principle that value is best added to economies through highly skilled activities (Government Office South West, 1999). Tourism was considered problematic in this respect, leading CISEF to promote the perception that Cornwall was now a 'high quality destination with a positive and creative future' (CISCF, 2006, p. 6).

However, despite a shift in emphasis from tourism towards the creative industries, IT

and environmental sustainability – sectors from which it was projected well paid, highly skilled and economically productive jobs could be developed – there was still continuity in terms of how Cornwall was described. Consequently, and drawing on the creative class concept popularised by Florida (2002), an inward investment plan was devised which aimed at attracting individuals and enterprises which could contribute to the knowledge economy. E-marketing, network events in both London and Birmingham, and support for relocating businesses was given based on the premise that by bringing their businesses to Cornwall, dynamic entrepreneurs would be able to partake in the high quality of life that can be experienced in the region (Cornwall Pure Business 2008, Author 2010). Whilst this process used types of imagery associated with visitor discourse – such as leisure pursuits and attractive landscape – it began to challenge the idea, developed alongside the tourist experience, that Cornwall has a slower pace of life (Payton, 1993). Instead, it tried to emphasise a vibrant, creative dynamism (Cornwall Pure Business, 2008), and consciously omitted to mention tourism as a possible business opportunity, emphasising alternative, knowledge economy sectors. This shift in discourse was only partially successful. Whilst it attracted business relocation, and contributed towards changing narratives of Cornwall, it also reproduced a perception that ultimately, the region is a place to consume, rather than a place of production (Author, 2010).

Alongside this process there has been a dedicated effort to coordinate the presentation of Cornwall to the outside world. The Cornwall brand was developed to raise the profile of Cornish businesses to potential investors or business partners both within the EU and internationally by offering, among other things, direct marketing support (Cornwall Brand, 2011). The Cornwall brand objectives are to improve the Cornish economy through promoting Cornwall's dynamic, and state of the art businesses on an

international level. Businesses that represent these values are invited to become ‘brand ambassadors’ who will benefit by being included in Cornwall Brand Public Relations (PR) campaigns (Cornwall Brand, 2011).

This means that the approach taken by Cornwall towards regional marketing adopts a networked approach, with direct communications between many layers of civil society. Firstly, it represents the strategic direction of decision makers and opinion formers, but they operate, and communicate with the outside world through and with the support of local businesses. The networking events held in London and Birmingham by Cornwall Pure Business epitomised this. They relied on ambassador businesses to showcase local enterprises representing brand values, and in so doing, provided potential investors with ‘people like them’ that they could relate to.

### **Place-Marketing Strategies in Northumberland**

Between 2003 and 2011 the North East’s regional development agency, One North East (ONE), was responsible for promoting Northumberland’s tourism and economic development. Tourism is particularly important for the North East and Northumberland, with approximately 90,000 people reliant on tourism-activity for employment (House of Commons, 2010). With this in mind the objectives of the regional marketing strategy were focused on attracting both domestic and overseas visitors to the area; increase visitor spend in situ; increase the frequency with which visitors came to the area; and to generally build tourism capacity across the North East area (One North East, 2005).

As a core component of promoting tourism within the North East region ONE launched a Regional Image Strategy in 2005 under the banner ‘Passionate People, Passionate Places’. This sought to develop a closer alignment between tourism and

the regional image, to involve the private sector, attract international visitors, and achieve a combination between work, business, lifestyle and recreation (House of Commons, 2010). However, since 2008 there has been a stronger focus on business and innovation. Alongside this, the tourism marketing plan underpins the work of the regional image strategy, but as a separate document it highlights the importance of distinguishing tourism from other aspects of place identity (One North East. The tourism plan uses the same branding, but as a secondary level plan it emphasises that visitors should recognise the wider attributes of the North East region, not just the designated tourist attractions.

Within the marketing strategy, unique selling points (USPs) of the region are emphasised. These USPs promote the diverse offerings of the region: coast and countryside, history and heritage, and city culture. As part of the specific marketing communications offering, a number of integrated marketing components were developed, using regional and national media coverage, direct marketing leaflets, database, and website information, viral marketing campaigns, public relations, and advertising campaigns. Throughout these media, core message on the regional offerings were integrated, raising the profile of the region as a buoyant, exciting place to go to.

Perhaps confusingly for target audiences, the North East region was also promoted by Northumberland Tourism, when in 2010 the ‘Northumberland: An Independent Spirit’ brand was launched (Northumberland Tourism, 2011). This, in effect, separated Northumberland tourism marketing from the rest of the North East region. This separation on the one hand is understandable as there is a strong identity (‘Spirit’)

within Northumberland, however nonsensically, the Northumberland Tourism Action Plan had a focus on exceptionally similar aims to that of ONE: increasing visitor spend to the region and deriving maximum benefit from tourism across the region (Northumberland Tourism, 2010; 2011).

In a telephone interview, the Chief Executive of Northumberland Tourism explained the importance of securing the collective investment of partners to promote Northumberland independently, stating *'we wanted a powerful identity that got buy in from partners...It is about how people can better understand the county and communicate its assets.'* In this statement it is apparent that the identity was both built upon the core values of local actors and that it should be communicated as much as possible through these actors and wider local communities. Emphasising his outlook, he later remarked that *'A destination brand should be more than a brand for visitors.'* This refers both to the importance of the local communities as groups that had to believe in the brand and to the potential for building synergies with other forms of promotion, notably in conjunction with enterprise development. This buy-in is particularly noticed in the partnership working between Northumberland Tourism and Northumberland County Council, with additional links to the Northumberland Attractions Association, the Outdoors Northumberland Association, and the South East Northumberland Tourism Association (Northumberland Tourism, 2010; 2011). Through on-the-ground marketing efforts such as direct marketing, e-marketing, leaflets, guides, and public relations, promotional activity was built around the 'visitor journey'. In doing this, potential visitors were reminded at each stage of the journey (planning, booking, travel, experience, return) why they should visit Northumberland and 'fall in love' with this part of the region.

Ultimately, the marketing approaches taken by ONE and Northumberland Tourism are success stories in their own right in relation to tourism. Both marketing strategies formulated integrated marketing communications, whereby the core tourism-related marketing messages were portrayed in a unified and supportive manner in a number of marketing mediums (e.g. leaflets, websites) lowering contradiction or confusion around the information for target audiences. However, the integration of ONE's strategy and Northumberland Tourism's strategy is less convincing (albeit was never intended to be integrated). It is with these two separate region-promoting agencies that confusion for potential visitors can arise, as they may fail to understand that Northumberland is part of the wider North East region, and that in any one visit many sections of the whole area can be explored, loved and then revisited. This lowers complementarity as suggested by the Interaction Model of Communication. Conversely, as part of the evaluation of the two strategies using this model, the use of personal sources of information and opinion leaders/formers is a strong component of the two marketing strategies, seeking partnerships and buy-in from businesses as part of Northumberland Tourism's plan, and through the creation of a unified database (desti.ne) of information on the region by ONE. Within the individual strategies, due to repetition of the core messages, together with a number of marketing mediums used, one could argue that the marketing coverage and commonality were heightened.

In summary, both ONE and Northumberland Tourism place a strong focus on a regional identity, which is used as the core construct throughout the tourism marketing of Northumberland. This regional identity explores the region's heritage, tangible marketing characteristics such as 'dramatic landscapes', and intangible

features such as ‘a place to find time’. Additionally, the tourism marketing undertaken by these two bodies for the region emphasises the region as a place to travel to, explore, and return, rather than focusing on it as an area in which to live and work. Attention is given to a strong brand image, underpinned by several core messages/themes. These core messages are delivered through a varied promotional mix, and to a particular target audience; those who value arts and culture, and are mainly within a short travelling time to the region.

### **Contrasting strategies and lived experiences – Cornwall**

Discussing the brand campaign to reinvigorate business in the region, one economic development practitioner stated:

*‘Perceptions of Cornwall outside of Cornwall were a bit out of date, it was only seen as a holiday or retirement destination. In order to get the growth that the Objective 1 money was designed for, there needed to be more of a push on business growth and development.’*

An enduring problem within the Cornish economy, and one which Objective 1 (and latterly Convergence) EU structural funding is in part designed to deal with, is the lack of economic productivity within the economy. Measures to deal with and position Cornwall as a potential player within the knowledge economy were hampered by attitudes where, in one focus group series, the idea of doing business with Cornish enterprises was *‘treated with laughter and derision.’* The ‘push’ described, included strong marketing campaigns to potential investors to encourage them that Cornwall *is* a location where serious business takes place

A fundamental (and successful) part of this brand campaign was based around the idea that doing business in Cornwall was ‘cool’ and ‘sexy’, frequently building on

trendy city surfer types of visitor representations. However, there have been criticisms of this approach as providing only a narrow version of the region:

*'Cornwall has positioned itself extremely well for the image that it wants to portray of itself, it's the sort of young, surfer, everything's cool and laid back and life is a happy and great place to be... (but) it doesn't give an honest view of what Cornwall is all about. And I think, if you happen to be in your early 30s and driving a new BMW and fitting the image that everything's there, it's extremely attractive, and I think you see a lot of that coming down in what sort of business is attracted down here. But it kind of, there's a risk that it alienates as many people as it does encourage.'*

Moreover, some business in-migrants have also found that the lived reality does not meet expectations that they had at the outset. Instead, elements of Cornish living which are 'backstage' to the tourist experience jar conceptually with lived reality: *'So we moved the children into maybe a bleaker environment there's not a huge amount of money spent on making things look lovely, meeting with clients, and you're walking to what looks like a very very grey building on the outside.'*

That this backstage exists is not in itself surprising, given that Cornwall is one of the poorest parts of the UK. However such imagery is not a part of the attraction for visitor based perceptions, whether marketed specifically around the tourist product, or as a narrative to encourage inward investment of knowledge economy industries:

*'They wouldn't have gone to the back of Gorvess or Treneer (two very deprived housing estates), and had the opportunity to stay with ordinary Cornish families and seen some of the real economic and social and housing especially challenges, which people in Cornwall actually face, so they will have got an entirely false impression'.*

A further problem involves a clash between expectations and reality, and relates to the differences in doing business between peripheral rural, and core urban areas:

*'There are still far too many that come down here with great hopes about what they wanted to get out of doing business in Cornwall, but regrettably don't find that deliverable. That the expectation isn't matched by what they subsequently find at the end of it.... it's just about the complexity of doing business in Cornwall.'*

The complexity referred to relates to the technical differences between rural and urban areas. Chiefly, that informal networking with business contacts does not happen in the same way as in the city, and long lunches which involve accidental meetings with a number of contacts are not a feature of rural business.

The tension between perception and reality has wider ramifications with regards to developing a truly distinctive regional approach:

*'No-one is looking at what we've got, which is the core kernels of us, and saying how do we exploit them more effectively, we're kind of saying let's go for creative industries, let's go for ICT infrastructure, other things which aren't, there's nothing intrinsically wrong with going down that route, other than that it won't give you anything unique. You miss the bit that you've got already.'*

The key to this piece, is that visitor based imagery is widely used in regional branding and economic development discourses (Lee et al, 2005), in part, because it provides a 'catch all' type of quality, with broad appeal. However, the ubiquity of such approaches means that whilst ostensibly describing factors which are 'unique' to a particular region, are in reality transferable to just about any place. This negatively impacts on the actual 'uniqueness' of the regional offer. Instead, the argument used by this respondent, was that there needs to be a difference between visitor imagery,

and regional development branding; The latter needing to be founded on a more in-depth and imaginative understanding of ‘real’ identity.

It was widely accepted amongst the interviewees that whilst Cornwall has been extremely successful in promoting itself as a tourist region, the key to new development lies in other directions. Tourism is accepted as a *part* of what Cornwall is, but this is only one part, which has come to dominate regional perception. As a consequence, dedicated programmes have had to be developed which emphasise that in contrast to the stereotypes incorporated in the visitor idyll, Cornish companies also operate within the knowledge economy. However, the discursive line that these strategies take is also contentious and for some observers, relies too heavily on tourist based narratives which presents a one dimensional version of the region, and overlooks other narratives of place which may also be beneficial to strong regional development. There are also fears that the idealised nature of tourist based imagery used in strategic branding may grossly misrepresent the reality of living in Cornwall to potential inward business migrants. Importantly too, reliance on tourist based imagery is seen as an activity which actively risks destroying uniqueness through sharing a homogenous strategic approach with many other regions.

### **Contrasting strategies and lived experiences – Northumberland**

Northumberland is characterised by high proportions of micro-businesses and befitting the rural environment, interviews with business-owners highlighted the quality of life, the friendliness of the people and the strength of communities as well as the attractiveness of the landscape. This was particularly evident among in-migrants, reinforcing the use of ‘people’ and ‘places’ in the branding slogan.

Two in-migrant business owners reported that they *'fell in love'* with particular properties and that led to their decisions to move. Both subsequently set up businesses connected to the landscape and tourism – one a coastal bed and breakfast and the other an art and crafts gallery – seeking to sell not only their services and products but also the places for which they have displayed such passion. In return for benefiting from the local environment, many in-migrants related to a sense of pride in the contribution of their activity to the local area. The gallery owner occupied a historic building that had been empty for many years and a third interviewee commented that activity such as his photography business was *'breathing a bit of new life into certain areas of the countryside'* adding that his premises *'used to be a dilapidated cowshed.'* Similar remarks from two other in-migrants include, *'the village is proud to have a brewery named after it'* and, *'we've not only set up a business for ourselves but we've improved the village.'*

The value created by businesses extends beyond the improvement of the built environment and the perception of their towns or villages to include an economic value. A bed and breakfast operator explained, *'This business brings an awful lot of trade to the village because people travel so while they're here people will ask where we get our steak from, I'll say the local butchers'* As the conversation continued, it was apparent that they had a good knowledge of the local area and were keen to tell people about the places that they could visit and the other businesses in the village. This passion to tell others about their local area and simultaneously to support the local economy crystallises the importance of linking centralised marketing strategies with these micro-level personal communications that can convey more authentic messages.

A couple who moved to rural Northumberland to run a guesthouse and have been engaged in various village activities commented that *'people like the fact that they see you are committed to the community'*. The desire to participate may be an innate characteristic but it seems no coincidence that attitudes towards local communities were also strong with in-migrants expressing feelings such as, *'The people are so much more friendly, it was a breath of fresh air'* and *'Everyone was very helpful'*. These are not messages that are easily conveyed through mass-marketing approaches but if marketing messages are firmly rooted in the local area and recognise that local communities are part of their audience, it is perhaps possible to facilitate an 'identity' that satisfies both marketers' and sociologists' understanding of the term.

The idea of 'quality of life' is strong in the rural north east but this is not a simile for an 'easy life' typified by a pleasant climate or an affluent society, but a recognition that quality of life can be determined by other factors such as community cohesion, local identity and, in the case of business owners, opportunities to make a difference. For these aspects of 'quality of life', especially as an outsider, you need to make an effort and learn about the people and places that create the local identity – you need to appreciate the passion that exists for the North East. This analogy can perhaps be extended to the landscape of the North East too; it is not the 'easy' gentle rolling countryside but harsher, more rugged and remote. However, as long as you are prepared to accept the difficulties, the rewards are in many places stunningly beautiful, historic and atmospheric. In this sense the choice of the term 'passion' is a perfect choice; to be passionate means that you will act upon that emotional sense of liking something and not simply bask in the pleasure of being in a pleasant situation.

The idea of 'passion' in the branding presents a group of people who are actively proud and engaged with their local identity not just passively aware of it.

## **Discussion**

On analysing the tourism marketing strategies of Northumberland from both ONE and Northumberland tourism, it can be seen that there have been some successes. These include the formulation and successful implementation of the desti.ne database the only one of its kind used for tourism marketing in England. Additionally, the PPPP campaign was widely recognised, winning awards for its approach to branding the region (House of Commons, 2010).

Comparing the tourism marketing strategies, including the branding of the Northumberland region with the perceptions of individuals who live, work and travel within the region, there are areas of overlap but also divergence. The tourism marketing of the region focuses in part on the 'undiscovered and dramatic landscapes'. The portrayal of the region in these terms fits with similar perceptions from those in-migrant views of the region, who view the region as an attractive area with outstanding landscapes. This congruency is important when considering that the marketing offering (an attractive landscape) needs to be realistic if the visitors to the region are to see a fit between what they have been 'sold' in the marketing communications and reality. Only by delivering on the marketing communication messages will the target audience be satisfied and therefore be more likely to return for repeat visits; in itself a further aim of the marketing strategies. Likewise, pride in the region told by the in-migrants, is translated in the marketing communications in terms of the welcoming and friendly people of the North East and Northumberland.

Thus, the marketing strategies successfully convey a genuine feeling in the region, of people being proud of where they come, and translating this into the branding and communications of the region.

Divergence can be seen however in that the in-migrants in our previous research said that they like to promote local businesses within the area to visitors. Having looked at the available information on the place marketing strategies of the region, there appears to be less of a focus on marketing the region's businesses, their offerings, and their value, in comparison to other aspects such as landscape, heritage, and character. Given that tourism is a particularly important sector in the region for employment, together with the fact that in-migrants are willing, and do, promote the region's businesses to visitors, more could be made of this business marketing in the communications strategies.

Whilst there have been some successful elements in the region's marketing strategies, there are elements where the marketing communication is not as well integrated as it could be. In particular the branding of Northumberland from ONE and Northumberland Tourism, do not at first glance support and complement one another. Different slogans are used for example. For a visitor new to the area, this could create some confusion, and 'water-down' the effect that the branding could achieve. Additionally, from the data gathered, the use of word-of-mouth communications, whilst recognised as important, is not developed explicitly in the marketing communication strategies. The use of opinion leaders, formers, and other personal sources, may be particularly useful given that the marketing budgets will be reduced in upcoming years as the RDAs are reduced and government spending is cut. These

‘free’ forms of recommendation could well be a key avenue to ensure the widespread flow of a positive brand image for rural areas such as Cornwall and Northumberland.

## **Conclusions**

Place branding approaches must consider all audiences. Linking the brand to the perceptions of local people is essential for credibility. Without local support, the brand is no more than an image, heightening the distinction between ‘local’ and ‘outsider’. Woods (2011, p. 169) recognises that while sense of belonging to a community and to a place are different, they are often harder to distinguish in rural areas. The overlap of the two strengthens place attachment and sentiment in rural areas, adding a particular challenge for the marketing of these areas, especially if the marketing messages are from outside agents and/or if those messages have the aim of bringing about certain changes to rural places.

Some images can be contradictory; ‘enterprising’ and ‘forward-thinking’ may be associated with new building and change, whereas touristic and environmental imagery may be associated with conservation and stasis. If the image conveyed does not match the reality of the aspirations of the places concerned, a marketing strategy is unlikely to receive the support of local organisations. It could still be externally successful in the short run but the images would be representations of the local area selected for advertisement purposes rather than the communication of local identities that can penetrate peoples’ deeper consciousness.

Therefore, if applied to place marketing, the Interaction Model of Communication should include a separate node in the diagram (Figure 1) to reflect local identity. Communities are not necessarily public opinion leaders or opinion formers but play a more subtle role in sustaining the local conditions that generate the local identities that undergird the perceptions and experiences of others, whether they are tourists, immigrants or entrepreneurs. Such a theory can then ensure that the reality of place is not at odds with the images presented through a marketing campaign.

Returning to Aitken and Campelo's (2011) understanding of sense of place, comprising rights, roles, relationships, and responsibilities, it is clear that both internal and external consistency is essential. We support their argument that understanding local communities is important for brand authenticity and brand sustainability but we argue that for rural places the notion of a model that 'reflects the social ontology of a place' (p. 927) may not go far enough. A model that is embedded within authentic and dynamic understandings of places can set the social or societal element at the heart of the message, thus conferring as much of the ownership and associated responsibility for the brand as possible upon local communities. Place marketing is, after all, a publicly funded activity so idealistically it should deliver public development not just private business gains.

In the two case study regions selected for this research, the significance of perceptions have been highlighted in many ways and the potential for one message or image to have multiple implications can hold back certain forms of development. With reference to the Florida's 'Creative Class' (2002), McGranahan et al note that 'rural places pursuing entrepreneurship as a development strategy need to consider the

potential contribution of the outdoors as a means to attract the creative class and recharge knowledge' (2010, p. 23). This language is quite different to a purely touristic representation of a rural environment, referring to a lifestyle image that will attract like-minded people to live and work in a region where they can exploit creative freedom and assimilate into the local environment. In effect, local actors can shape local dynamics of development while retaining shared sentiments towards place and environment. In essence, people are central to the message and not simply 'reflected' (Aitken & Campelo, 2011) in messages put forward by other actors who claim a sense of ownership through designated marketing roles. Based on our evidence from Cornwall and Northumberland we suggest that this can lead place marketers towards approaches that are both locally embedded and externally focused, and that recognise places as dynamic, social entities whilst retaining the essential ingredient of authenticity.

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