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# Political Change and Tourism in Scotland: Nationalism, devolution and autonomy

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## Introduction

Scotland has experienced turbulent times in the past decade, with both domestic and international influences creating a climate of economic and political uncertainty. The economic recession of 2008 and the growth of new nationalism worldwide has affected Scotland directly and indirectly. The Scottish Independence referendum of 2014 resulted in a narrow majority of Scots voting to remain in the UK but strengthened the popularity of the Scottish National Party in the 2015 UK election to the extent that they hold 56 out of 59 MPs in the UK parliament. In the June 2016 UK referendum, a small majority (52%) of the UK electorate voted to leave the European Union (EU), commonly referred to as 'Brexit', but in Scotland 62% voted to remain. More recently, the election of Donald Trump as President of the USA further underlines moves towards a new nationalism and an uncertain future.

The idea that nationalism and tourism are interrelated concepts was explored by Bhandari in a Scottish context (2014: 131) and gains credibility in the current political climate with popular emphasis on 'them and us' and a sense of 'who we are'. In spite of these momentous political events, evidence suggests that tourism has continued to prosper, that the organisational context is maturing and that Scotland has maintained a distinct identity within the UK, to the extent that internationally, it has a higher recognition factor than many nation states. However, despite twenty years of greater devolution and polarisation of opinion different to the rest of the UK, Scotland remains a region rather than an independent country, albeit one with increasing powers, to the extent that "Scotland is fast becoming one of the world's most powerful subnational states..." (*Economist*, 2016). How long this somewhat confused state of affairs will last is hard to say, with pressures for greater autonomy within the UK but with a preference to remain in the EU, highlighting Scotland's unique and unenviable position. The focus of this chapter is on where tourism fits into these political changes, the viewpoints of the tourism sector and the difference between international image and political reality.

The perplexing issue of where tourism fits into the political process has been identified by several authors (Hall, 2000; MacLellan and Smith, 1998; Lennon and Seaton, 1998) and this has also vexed tourism policy makers in Scotland for decades. The need for central organisations for tourism, such as a National Tourism Organisation (NTO), has now been accepted throughout the world (Pearce, 1992; Jeffries, 2001) and destinations with national aspirations such as Scotland have embraced the NTO model in spite of there being a British Tourist Authority representing the nation state (UK). However, there are signs that progress has been made in the last decade on stakeholder involvement and balancing government and private sector roles in leading Scotland's tourism strategy.

## Historical context and the tourism brand

Scotland constitutes around one third of the area of the UK but has only around 8% of its population (5.3 million). Located to the north of England, it is peripheral in both European and UK terms, resulting in accessibility and transportation challenges. However, the combination of relatively low population density and remoteness affords Scotland advantages in the quality and variety of its natural environment. The tourism identity of Scotland has traded on images of romantic scenery, mountains, glens and lochs, interspersed with castles and rural villages, although in reality most tourism takes place in the major cities of Scotland. The Greater Glasgow conurbation represents one of the UK's large urban agglomerations, with around 1.2 million people, and has become a successful business and retail tourism destination in its own right with an improved infrastructure for major sporting events. The capital city, Edinburgh, has a population of around 500,000 but as the historic centre of government, arts and culture has established itself as one of the most successful arts festival cities in the world (Getz and Andersson, 2008).

According to an official government briefing document (Dewar, 2007), tourism is important to Scotland for primarily economic reasons, particularly expenditure by tourists and jobs created in tourism, many of which are in rural areas where other employment opportunities are limited. In 2015, just under 14.9 million tourists took overnight trips to Scotland as shown in Table 7.1, and the annual visitor expenditure was over £5 billion (VisitScotland, 2016). Expenditure by tourists in Scotland generates around £12 billion of economic activity in the wider Scottish supply chain, contributes around £6 billion to Scottish GDP (in basic prices) and generates almost 200,000 jobs (Table 7.2). This represents about 5% of total Scottish GDP. Travellers from elsewhere in the UK account for 83% of tourism trips to Scotland, with overseas tourism accounting for the remaining 17%. Although the European Union is the largest overseas market, with seven of the top ten inbound markets sharing the single European Currency, the USA remains the biggest single national overseas market with 23% of overseas tourist spending (VisitScotland, 2016).

The growth of tourism in Scotland has had a profound influence on its identity (Butler, 1998), and the creation and development of the national brand to attract visitors has also affected the shape and popular image of nationalism (Bhandari, 2014). Scottish tourism marketing has been described as capturing the essence of its

brand from its history (Yeoman *et al.*, 2005); history has created the sense of place (Durie *et al.*, 2005) critical to promoting Scotland. A conscious effort has been made to create a national image, “a collective and united way of describing Scotland to the world” (McCrone *et al.*, 1995). From the re-imaging of Scotland by Sir Walter Scott and in particular the visit of the reigning monarch George IV in the 1800s (Butler, 1985), those who have contributed to the branding of Scotland have sought to downplay the less attractive characteristics attributed to Scotland and the Scots, and place the emphasis more on the changed, reformed nature of the rapidly changing country, both economically, politically, and socially; but at the same time without losing the dramatic, romantic, wild imagery of the primarily Highland natural landscape.

**Table 7.1:** Tourist visits in Scotland 2015 (VisitScotland, 2016). Source: GBTS/NISRA/IPS

Visitors' origins	Trips 2015 (m)	% of total	Nights 2015 (m)	% of total	Spend 2015 (£m)	% of total
Scotland	5.84	39%	16.67	26%	1,154	23%
England	5.99	40%	23.99	38%	2,086	41%
Wales	0.16	1%	0.67	1%	39	1%
Total GB Tourism	12.00	81%	41.34	65%	3,279	65%
Northern Ireland	0.27	2%	0.94	1%	97	2%
Total Overseas Tourism	2.59	17%	21.49	34%	1,695	33%
Total	14.86	100%	63.77	100%	5,071	100%

**Table 7.2:** The tourism economy and tourism related employment 2009 – 2013 <sup>1</sup>. Source: Scottish Annual Business Statistics

	Sustainable tourism *					Total Economy			
	2010	2011	2012	2013		2010	2011	2012	2013
Employees (000s)	165.8	170.1	166.9	196.9	Employees (000s)	1614.8	1625.6	1625.8	1669.5
Gross value added at basic Prices (£bn)	2.9	2.8	3.2	3.5		81.0	86.0	83.2	94.8

<sup>1</sup> Latest data available at the time of publication

\* The definition of sustainable tourism represents the SIC07 industry classifications for tourism used within the Scottish Government's growth sector.

The process of image creation may be far from an accurate or authentic representation of Scotland and many have criticised the ‘tartanising’ of Scottish culture (Butler, 1998). But the re-imaging, started in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century by Scott and others, has been successful to the extent that most Scots today find it hard to separate fact from fiction in their reflections on themselves and Scotland. Recent Hollywood interpretations of Scotland through films like *Highlander* and *Braveheart* have reinforced this romantic, but less than accurate, portrayal. This was taken a step further in 2011 when VisitScotland promoted the animated film *Brave* in a joint campaign with Disney in an attempt to achieve a target of additional tourist spending of £140 million over 10 years. Despite reservations regarding authenticity and historical integrity, the result is that Scotland has a largely positive international recognition factor that gives it a competitive advantage in an increasingly crowded tourism marketplace.