



Community Led Tourism - the recording and outputs from the 2021vSRP Session on 11th March 2021

Session curated by [Senscot](#) and chaired by **Sarah Cameron**, Tourism and Cultural Social Enterprise Network Lead.

Scotland Outlook 2030, Scotland's Tourism Strategy has a mission to "...grow the value and positively enhance the benefits of tourism across Scotland by delivering the very best for our visitors, our businesses, our people, our communities and our environment."

The Scottish Rural Parliament session explored the contribution that communities make as the driving forces of local tourism strategies.

Community-led tourism, as part of local place-making strategies, is a vehicle for designing tourism offerings and facilities to maximise benefits for local people and businesses, and the tourists who visit. It is based on collaboration and partnership between tourism 'experts' and communities and contributes to community wealth building/wellbeing economy and addressing climate change. Place-based communities should be inclusive of communities of interest such as LGBT populations and Travellers but, in many cases, additional supports must be put in place for communities of interest to participate in community-led tourism development.

Summary of Presentations and Panel Discussion

Sarah Cameron opened the session by acknowledging that the Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in a difficult year for the tourism sector. Communities have an important role to play in the sector's recovery as well as in the transition to a more sustainable model of tourism that will contribute to promoting social and environmental wellbeing.

Andrew Ward presented evidence from the Creetown Initiative, one of two pilot Community-led Proof of Concept Projects in Scotland. His starting point was the statement - "**What is good for communities, is good for tourism.**"

- The Proof of Concept projects were set up to understand the context of community-led tourism - its impacts and what can support communities to design and market their offerings.
- Tourism and local regeneration go hand in hand. Local improvements, be it a high street face-lift, a new swimming pool, a wheelchair accessible path, heritage project or a mini festival benefit local

people whilst at the same time making a place more attractive to the visitor. It is local improvements like these that will underpin a move towards slow/responsible tourism, enabling tourists to make a meaningful connection to a place.

- Communities create the tourism offering. Day to day interactions on the street set the tone. If communities are overwhelmed by tourists, this will impact on the tourists' own experience of hospitality. Recognising that communities are the third party in the mix, alongside tourists and the tourism industry, creates a policy environment that can draw on communities' local knowledge and creativity to address challenges including infrastructure constraints. Communities that are resourced and empowered to build a better place, for themselves and for tourists, are more likely to embrace all the benefits that tourism can bring.
- What is needed is a platform that allows communities to connect meaningfully and proactively with the wider tourism sector, to enable them to get their stories out there and collaborate on local place-making and marketing strategies.
- Illustrating the statement "what is good for communities, is good for tourism" are projects such as the [Barholm Arms](#) in Creetown, saved by the community and transformed into a charity shop, thirty bed accommodation centre, bike hire and electric charge point, the [Theatre Royal](#) in Dumfries and the Kirkcudbright [Dark Skies Visitor Centre](#).

The topic of community-led tourism was discussed by a panel of experts including **Wendy Reid**, Development Manager of [Isle of Ulva](#), **Mark Tate**, CEO of [Cairngorms Business Partnership](#) and **Julia Latto**, Project Manager at [Scottish Enterprise](#). The panel discussion, in which the audience also participated, raised the following points:

- Covid-19 has accelerated a move towards a different model of tourism – staycations, slow tourism, green/responsible tourism. Community-led tourism delivers on this model.
- With 'communities at the heart' of the new [Scotland Outlook 2030 – Scotland's Tourism Strategy](#) there is an opportunity to take a long-term view of the role of communities in shaping local tourism offerings. It is important to ensure, when using the term 'community-led tourism', that this does not put off small and medium enterprise owners who are the driving forces of community-led approaches. It is also important to listen to community concerns around the negative impacts of tourism on their lives and the environment.
- Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) and others responsible for local tourism development frequently struggle to engage meaningfully with communities, in part due to lack of dedicated resources, in part because communities themselves are stretched or do not see tourism as their business. There is a need to design shared platforms which add capacity both to DMOs and to communities and change the engagement narrative from one where the tourism sector mainly strives to 'alleviate community concerns' to one where the sector and communities collaborate on place-making. This approach is already being promoted by a number of DMOs including [Angus Tourism Cooperative](#) and several creative partnerships including the [Scottish Island Passport scheme](#).
- Networking across villages and communities within a destination area will support a coordinated approach to interpretation and marketing. Parity in terms of destination marketing is required with budgets devolved in an equitable manner to promoting local areas (subject to their own wish to be promoted) in addition to the national approach to promoting Scotland as a destination country.
- There is no clear route-map of advice and support for community-led tourism. Many communities lack the resources to become involved in community-led tourism while others who are focusing on place-making may lack expertise to promote their activities and facilities to tourists. Capacity

building for communities is necessary to maximise their contribution to the tourism industry. There should be increased focus on upskilling communities, promoting community leadership on, for example, slow and green tourism models, and creating quality local jobs and apprenticeships linked to transforming the industry over the nine remaining years of Outlook 2030.

- Tourism-related funding or investment packages are frequently short-term and focused on delivering capital projects, leaving the management of these projects to community volunteers. Funding that is contingent on ‘growth’, ‘job creation’ and ‘becoming self-sufficient’ disadvantages community projects that tend to wish to remain financially lean and focus on community benefit.
- Fit for purpose tourism metrics are required to help underpin future strategy including enhanced visitor profiling data, economic impact measurements and indicators capturing the impact of tourism on community wellbeing and the environment.
- At national level, the community voice frequently gets drowned out by big tourism operators. Turning this around and securing the right investment in community-led tourism would be a game-changer. Properly supported and marketed community-led initiatives will contribute significantly to increasing visitor spend. They will also support the transition of the tourism sector towards net zero.

The following recommendations were made:

Increase visibility of community-led tourism and generate ambitious policy discussions about its future

- Scottish Government to re-affirm commitment to community-led tourism as a vehicle for sector recovery and transition.
- Second tier bodies – VisitScotland, Senscot, enterprise agencies, Scottish Rural Action, Scottish Enterprise Academy etc. – to collaborate on showcasing community-led tourism initiatives and raising awareness of their impact.
- Capacity building of community-led tourism to be incorporated in Scotland Outlook 2030 implementation plan.
- Drawing on community-led tourism proof-of-concept project and commissioned analytical research develop fit for purpose metrics to assess impact of tourism in general and community led tourism specifically

Establish shared platforms between tourism industry and communities to enable co-production of tourism strategy at national and local level

- Fund the Community-Led Tourism Network (CLTN) so it may expand its membership, act as a conduit of good practice across the sector and amplify the voices of communities in national policy circles.
- Resource Visit Scotland to create a dedicated Community Lead tasked to build a strong and productive relationship between the CLTN and VisitScotland’s workstreams.
- At local level, pilot community engagement-building projects in three rural Destination Management Organisations with a view to supporting collaborative place-making between communities and the tourism sector.
- Highlands & Islands Enterprise and South of Scotland Enterprise to continue delivering the [Communities Leading in Tourism](#) programme in partnership with the Social Enterprise Academy.

Invest in placemaking through a tourism lens

- Specific budget from Visit Scotland Year of the Story 2022 redirected from national campaign to support local 'less heard' places and communities of interest including Travellers to promote history and culture.
- Increase Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund to £12 million per annum and offer flexibility on project management costs.
- Launch a Slow/Sustainable Tourism Development Fund as a mix of project and capital costs with three years repeat funding to support community-led initiatives that increase visitors sense of connection to places and help tourism transition to a more sustainable model.

Documents and initiatives mentioned during session:

- Inverclyde Tourist Group – led by the community since 2001
<https://www.inverclydetouristgroup.co.uk/content/about-group/>
- Destination Tweed – a partnership between the Tweed Forum and Borders Council
<https://tweedforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Destination-Tweed-Vision-Statement-January-2020.pdf>
- For more information about the Scottish Islands Passport Scheme contact Sarah Compton-Bishop - passport@hitrans.org.uk