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THE CO-DEVELOPMENT OF ORGANISATION AND ONLINE TECHNOLOGY – ‘TAILORING’ THE LOCAL DESTINATION MARKETING ORGANISATION (DMO)

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Abstract

Local tourism Destination Marketing Organisations (DMOs) present a special form of organisation, set up by local businesses as collaborative ventures to promote their locality. One critical aspect of this is the creation and maintenance of an online presence, which involves different actors (e.g. customers, intermediaries, potential members, founder members, local technical expertise). This creates the conceptual challenge of how to explain this process of the co-development of both the organisation and the online presence. The metaphor of ‘tailoring’ is presented as an analytical device, which, when unpacked, enables a rich appreciation of the complexity of this co-creation process. This study is empirically grounded in six case-studies of Scottish local DMOs, generated using a variety of sources, including interviews, online documents and media reports. It is concluded that use of the ‘tailoring’ metaphor, which need not be confined to local DMOs, usefully reveals the crafting nature of this co-creation process.

Keywords: Tailoring, DMO, Destination Marketing, online promotion, co-development.

1.0 Introduction

Studies of the implementation of online technologies commonly take as their unit of analysis the business, whereby the online presence is secondary to the purpose of the business (e.g. Martin, 2005). However, there is a form of organisation, which is set up in part to establish an on-line presence. This form of organisation, the local Destination Management Organisation (DMO), of which there is no ideal, arises when a group of tourism businesses collectively collaborate to organise themselves to develop and promote their locality as a tourism destination, with an online presence being the primary medium for promotion. A local DMO is typically characterised by the shared interests of its loosely tied members. This contrasts with more tightly coupled bounded entities, for which the uptake of information and communication

technologies (ICTs) can be explained using the concept of domestication (Harwood, 2011).

This paper focuses upon the case-studies of eleven Scottish localities and the emergence of DMOs and their co-development with that of an online presence. One feature of the DMOs was the different narratives about how they came into being and how they gained an online presence. Each has its own distinctive story, with some emphasising organisational development, others, the online developments. This creates the challenge of how to explain the co-development of a DMO and its online presence.

There appear to be few studies on how a local DMO comes into being and sustains itself (Wilson et al., 2001) and about how its online presence is established (e.g. Doolin, 2005). The WTO (1999) offers guidance on how a DMO can develop an online presence, but this pertains to a period when there was a shift from traditional media promotional activities to online presence. Likewise, Tourism Intelligence Scotland published an online Destination Development Guide in November, 2007 to support the number of emerging local DMOs. The absence of these topics in Pike & Page's (2014) more recent literature review of DMOs highlights the apparent neglect of this area.

Whilst a staged approach, as offered by the WTO (1999) prescribes how a DMO can come into being, this does not explain practice. Likewise, the staged conceptualisation of getting online fails to explain practice, merely observed pattern (e.g. Martin & Matlay, 2001; Piccoli, Brohman, Watson & Parasuraman, 2004). The metaphor of domestication as an analytical device, has been used to explain the manner in which technology is internalised into an organisational entity, e.g. the television into the household (Silverstone, Hirsch, & Morley, 1992). More recently, domestication has been used to examine the uptake of online technologies by serviced accommodation providers (Harwood, 2011). Domestication assumes a bounded entity within which users internalise a configurational ICT through its use. This is not the case with a DMO, irrespective of whether the DMO comes into existence before the development of the online presence or at the same time. The online presence is brought into being and maintained by a webmaster and serves the interests of the members of the DMO,

who may provide content, but its users are those external to the DMO, i.e. existing and potential visitors. This invites a different approach to conceptualising the co-development of the DMO and an online presence.

The narratives that constitute the case-studies reveal that there is a configurational aspect to a co-development process which results in a DMO and online presence that is unique and specific to the locality. One metaphor that has these attributes is ‘tailoring’; tailoring being an activity that can bring into being something unique and specific to requirements – the tailored outfit. This invokes a process that comprises of a number of stages without there being a definitive pattern. One hypothetical set of stages is presented to evaluate the co-development of a DMO and its online presence.

The use of metaphors to provide insight into a situation is not new. Aristotle discusses the use of metaphor in his ‘Rhetoric’: “Now strange words simply puzzle us; ordinary word convey only what we know already; it is from metaphor that we can best get hold of something fresh” (Rhys Roberts, 1946: Book iii. 9 1410). Metaphor is part of everyday language as revealed in Jackson’s (2016) study of how participants articulated their experience about an information system – information technology implementation, illustrated with examples such as ‘rank and file’ – a military metaphor, ‘wood for the trees’ – a horticultural metaphor and ‘treadmill’ – a sports metaphor. A metaphor provides a device to aid sense-making, though can be criticised for sloppy thinking or being misleading (Petrie & Oshlad, 1993).

Black (1962, 1993) explains how a metaphor works, arguing against views of the metaphor as mere substitution (with metaphor substituting for literal words) or comparison (imputing some similarity), instead offering an interactional view. The metaphor is less about what is represented by the word, instead is more about the embedded relationships and implications (an implicative complex) signalled by the word (Black, 1993). A strong metaphor allows a high level of implicative elaboration, which implies that a metaphor can be appreciated, requiring knowledge and judgement (Black, 1993). The strength of metaphors are illustrated in Morgan’s (1980, 1986) exploration of how organisations can be understood through the lens of metaphor. In contrast Sternberg (1990) explains how different metaphors of mind (e.g. geographical, computational, biological and anthropological) have underpinned

the development of theories about intelligence. In conclusion, it is here argued that metaphor offers a valid approach to make sense of the co-development of a DMO and its online presence.

The paper's contribution is the novel but insightful conceptualisation of the co-development of organisation and online information technology using the metaphor of 'tailoring'. This draws attention to the set of embedded relationships and implications associated with this word, this enabling the complexity of the co-development of a DMO and its online presence to be conceptualised.

2.0 Methodology

This study is based upon the analysis of eleven localities in Scotland and their associated DMOs during the period 2006 to mid-2008, a particularly interesting time in Scottish tourism due to the demise of membership based Area Tourist Boards (ATBs) in 2005 and the prolific emergence of local DMOs. Data was inductively collected from a variety of sources, including the interview of key figures (e.g. DMO chairs and webmasters) using a purposeful snowballing approach, meeting minutes, DMO websites and blogs. A narrative approach was used to write up the anonymised five cases, upon which this paper is based.

3.0 Case Analysis

The distinctive nature of DMOs is captured in five case studies. These reveal the challenges of establishing and maintaining both collaborative ventures and an online presence. These case studies describe events up to mid 2008.

3.1 The case-studies

Case Study 1

The stimulus to develop a local organisation to promote LOCALE1 was a meeting of the Highlands and Islands Development Board (HIDB) around 1976-7. The HIDB were encouraging localities to develop packaged holidays and offering five years

financial support. The take-up of this opportunity, particularly by the then owner of the XYZ Hotel, led to NAMELOCALE1 being formed in 1977. The initial membership comprised of twelve of the larger tourism product providers on LOCALE1 due to the high membership fee of £300. As an organisation, it managed to negotiate discounted rates for a range of tourism related services allowing holiday packages to be offered. Provision of these packages continued until around 2002 for insurance related issues.

NAMELOCALE1 underwent change following a request to open up its membership. Its governance was democratised and the membership fee was significantly reduced (~£20 per annum) to be affordable by other local tourism product providers. Since then, NAMELOCALE1 has expanded its membership and established an online presence.

Membership peaked during 2005, with reasons for the subsequent fall including changes in ownership, and a perceived decline in benefit. Membership numbers affect funding, which has always been an issue. Various formulae for determining the membership fee had been tried over time. Eventually one based on a flat rate, which escalated according to the number of rooms, was settled upon and has been in-place for many years. One of the criteria for membership was the requirement that members participated in the VisitScotland QA scheme. This was necessitated by the local ATB (AAAAA) who provided financial assistance ('back-funding'). This assistance ceased upon the dissolution of the ATB in 2005 rendering the QA requirement redundant. During the AGM in March 2008, it was decided that membership would be opened up to include businesses not registered to VisitScotland. NAMELOCALE1 should speak for the locality. The immediate effect was a rise in membership numbers.

The website went live around 1994, being developed by a local IT literate non-IT professional. The maintenance was out-sourced around 1997 to a non-local company, this being passed back to the local professional around 1998-9 who, himself, set up an IT business around 2000 and still maintained the website until late 2008. It has been periodically updated, though the webmaster considered that it would benefit from a complete overhaul. Keeping the website up-to-date has been a challenge due, not only

to the relentless development of online technologies, but also to changing fashions regarding appearance:

it all looks a bit dowdy and four years old. Computer websites develop rapidly.

The problem is keeping up with it (webmaster).

A former Chairperson of NAMELOCALE1 described the website as “a very popular site” and believed it to generate a lot of business for the location.

One of potential problems with a website relates to domain name ownership. The tactics used to prevent problems are revealed in the following comment by the webmaster:

they were bought to stop other people using the NAMELOCALE1 name, because we found that there were a number of people on LOCALE1 who did not want to join NAMELOCALE1, but then bought the, or tried to buy the domain name, so we bought them up so they could not be used.

The key principle underpinning NAMELOCALE1 is to attract people to the locality and be in control of how this is done. Its constitution establishes its status as a “voluntary Association” and defines its purpose as in terms of serving needs of the area with regards to the development and promotion of tourism and to liaise with associated bodies with interests in tourism. It has been financially sustained through its fee based membership and financial support from public sector organisations, including an award of ~£3k from the Challenge Fund in 2005. It is organisationally sustained through the voluntary activities of its members and the energy of the founder, which persisted until his retirement in 2004. One concern, which is perhaps a legacy from the days when only a few businesses could afford membership, is that it has been perceived as an exclusive organisation. What characterises NAMELOCALE1 is its continuity and evolution over a period of thirty years, with the subsequent co-development of its online presence.

Case Study 2

In contrast to LOCALE1, events on LOCALE2 have a more recent beginning, are marked by discontinuity and latterly by tensions with VisitScotland. Two disassociated developments characterise events on LOCALE2. The first relates to the

development of an online presence to promote LOCALE2. The second relates to the organisation of local businesses to deal with local tourism issues.

Localnet, LOCALE2.com

The development of an online presence to promote LOCALE2 and local tourism businesses, in particular accommodation providers, has progressed through different phases. It possibly starts with the development of localnet.co.uk. This was a private venture of two local entrepreneurs to promote the locality. The initial intention was to enrol local accommodation providers, but no interest was shown. Nevertheless the website localnet.co.uk was launched in 1996 and, over time, more and more content was added. The website grew with the consequence that it attracted 'hits' and thus, interest from local businesses wanting to advertise, including the elusive accommodation providers. However, it was not alone. A year earlier another website, LOCALE2gateway.com, had been launched by another local entrepreneur. According to one observer, the competition between the two websites was such that the loyalties developed created tension in the locality. A third "privately-run, non-profit website" was launched in 1997 as an experiment and to publish online material about LOCALE2's heritage. It became an award winning and popular website. Unlike Localnet, this did not have any advertisements and did not list hoteliers, though provided a links page.

Against this backdrop, LOCALE2's Tourist Board, LOCALE2's local Authority and the local Enterprise Agency, collectively established an initiative to develop an all-encompassing portal for the LOCALE2 (Project participant, personal communication). The development of the portal was submitted to a tendering process, which was won by the Localnet team. The website LOCALE2.com was launched in September, 1998. Its aim was to provide a comprehensive view of the locality, serving both community and visitors.

However, as a public sector initiative, its funding was fixed. Other issues undermined it. The public sectors became interested in developing their own online presence:

we lost our all-important webmaster... we also found there was a lot of friction between some of the supporting bodies... people left... people moved

on.. people had their own agendas, so really the fact that we had lost our key person meant that it kind of faded from prominence.

People on the project moved on and agendas changed. One IT specialist, who mediated between the different parties, left the local Authority. This led to less frequent meetings of the Steering Committee, a loss of momentum and perhaps the loss of the partnership spirit. This was exacerbated with the loss of the webmaster, who took up other employment around March 1999, after six months employment, leaving a vacancy which was difficult to replace. To compound the difficulties, conflict arose about use of the domain name LOCALE2.com. This was owned by a resident, whose business provided internet services. The domain name was rented over a three year period, but when it was time for the subsequent subscription renewal, the domain name was offered on a sale basis, but at a price which could not be accepted. This led to the acquisition of another domain name in 1999 and the re-launch of the site under this new domain name, though this appears to have had an unsettling effect amongst the partners. Sometime around late 2001 - early 2002, content behind the portal was replaced by links from the homepage to the websites of the respective public sector agencies, whilst the three non-tourism themes presented on the home page were replaced by direct links to the respective stakeholder organisations.

This created a gap in terms of how local communities could be served, which led to the launch of a community based website in October, 2003:

it was set up to fill a niche that was not served by the public agencies.. the rationale behind it was that LOCALE2.com was a portal project, but it really never got off the ground to the extent that it could have and that was largely because of the agencies that it was representing and the interests that it was representing went beyond it in having their own websites.

Initially funded and developed by the local Enterprise Agency, it had become financially viable in its own right. Two attractive features of this site to the visitor were, its rich collection of images and up-to-date details about local events:

yes it does promote the locality... quite a great deal... in terms of popularity and use... its one of the top three most visited sites in LOCALE2.

The LOCALE2 Tourism Group

The announcement of the dissolution of the LOCALE2 Tourist Board led to the formation of the LOCALE2 Tourism Group (LTG) as a not-for-profit organisation.

The concern and uncertainty are captured in the statement:

we decided to form a tourism group, because we had no idea of what was going to happen.. we didn't know if we were going to lose our tourism office here... whether marketing was going to be done properly.

The activities of the group were explicitly stated in a variety of ways. The minutes of the LTG's Inaugural AGM in November 2005 stated that, in addition to the Group's lobbying role, it would "gather and collate information regarding the performance of VisitScotland (both good & bad)". Its Mission Statement stated that it:

will contribute to the growth of a quality tourism industry in LOCALE2 by providing leadership, representation and support that helps tourism operators to develop and prosper in a sustainable manner.

It's Business Plan 2007-09 reiterated these roles and made explicit another position as a catalyst bringing local businesses together. Also included was its role to lobby and to give support to efforts to extend the tourism season. However, one activity that it did not intend to get involved in was the promotion of the locality. This was to be achieved by either businesses, VisitScotland's website for the locality or 'whatever'.

The Group was set up as a membership organisation with its website homepage reporting 130 members when viewed on the 7th July 2008. The composition of the membership was split between serviced accommodation, self-catering and others, each roughly having a third of the members. The cost of membership for 2008 was £55 (excluding VAT). Whilst there does not appear to be any constraint regarding membership, it encourages its members to participate in the VisitScotland QA Scheme. This focus in quality is reiterated in the Business Plan 2007-09:

LTG will promote quality criteria as a condition of membership in order to contribute towards the development of LOCALE2 as a high quality tourism destination.

It has already been mentioned that LTG, in focusing upon the interests of its members, all with a vested interest in tourism, has left the marketing of tourism to VisitScotland, through a website dedicated to the locality. However, concern about

this was latterly being raised in the local online press revealing tensions in this relationship. Reference was made to the centralised manner in which the VisitScotland website was managed, which was being contested by withholding funding to VisitScotland.

Case Study 3

LOCALE3, like LOCALE2, has undergone several stages of development, but, unlike LOCALE2, development has been progressive. Furthermore, there appears to be support from and alignment with VisitScotland.

The concept of a participatory organisation to develop and promote local tourism is not new to LOCALE3. Prior to 1996, when ATBs were merged and the regional Tourist Board was formed, LOCALE3 had its own Tourist Board with 400 members. Since then, two successive developments appear to have shaped the more recent development, NAMELOCALE3. The first was the ‘The LOCALE3 Food Experience’.

The ‘LOCALE3 Food Experience’ (1997-2002)

‘LOCALE3 Food Experience’ was established as a pilot project by the local Enterprise Agency to explore the exploitation of two sectors with mutual interests: food and tourism. LOCALE3 had been selected due to its good mix of food and tourism related products. The initial offering was a guide-book (1998, 2000, 2002 editions), though a website was produced, which went live around 1999 and did not change significantly since then. When funding ended, the website went into abeyance though was still accessible in November, 2006. Recognising the value of the site, a local company negotiated with the website’s owners, the regional Enterprise Agency, for the transfer of the site. Taking eighteen months, the transfer took place in early 2007. Whilst website details have been updated, development of this site is a future activity.

Whilst this was an Enterprise project, it required the participation of local businesses. Initial resistance was quickly replaced by acceptance. Indeed, it could be argued that it triggered local collaboration, particularly between food related businesses. Around the year 2000, food producers were seeking a collaborative structure, but there was

resistance to a co-operative arrangement. Instead, a privately owned company, 'LOCALE3 Food Experience' was formed in 2001, which provided a route to market for local food producers. This led to the development of a trading portal.

However, the significant event was 'LOCALE3 Food Experience' attendance, not at food trade fairs, but at tourism trade fairs. It had been recognised by LOCALE3's food producers, that locally produced food could be sold through tourism. As a result of a meeting at the VisitScotland Expo 2002 trade fair, between "'LOCALE3 Food Experience' and VisitScotland's CEO, it was decided to launch the new initiative 'COME-TO-LOCALE3'.

COME-TO-LOCALE3 (2003-2006)

The focus of COME-TO-LOCALE3 was upon quality and how LOCALE3's tourism product could be improved. Whilst an online presence was considered, this was rejected to focus upon tourism product development and improvement. The project created a challenge: How to get people to collaborate to improve the quality of their offering. It was a three-year project that ended in August, 2006. Thirty local businesses participated. The value of this experience was both in the co-operation it fostered and the local tourism initiatives generated:

what it has instilled was the confidence of the Tourism sites to work together. No doubt about that and also, a far greater focus on product development... we have got better information available on the ground now. We have information points on the ferry. We also run an Ambassador Scheme for people that go the extra mile to try and improve LOCALE3's tourism and we have an Ambassador Awards Dinner... we also have a children's passport, which we use to get families to move around the island rather than be based in the main villages.

However, there were limitations in what could be achieved due to the voluntary nature of involvement and the demands of running businesses.

VISITLOCALE3

When the project ended in August, 2006, work had already started to establish VISITLOCALE3, which included a successful application to the Challenge Fund, winning an award of over £18k. VISITLOCALE3 was incorporated in January, 2007,

though it was May, 2007 before the website was formally 'launched'. One aim of VISITLOCALE3 was to collectively market LOCALE3. However another was to bring local businesses and public sector organisations together and thereby provide better information and quality and hence a more joined up tourism experience.

Although it was a totally private sector led tourism organisation, it received support from a number of significant public sector organisations such as Historic Scotland, Royal Society for Protection of Birds, Scottish Natural Heritage and VisitScotland. It was awarded around £13k in Challenge Funding in May 2007. The relationship between VisitScotland and VISITLOCALE3 was clear, whilst VisitScotland was Scotland's marketing organisation, VISITLOCALE3 focused on managing the product offered, making sure it was right for the market, in other words delivering on the ground, in alignment with VisitScotland's national strategy. The help of a tourism consultant was enlisted.

However, it was not a membership-based organisation, with subscribing businesses being 'participants':

They will just be called participating businesses where you are asked to pay a small fee towards the running of the company. It will not be membership at all.

The annual subscription fee was calculated as either 0.3% of business turnover or £150, whichever was the higher. In addition to the subscription, funding had also been raised by public sector funding and VisitScotland Challenge funding.

Much of the early effort was upon setting up the organisation, developing the LOCALE3 brand and establishing a portal. By the end of 2006, an extranet had been set up. The visitor facing website was launched on the 9th May 2007. The .co.uk and .com domain names for VISITLOCALE3 had been created in 1997 and 2000 respectively, with the registrants being visitscotland.com (Network Solutions). The .net domain name was being used by a Glasgow based company to promote LOCALE3. By the middle of July, 2008, there were 62 participating businesses. Indeed, VISITLOCALE3's claim that it spoke on behalf of tourism businesses was validated by the type of organisations participating:

if people might say to VISITLOCALE3, why should you be the voice-piece?
Well the thing is, we have got the biggest brands on the island, people who are committing serious money to Tourism.

The mixed composition of the membership possibly reflects the contribution tourism makes to many of LOCALE3's businesses, with only a third of the locality's accommodation providers being 'serviced'. However, despite the high number of participating businesses, only thirteen of these were hoteliers out of a population of around 60. These tended to be hoteliers with five or more rooms, which compromised just over half of all hoteliers. Only three of the smaller hoteliers participated.

A possible reason for the limited uptake, particularly by smaller hoteliers is the requirement that hoteliers have a VisitScotland grading. This cost adds to the £150 minimum subscription fee. One hotelier explained why uptake might be hampered. VISITLOCALE3 was new and unproven with benefits of membership being unclear:

I haven't seen yet what obvious advantage there would be in it and there is an upfront payment in it anyway... without any indication as to what that might produce at the end of the day.

Other reasons included a personal preference to "pursue a more independent line and do our own thing" or dislike of VisitScotland or visitscotland.com:

in many people's minds... the association with VisitScotland... we don't like VisitScotland so we don't like him... and I think maybe VISITLOCALE3 will suffer from that.

One insightful comment reveals that uptake might be a more personal issue, reflecting the fact that local communities are not immune to internal tensions between its members:

to some extent the problem has been that it has become one person's [project]... has perhaps annoyed a few of us a little bit with what has been going on... and I don't really want to be totally negative about it... he's done a good job in promoting LOCALE3.

Indeed, some may hold the view of letting others 'get on with it', and reap the benefits of any spill-over, in other words free-ride on this work.

Case Study 4

LOCALE4 presents a designer approach to the development of the local tourism group. However, this is not necessarily a guaranteed route to the effective and sustainable formation of a local tourism group as demonstrated in LOCALE4.

Incorporated as NAME4 in December 2003, the ‘official’ launch of NAMELOCALE4 in September 2006 was not only reported locally but also nationally on the BBC website. Part of the hype was that this was the first privately led destination management organisation in Scotland. The fundamental difference between the LOCALE4 and the other localities examined, was that its strategy appeared to emerge from an international benchmarking exercise of 15 leading resorts of similar character to the locality, under the guidance of a tourism consultant. Financially it was supported by VisitScotland (including four Challenge Fund awards totalling around £129k. Furthermore, it had intended to adopt an innovative approach to raising funds by introducing a voluntary tourism levy, though these were shelved in April, 2007 as a result of local business opposition.

However, by 2008, it was being reported in the press that there were problems, with local businesses not signing up and the withdrawal of one of its largest local organisation members. The prescriptive approach appeared not to be working. Additionally, it was revealed that there was criticism about the ‘behind closed doors’ Director’s meetings.

In 2008, major changes were reported in order to improve its appeal and so increase membership and hence funds. The recovery strategy involved a significant reduction in membership fees (small businesses fee: £250 reduced to one based on turnover with a minimum of £85), the re-launch of the website with a free listing to tourism businesses and a re-organisation, to include the election of directors. It was unclear at this stage how effective this would be.

Case Study 5

LOCALE5 presents an interesting situation in that the long established local tourism group, NAMELOCALE5a, appears to have been usurped by a new group

NAMELOCALE5b, which has established legitimacy with VisitScotland, through the award of a Challenge Fund grant.

NAMELOCALE5a

NAMELOCALE5a, was established in the 1980s, “following the demise of the Licensed Trade Association, which was made up of hoteliers”. A requirement for membership of the NAMELOCALE5a was to be a fully paid up member of VisitScotland. The cost of membership varied according to the type of membership required and type of business e.g. accommodation provider, shop, restaurant, craft.

An early attempt to promote online, LOCALE5 and also an adjoining locality LOCALE6, was effected by a local website designer (GB), with a website created and launched in 1997. This website was adopted as the initial online outlet for the NAMELOCALE5a. Around 1999-2000 NAMELOCALE5a migrated to a website under their own domain name. This had been developed by BP, an associate of GB, through their company COMPANY-A. The initial website then transformed into a directory, with links, of websites for both LOCALE5 and LOCALE6. At some point around 2004, this directory was replaced by a holding page with the statement “Update in progress, please call back later”, which is still in place in July 2008.

During the summer of 2007, NAMELOCALE5a launched a new website, this having been developed by a mainland based company located in the south of the UK. The long-serving association of the website with COMPANY-A, who had created and maintained NAMELOCALE5a’s own website, was severed.

NAMELOCALE5b

Also during 2007, another marketing group emerged, NAMELOCALE5b. Two different views have been expressed regarding the purpose of this organisation. One participant revealed that the view held by members of the embryonic group, was to develop an “all encompassing” website to promote LOCALE5. However, the upheld view was that it was “to promote LOCALE5 as a winter destination with up market accommodation”. Membership required that members were not only quality graded, but that they had at least a four star grading. This was later lowered to three stars due to limited enrolment. This ‘quality’ message also appeared in a VisitScotland media

announcement, which revealed that this new group aimed to improve LOCALE5's international reputation as a quality Scottish destination, placing particular emphasis on development of the winter season. Challenge Funds of nearly £7k (40% of the budget) were awarded to achieve this. This would involve branding, a new website and a promotional programme to the media. The website was launched in December 2007. The activities of NAMELOCALE5b were raised in a local blog, which revealed that membership to the group cost £175 for the first two years and that there was the requirement of a three star VisitScotland grading. The content of the blog itself was the subject of a discussion on a local online forum run by a regular visitor with a passion for LOCALE5. It highlighted a couple of concerns, in particular the exclusivity of the website and the omission of prominent local tourism businesses: what was presented on AMELOCALE5b's website provided an incomplete picture of what the locality had to offer (e.g. the amount of accommodation). On the 3rd July 2008, it listed 11 hoteliers, of which seven were also present on NAMELOCALE5b's newer website, which also listing a total of 11 hoteliers. The number of hoteliers in LOCALE5 had been determined to be 57 in March, 2007.

One islander commented about this new group and the tensions within LOCALE5's community, that perhaps are not uncommon to communities in general:

we understand that there is a little discord within the group, since it does not appear to be democratically run, i.e. the voice of only one, or the desires of... LOCALE5 is inundated with various groups following different lines, there are so many different factions around. I suppose this is typical of small communities.

3.2 The metaphor of 'tailoring'

Each of the preceding case studies reveals a dynamics over time that is unique to each case, but has the common theme of local collaboration of businesses and the development of an online presence. For example, case three reveals a trajectory of successive developments, whilst case four reveals a more simple but dysfunctional approach. This invites the question of how to make sense of a phenomenon which is emergent, configured, does not have a uniform form or pattern of development and is very much locally contingent. One useful approach is to employ a metaphor that

invokes a process by which something is configured and brought into being specific to local requirements.

The metaphor of ‘tailoring’ invokes a process, which comprises of a number of stages, that can bring into being something unique and specific to requirements – the tailored outfit. The following hypothetical unpacking of the concept of ‘tailoring’ reveals many different stages.

The start point is the introduction between **tailor** and **customer** where the **opportunity (1)** emerges to produce an **outfit** (e.g. Highland Dress). The outfit comprises a set of items that fit together, each item itself made or alternatively bought in. Other activities include:

2. the **initial measurement** of the customer’s relevant dimensions;
3. the firming up of specific **design requirements** (e.g. items, appearance-style, functionality, cost) which may involve scanning what has been produced elsewhere, current fashions and trends. This may involve looking up **reference materials** (e.g. catalogues);
4. **the source of requirements**: defining what needs to be appropriated and where to source (e.g. box pleat expertise in the Scottish Borders);
5. **acquiring resources**: taking possession of resources (e.g. delivery of a specific tartan material);
6. the **muslin trial**: testing a specific design;
7. cutting (**shaping**) materials, perhaps to a template. This is the detailed act of shaping each piece that is to be assembled;
8. **assembling** the components (e.g. the pieces that make up each item), in the right configuration to produce each item and assembling the item to produce the outfit; and
9. **fitting** - adjusting the items in the outfit to achieve the ‘perfect’ fit .

The outcome is an outfit that serves a purpose, presents an image and feels good to wear. Following hand-over to the customer, the life-span of the outfit will shorten if the outfit is not given care and **maintenance (10)**. Furthermore, at a later point in time, there may be a need to make **alterations**. Also considered is perhaps how the tailor is **found** in the first place, particularly if there is **competition (11)**.

3.3 The ‘tailoring’ of a DMO and online presence

The **outfit** to be tailored is the collective development of local tourism through the tourism organisation, whose activities include the production and maintenance of an online promotional presence. The **tailor** is: 1) the founders of the organisation who recognise the opportunity and commence the tailoring process, perhaps continuing in their tailoring as committee members and 2) the organisation’s active members who become involved in the tailoring process, possibly because of their skills (e.g. website development). Unlike the clothing tailor who receives income for tailoring, these tailors tend to be voluntary and unpaid. The tailor needs to develop expertise, which reveals a learning expertise, perhaps being supported by consultancies or government agencies (e.g. VisitScotland). The unpacking of the metaphor suggests nine stages:

1. **opportunity**: The stimulus to do something may be the dissolution of the ATB prompting the need to have something to replace it (e.g. LOCALE2 Tourism Group) or the desire to promote the location as an upmarket destination (e.g. NAMELOCALE5b);
2. **initial measurement of the customer**: There are two types of customer. The visitor, who is measured in terms of profile and measures of visits (e.g. number of nights, spend), and the local community, especially the tourism product provider, measured through a tourism product audit to establish needs and potential for enrolment;
3. **design requirements** (e.g. purpose, governance, policies, funding, enrolment and technology use). There are two main forms. One is a membership based organisation, with a elected organising committee (e.g. NAMELOCALE1), and the other is a private venture, enrolling subscribers for services (e.g. VISITLOCALE3). Likewise, is the issue of the nature of the online presence and whether to adopt more familiar technologies (e.g. NAMELOCALE1) or have a higher risk ‘state of the art’ presence (e.g. NAMELOCALE4). **Reference materials** relate to what others are doing (e.g. NAMELOCALE4 benchmarking itself internationally) and guides (e.g. Destination Development Guide, provided by Tourism Intelligence Scotland);
4. **the source of requirements**: This can be both new members / subscribers or the requisite expertise to develop the online presence. There can be uncertainty about with whom to enrol partners. Expertise may be locally available (e.g.

NAMELOCALE1 and NAMELOCALE5a) or brought in, as in the cases of VISITLOCALE3 and NAMELOCALE4, in the form of consultancy and government agency support for the establishing of the DMO, brand development and the online presence. The expense of developing the online presence highlights funding as an issue, whether membership subscriptions can support this, highlighting enrolment and the importance of government agency grants (e.g. VisitScotland's Growth Fund) and the conditions of award (e.g. NAMELOCALE4 and NAMELOCALE5b);

5. **acquiring resources:** This concerns both the provision of the online presence in terms of platform and content as well as the act of enrolling members / subscribers. The former may draw upon locally provided content (e.g. photographs), but can be beset with issues such as ownership (e.g. domain name), particularly if there is disagreement. The latter raises issues of how to enrol and retain (e.g. NAMELOCALE4's loss of its main subscriber);
6. **muslin trial:** A trial (pilot) may take the form of a two year funded project to support the development of some form of collaborative initiative or online presence (e.g. (1st) 'LOCALE3 Food Experience', (2nd) COME-TO-LOCALE3). The latter initiative led to the more permanent VISITLOCAL3, this serving as a form of apprenticeship for those (tailors) setting up VISITLOCAL3;
7. **shaping:** This is the detailed act of shaping each piece that is to be assembled (e.g. photographs, text, procedure for handling subscriptions), perhaps using a template (e.g. the memoranda of association). Attention is to detail;
8. **assembling** The pieces for each of the items of the outfit are pinned - stitched together into their correct configuration, yet this may not be the final configuration. The online pieces are stitched together using hyperlinks and embedded objects before being loaded onto the host server. Discussions may ensue setting timetables for meetings and agendas. An action plan may be generated which brings everything together so that people can communicate what is happening;
9. **fitting:** is about how the activities of the group fit within the busy business and private lives of the member. For example, it concerns how the website functions when loaded onto the host server; whether images may fail to appear or are slow to upload when the website is brought up in a browser and require

resizing or reloading. It considers how the code of conduct deals with members misrepresenting the organisation to the media and needs adjustment. It concerns whether the formula for establishing the subscription fee gives rise to the perception of being 'unfair' and being discriminatory against some. Fitting is about making it work. But not just getting it to work, but to work in the way that is 'right'. It may involve adjusting, tinkering, experimenting, work-arounds, or starting again as in the case of the jacket that defies a good hanging or is 'just not quite right' in colour.

The outcome should be a functioning DMO, with online presence, which enrolls members and attracts visitors. However, the linearity invoked in this process perhaps relates to the progressive series of developments rather than to a temporal sequence of events, with iterations of specific aspects being required to enable problematic parts to work. Members who are satisfied, will renew membership and recommend to others. Likewise, the online presence will continually attract visitors. This requires that the DMO maintains its value, adapts to change and addresses problems;

10. **flaws, maintenance and alteration:** It is through the enactment that the flaws are detected and put right, such as adjusting subscription fees (NAMELOCALE4). On-going maintenance includes the issues raised in committee meetings as well as regular online updates of content (e.g. 'events', 'news', links). However, over time, changes in circumstances required alterations (e.g. NAMELOCALE1, who dropped its quality grading requirement in March, 2008 and become more inclusive). Websites need to be upgraded to accommodate developments in search engine technologies if they are to continue to be found. Their appearance can become "dowdy";

11. **competition:** the existence of a DMO does not preclude another DMO being formed as exemplified by NAMELOCALE5b, which formed in 2007, despite the existence of the long established NAMELOCALE5ba. However, this is divisive, and raises, amongst others, the question of how the customer (i.e. potential member or potential visitor) distinguishes between the two tailors.

The tailoring metaphor offers a useful analytical device to explain the complexity of the co-development of a DMO and its online presence. It does not offer a neat mapping, but is that a necessary requirement for a metaphor to be useful? Instead, the analytical power of the unfolding of the complexity inherent in the metaphor,

‘tailoring’, highlights the complex dynamics of the co-development of a DMO and its online presence. As such it is argued that a metaphorical approach to the analysis of this dataset has been insightful.

4.0 Conclusion

This evaluation of the metaphor of tailoring, has allowed the diversity inherent in each of the localities to be examined in a coherent, consistent and transparent manner to provide a rich insight into the co-development of local DMOs and their online presence. The emphasis placed on fitting highlights that this is not about taking an outfit off-the shelf, wearing it and making do with its ill-fit. Instead, the emphasis is upon ensuring a good fit; that it meets all requirements of the customer, whoever the customer is. Tailoring is a process whereby attention is given to the detail of each piece and also the detail of how everything is made to fit together. The metaphor of tailoring helps explain the co-development of local DMOs and an online presence, recognising that local DMOs come in all shapes and sizes.

One novel insight is presented by the view that a tailor could undergo an apprenticeship. This allows the provision of fixed-term public sector funded initiatives to be viewed in a new light. It is not known how many started, then, at the end of their life-cycle, die. However, the two successive initiatives on LOCALE3 can be viewed as ‘apprenticeships’, which spurred the formation of VISITLOCALE3. This view of their apprenticeship potential offers an opportunity to improve the effectiveness of such local initiatives and optimise funding arrangements. This offers the opportunity to examine how a short term apprenticeship can improve the establishment of longer-term collaborative ventures and improve the likelihood of the success and sustainability.

Whilst this conceptualisation has been established using the particular form of organisation – the DMO, this metaphor may be usefully applied more generally in cases involving the co-development of any form of loosely tied organisation and configurational technology.

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