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Living on multiple edges: Forces influencing tourism in Silloth and The Solway Coast

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Abstract

Tourist destinations experience a number of influences, many out of their control. Being geographically peripheral often confers tourist appeal: being beside the sea, rural or rugged countryside, with fewer people and more space than urban centres, but is associated with being politically peripheral with less influence on local and national policies impacting on the area. To explore the impact of peripherality, this research investigated the forces affecting the tourist fortunes of the Cumbrian Solway coast, a small, remote area on the edge of Northwest England, Cumbria and close to the popular tourist area of the Lake District. Semi-structured interviews with tourism providers in the area helped identify a number of dynamic influences and 'edges', including different interpretations of the coast and countryside and political decisions about public spending on tourism. Local organisations supporting tourism to achieve different goals (landscape preservation, habitat conservation, maintaining and enhancing local services and infrastructure, community vitality, employment and prosperity) sometimes failed to align their motives and work together for common goals. The case study reflects the circumstances in many small resorts. A dialectical approach, acknowledging the constantly changing political, economic and other contexts of tourism, offers potential for future tourism research.

Keywords

coastal tourism, marginality, tourism policy, dialectical approach, Cumbrian Solway Coast

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Introduction

The contribution of this article is to shed light on issues facing, what can be described as, a marginal coastal destination, one which is on the edge or 'hanging on' in terms of tourism provision. In doing so, we consider the multi-faceted changes it faces, notably regional and national strategies which impact upon, but do not take account of, the area. Other small and marginal resorts will be facing a similar range of challenges. We also reflect upon the importance of cooperation amongst local tourism providers within such a dynamic and challenging context; one which lends itself to the dialectical approach adopted in this study. The case considered here is the Solway coast and its main resort, Silloth.

Silloth and the Solway coast are on the edge in many ways – physically they lie on the isolated fringe of England, also, and they are far from alone in this, they sit on the coastal periphery and at the end of the line; at least until the railway closed. Poor transportation ensures isolation for this part of *The Borders* on the north coast of Cumbria, England, and looking across a bay to nearby Scotland; there are multiple 'edges' to this area. As well as the more obvious geographic edges: coast, political boundaries and landscape types, there are also edges such as those of economic viability for a tourism economy, different interpretations of benefits and the policies and practices of public, private and voluntary organisations. Time brings changes in how tourism and leisure is practised and provided for, policies affecting tourism and the wider socio-political context. Such changes create their own 'edges', as one practice supersedes another.

Interviews with tourism providers revealed that the circumstances of the area were in constant flux: some caused by exogenous factors over which the destination has no influence, factors over which it had some influence, at least in how it reacts and endogenous factors where collective or individual actions within the destination might change outcomes. This reflects Ivars i Baidal, Rogriguez Sanchez & Vera Rebollo's[1] description of how: 'The dialectical interplay between external and internal factors underlies the uneven evolution of tourist destinations'. Acknowledging this interplay, led to adopting a dialectical approach, seeing every condition as the result of a conjuncture of dynamic flows, effectively on the edge of numerous forces, with any 'state' emerging from this conjuncture only maintained through the continued dynamic interactions of those forces.

The next section explains the significance of 'edges' in tourism and is followed by a description of the study area's edges, an explanation of a dialectical approach and a description of the methodology employed. The interviews are unpacked, they expose different influences on tourism in the area, how they interact and relate to the existing literature. The penultimate section, before we offer our conclusions, discusses how 'living on the edge' or on various edges offers advantages and disadvantages to the area and

[1]Ivars i Baidal, Josep A., Isabel Rodriguez Sanchez and José Fernando Vera Rebollo. 'The evolution of mass tourism destinations: New approaches beyond deterministic models in Benidorm (Spain).' *Tourism Management* 34 (2013): 184–195. doi:10.1016/j.tourman.2012.04.009 p 187

explains how a dialectical approach helps understand the forces shaping and reshaping a destination's tourism.

Literature Review

Spaces and Edges

The social construction of spaces has been recognised by many authors as a practice of power (see: [2,3,4]) challenging the positivist view of empty space: 'Space is a social product … not simply "there", a neutral container waiting to filled, but dynamic, humanly constructed means of control, and hence of domination of power'.[5]

Yet, such created spaces are changing, fluid and relational,[6] they 'exist in a dynamic relationship to one another, and are constantly opening and closing through struggles'.[7] Different representations create, maintain and alter these constructions, through 'constellations' of unrelated ideas overlaid on top of one another[8] forming a 'live cliché', subject to constant change through the power struggles of a variety of agencies.

Spatially, places on the margins of regions or areas can be considered 'out-of-the way', 'left behind' and contrasted unfavourably with the 'centre'.[9] They can even be considered culturally marginal, when physically close to the centre.[10] However, marginal places often evoke nostalgia, fascination and can even occupy a symbolically central position.[11]

Marginal places help define centres through their 'Otherness' and demonstrate 'positional superiority'[12] whereby the categorisation of areas, activities or people as low or inferior enhances the power of those at the centre.[13] In essence, a 'centre' needs a periphery of its area in order to be a centre, but also needs to represent the relationship as between a superior centre and the inferior periphery. The power to shape space and define boundaries reflects and delivers authority and material differences which are maintained and reproduced through representations and practices, including the 'internalisation of powerlessness or through dominating ideologies, values and forms of behaviour'.[14]

[2]Harvey, David. *Justice, nature and the geography of difference*. 1996. Oxford, Blackwell

[3]Massey, Doreen. 'Geographies of responsibility'. *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography* 86, no. 1 (2004): 5–18.

[4]Said, Edward. 'Orientalism. New York: Vintage'. *Media, Communication and Postcolonial Theory* 399 (1979).

[5]Lefebvre, Henri. 'The production of space (1991)'. In *The people, place, and space reader*, pp. 323–327. Routledge, 2014.

[6]Massey, Geographies

[7]Gaventa, John. 'Finding the spaces for change: a power analysis'. *IDS bulletin* 37, no. 6 (2006): 23–33.

[8]Stewart, Kathleen. 'Ordinary affects'. In *Ordinary affects*. Duke University Press, 2007. p30

[9]Shields, Rob. *Places on the margin: Alternative geographies of modernity*. Routledge, 2013.

[10]Shields, *Places on the margin*

[11]Stallybrass, Peter and Allon White. 'Reading the body and the Jacobean theater of consumption'. *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (1986): 210–20.

[12]Said, Edward. 'Orientalism. New York: Vintage'. *Media, Communication, and Postcolonial Theory* 399 (1979). p6

[13]Shields, *Places on the margin*

[14]Gaventa, John. 'Finding the spaces for change: a power analysis'. *IDS bulletin* 37, no. 6 (2006): 23–33.

Both tourism suppliers and customers are drawn to 'frontiers' by their geography, remoteness and difference from the tourists' origin, yet risk developing in ways which threaten their distinctiveness.[15] Tourism also offers a livelihood to people wanting to live in peripheral areas, sometimes without the skills or inclination to develop the tourism potential of the area.[16]

Living on the Edge

Remoteness and difference are relative concepts which can change with accessibility from 'centres' and other areas. Changes in the speed and configuration of transportation and the availability and distribution of time and resources available for leisure activities help define the 'edge' of areas in an acceptable range for different durations of stay. The growth in the railway network in 19th century along with a reduction in working hours[17] and greater prosperity among the working classes[18] contributed to the growth in the numbers and size of British resorts. These seaside, rural and upland areas afforded space[19] and relaxation away from the increasingly crowded British cities.[20] Later, greater car ownership allowed other destinations to flourish, often at the expense of the railway resorts, some of which then lost their railway connections. More recently, cheaper international flights, and the removal of bureaucratic and other barriers[21] have opened up new destinations, often highly and innovatively promoted.

The appeal of remoteness and difference is also subject to fashion and human interpretation. Attributes once regarded as uninviting, can transform into beauty for different groups of visitors. Macnaghten and Urry[22] trace the increase in the popularity of wild and 'terrifying' vistas to be consumed visually, through the Romantic Gaze, which emphasises solitary appreciation and immersion. Different ways of appreciation are conveyed and reproduced through representations in paintings, guidebooks, brochures[23] and postcards or through teachers and other opinion-formers from the middle classes.[24]

[15]Butler, Richard W. 'The development of tourism in frontier regions: Issues and approaches'. *Tourism in frontier areas* (2002): 3–19.
[16]Ioannides, Dimitri and Tage Petersen. 'Tourism "non-entrepreneurship" in peripheral destinations: a case study of small and medium tourism enterprises on Bornholm, Denmark'. *Tourism Geographies* 5, no. 4 (2003): 408–435.
[17]Walton, John K. *The British seaside: Holidays and resorts in the 20th century*. Manchester University Press, 2000.
[18]Urry, J. (1987). Holiday Making at the Seaside. In Lancaster University (Ed.), *Lancaster Regionalism Group* (Vol. Working paper 22). Lancaster: Lancaster University.
[19]Walton, John K. *The British seaside: Holidays and resorts in the 20th century*. Manchester University Press, 2000.
[20]Urry, Holidaymaking
[21]Agarwal, Sheela. 'Global–local interactions in English coastal resorts: Theoretical perspectives'. *Tourism Geographies* 7, no. 4 (2005): 351–372.
[22]Macnaghten, Phil, and John Urry. *Contested Natures*. Sage, 1998. p114
[23]Ploner, Josef. 'Narrating regional identity in tourism–sketches from the Austrian Danube valley'. *Language and Intercultural Communication* 9, no. 1 (2009): 2–14.
[24]Walter, J. Anthony. 'Social limits to tourism'. *Leisure Studies* 1, no. 3 (1982): 295–304.

These 'teach' tourists what to appreciate[25] and shape place identities and acceptable activities, but denigrate others, often working class ways of enjoying leisure.[26]

The significance of the coast has changed over the years. Löfgren[27] describes how a coastline considered 'very ugly. Grey, naked, bumpy cliffs' later attracted tourists because of its rugged cliffs and open vistas of the sea and sunsets. From being viewed as a place of therapy in the 18th century,[28 29] the coast transformed into a space of relaxation and leisure for most classes in the late-mid 1800s.[30] Since, it has acquired a number of recognisable cultural constructions including childhood memories,[31] family togetherness,[32] a sense of freedom, the site for activities such as swimming, boating, sunbathing, bird-watching, heritage, spectacle and nature evoking transformation and renewal.[33] Even, the apparently timeless appeal of the sunset over the sea has different cultural connotations. Löfgren[34] describes how tourists to the west coast of Sweden built holiday home verandas facing the setting sun, celebrating being away from 'the routines and demands' of the city, baffling local people who traditionally settled in sheltered locations.

Here, we demonstrate how 'edges' and peripherality are reproduced by tourism providers on the Cumbrian Solway coast, representing both advantage and disadvantage for tourism in the area. They include the use and interpretation of the physical landscape, local and national policy and its implementation and changes in the governance and motivations of local tourism providers. It illustrates how confluences of practices and discourses have contributed to the creation and maintenance of tourism and a constellation of identities for this coastline.

The Solway Coast

This coastline lies in the extreme northwest of England, in the county of Cumbria, on the southern shores of Solway Firth. The low coastal plain contrasts with the mountains of the Lake District, one of Britain's most visited tourist areas, to the south and the fells of Dumfries and Galloway visible across the Firth to the west and north in southern Scotland (see Figure 1). Although mainly agricultural, it contains several wildlife areas, including tidal and coastal reaches and lowland peat bogs or mosses.[35]

[25]Löfgren, Orvar. 'Learning to be a tourist'. *Ethnologia Scandinavica* 24, no. 1994 (1994): 102–125.
[26]Walter, Social Limits
[27]Löfgren, 'Learning to be tourist' p105
[28]Löfgren, 'Learning to be tourist'
[29]Walton, John K. *The British seaside: Holidays and resorts in the 20th century*. Manchester University Press, 2000.
[30]Walton, *British Seaside*
[31]Jarratt, David. 'Seasideness: Sense of place at a seaside resort'. In *Landscapes of leisure*, pp. 147–163. Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2015.
[32]Walton, *British Seaside*
[33]Macnaghten, Phil and John Urry. *Contested Natures*. Sage, 1998.
[34]Löfgren, 'Learning to be tourist' p107
[35]Land Use Consultants. *The Solway Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty: Landscape and Seascape Character Assessment* (Solway Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, 2010).

Figure 1. Images of Silloth – The green and looking across to Scotland.

The closest statistical unit is the Solway Coast Electoral Division whose details give an indication of the area's scale and character. Around 3000 of the area's 5500 population live in the town of Silloth, the most north-westerly town in England and more than one third are over 60 years old.[36] Tourism, while an important employer in Silloth, with caravan sites, guest houses and self-catering accommodation, only accounts for 8.2% of employment in the area, with 16.4% of employment in manufacturing (human and animal food production, construction and textiles),[37] some associated with the freight coming through the port of Silloth or housed in hangars built during the 2nd World War.

The Solway Firth forms the border with Scotland and still influences the character of the area.[38] The Romans left the visible legacy of Hadrian's Wall which finishes at Bowness-on-Solway although its line of defences continue for 40 km with mile fortlets and turrets down the coast.[39] Fortified churches and farmhouses survive from the times (approximately 1450–1610) when Reivers raided the area from Scotland. Smuggling was also rife for many centuries, leaving evidence in local buildings and stories.[40,41]

The town of Silloth (Figure 1) was built by funders of the railway line and dock. These, mainly Carlisle, businessmen sought to generate passenger traffic on the line designed as an independent route for freight in the 1850s.[42] Passenger trade was encouraged by cheap excursion rates from Carlisle[43] and by 1901, Silloth had over 100 guesthouses and aspired to be a high-class resort. Yet these aspirations were never fully realised and its growth

[36]Cumbria County Council. Solway Coast (Cumbria County Council. 2014).
[37]Cumbria County Council. Solway Coast.
[38]Land Use Consultants. *The Solway Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty: Landscape and Seascape Character Assessment* (Solway Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, 2010).
[39]Breeze, David J. 'Roman military sites on the Cumberland coast'. *Wilson and Caruana* (2004): 66–94.
[40]Platt, Richard. *Smuggling in the British Isles: a history.* History Press, 2011.
[41]Visit Cumbria, 'Silloth'. November 18 2022 https://www.visitcumbria.com/wc/silloth/
[42]Walton, John K. 'Railways and resort development in Victorian England: the case of Silloth'. *Northern History* 15, no. 1 (1979): 191–209.
[43]Smith, W. R. 'Silloth: A Product of Yesterday'. *Industrial Archaeology Review* 3, no. 1 (1978): 75–85.

never matched that of many less remote English resorts in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.[44] It attracted day-trippers and tourists from Carlisle, elsewhere in Cumbria, Northern England and Southern Scotland; a regional market compared to the largest English resorts, such as Blackpool or Brighton, which attracted people from across Britain.

Between the wars and after the 2nd World War, Silloth, like most other coastal resorts, experienced economic restructuring in the form of a move from guesthouse accommodation to self-catering;[45] notably caravan holidays and several sites developed close to the town. The closure of the railway in 1964 dealt a severe blow to Silloth's tourism while most other English seaside resorts retained their railway links.[46] As with many resorts, especially smaller ones in larger administrative areas,[47] neither historical visitor numbers nor accurate contemporary ones are available, nevertheless, the tourism provision and growth today is limited, as will become apparent.

The Solway Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), with just 115 square kilometres, consists of two narrow coastal strips on either side of Silloth.[48] Designated in 1964, the AONB's purpose is conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area,[49] described as a 'mosaic of coastal and farming landscapes'.[50]

A temporary, but important local project, Solway Wetlands, focusses on several conservation and archaeological sites within the area both within and outside the boundaries of the ANOB including one in Carlisle.[51] Another local partnership, the Solway Firth Partnership established in 1994 aims to ensure the long-term sustainability and protect 'the distinctive character, wildlife and heritage both side of the Firth'.[52]

More recent developments include: the opening of the Discovery Centre in Silloth in 2002 attracting about 11,000 visitors a year[53] (although at the time of writing, this has been temporarily closed since lockdown), completion of Hadrian's Wall walking trail in 2003, which starts/ends in Bowness on Solway, attracting approximately 12,000 end-to-

[44]Walton, John K. 'Railways and resort development in Victorian England: the case of Silloth'. *Northern History* 15, no. 1 (1979): 191–209.
[45]Agarwal, Sheela. 'Global–local interactions in English coastal resorts: Theoretical perspectives'. *Tourism Geographies* 7, no. 4 (2005): 351–372.
[46]Walton, John K. *The British seaside: Holidays and resorts in the 20th century*. Manchester University Press, 2000.
[47]Walton, British Seaside
[48]Land Use Consultants. *The Solway Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty: Landscape and Seascape Character Assessment* (Solway Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, 2010).
[49]Solway Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Managing for the Future. November 18th 2022. https://www.solwaycoastaonb.org.uk/2019/our-work/management-plan/
[50]Land Use Consultants. *The Solway Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty: Landscape and Seascape Character Assessment* (Solway Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, 2010).
[51]Solway Wetlands. Interactive Map. 18th November 2022 https://solwaywetlands.org.uk/map
[52]Solway Firth Partnership. *Across the Waters: Implementation of the UK Marine and Coastal Access Act and devolved marine legislation: cross-border case studies*. (Solway Firth Partnership, Dumfries, 2009), p2
[53]Solway Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. *Management Plan 2010–2015*. p58

end walkers,[54] opening the local section of Hadrian's Wall Cycleway which goes through the area on its route between Tynemouth and Ravenglass in 2013 and inauguration of a new Solway Coast Cycleway in 2021.

Change has come from a number of forces. The long-standing, but ever-changing, coastline has morphed from a vulnerable edge giving access to invaders, raiders and smugglers, to an attraction for visitors with an increased ambit from the access afforded by improved transport. 'Internal edges' have been created, such as between the designated AONB, where conservation of the landscape takes precedence over development, and other parts of the area. These edges themselves mark current and previous practices, such as the exclusion of Silloth from the AONB because of its industry and heavy reliance on caravan tourism, when the visual consumption of the countryside[55] offered harmony and escape from urban stresses.[56] Changes in policy and practices also create temporal edges as the new succeeds the old. Reduced public spending and higher tourist expectations now put the area's tourism economy on the edge of viability. We consider the various landscapes and their edges: geographical, political and tourist affecting this peripheral area.

Methodology

A Dialectic Approach

Critics of a linear, reductionist approach to tourism research (see e.g.[57,58]) suggest qualitative perspectives, able to accommodate non-linear relationships, complexity and adaptive entities. This study adopts Harvey's[59] ontological assumptions of a dialectic approach which sees every condition as the result of a conjuncture of dynamic flows, effectively on the edge of forces. Even apparently static conditions are maintained by flows. (See[60] for explanation).

Interviews

This qualitative study used semi-structured interviews with local tourism providers, recruited from personal contacts, representatives of local organisations and snowballing

[54]World Heritage UK. 'Frontiers of the Roman Empire, Hadrian's Wall'. 18th November 2022. https://worldheritageuk.org/world-heritage-sites-uk-list/england/hadrians-wall/

[55]Macnaghten, Phil and John Urry. *Contested Natures*. (Oxford, Sage, 1998).

[56]Roberts, Lesley and Derek Hall, eds. *Rural tourism and recreation: Principles to practice*. (Cabi, Oxford, 2001).

[57]Ivars i Baidal, Josep A., Isabel Rodriguez Sanchez and José Fernando Vera Rebollo. 'The evolution of mass tourism destinations: New approaches beyond deterministic models in Benidorm (Spain)'. *Tourism Management* 34 (2013): 184–195.

[58]Speakman, Mark and Richard Sharpley. 'A chaos theory perspective on destination crisis management: Evidence from Mexico'. *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management* 1, no. 1–2 (2012): 67–77.

[59]Harvey, David. *Justice, nature and the geography of difference*. 1996. Oxford, Blackwell

[60]Guiver, Josephine Wilhelmina. 'Understanding the conceptual models used in transport planning and mode choice: A case study'. PhD diss., University of Leeds, 2002.

from other interviewees. They include people working for the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, a local nature reserve, a Heritage Lottery funded project: Solway Wetlands, the manager of a caravan site, the engagement officer for a local recreational area, the owners/managers of two local attractions and the project officer for an enterprise development fund.

Interviews were conducted in the interviewees' workplaces and by telephone. One respondent preferred written responses to interview questions. The interview schedule explored the interviewee's understanding of the local tourism issues, where they perceived tensions, how they viewed the future of tourism in the area and who had the power to influence it.

A one-page synopsis of each transcript helped navigate the data. Themes were identified, compared, further explored until hypotheses evolved, for testing and retesting. Interviewee quotations are indicated by the transcript number, preserving anonymity, '…' denotes omission of part of a quotation.

The Physical Landscape

The current form of the rural coastline is the result of interaction between natural forces, human intervention and interpretation. Descriptions of this area consistently refer to its coastal and rural nature combining many qualities, such as space, tranquillity, fresh air, views, closeness to nature and connections with the past. These contrast implicitly with urban/industrial life and its stresses despite urban areas no longer being solely industrial places and many are tourist attractions themselves. Although often referred to as timeless, the appeal of both coast and countryside are socially framed and have changed through time.[61] Indeed, this landscape has been described in these terms, 'The sense of remoteness, preserved by the relative isolation of the area from large towns, together with the distinctive combination of coastal margins, mosses and rural agricultural landscapes, form the defining features of the Solway Coast landscape'.[62]

The Coastal Edge

The most evident edge of the Cumbria Solway coast is between the land and the sea. The area is characterised by estuary and marsh; these 'dynamic maritime landscapes lie at the interface of land and sea'.[63] The Solway coast is shaped by forces, many with cycles longer than human generations, as well as human action, including tourism. The dynamism of the environment has been remarked upon – 'The Solway is a highly changeable estuary with ever changing sandbanks, and so coastal change is a constant consideration. In addition to natural processes, human intervention, such as the

[61]Macnaghten, Phil and John Urry. *Contested Natures*. Sage, 1998.
[62]Land Use Consultants. *The Solway Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty: Landscape and Seascape Character Assessment* (Solway Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, 2010) p7.
[63]Cumbria County Council. Planning Cumbria. Cumbria and Lake District Joint Structure Plan 2001–2016. Technical Paper 5. Landscape Character. (2003) p18

construction of coastal defenses and the presence of the Solway Viaduct can also cause changes to the coastline'.[64]

Although part of its appeal when the resort was built,[65] one of the attractions of seaside resorts, immersing oneself in the sea, is not now recommended at Silloth and the beach was 'delisted' as a bathing water in 2018 because of low usage and lack of facilities.[66]

Space

The space of the dunes attracted people from Carlisle and other urban areas to camp and erect 'chalets' or '*pigeon lofts with windows*' (3) for holiday accommodation between the wars and into the 1960s, when '*every holidaymaker seemed to have a dog*' (3). The resulting litter and effluent problems led to more official camp sites, which then threatened the visual amenity of the area, one reason for the establishment of the AONB and why it excluded Silloth, the location of many of the camp sites.

The space of the dunes remains contested, open to some activities, while bans on others are not always respected.[67] One respondent described how young motorcyclists use the dunes after the wardens' shift and contrasted their destructive behaviour with other proposed activities on the beach, such as marathons, '*They don't realise how much damage they are doing to the dunes'* (2).

Views

Being on the edge of the sea provides sea views to the west and towards the Criffel Mountain of southern Scotland. Silloth is known for its spectacular sunsets (with multiple edges between land, sea, sky, day and night) leading the original developers to flatten the dunes to open the views from the town and creating the Green.[68,69] The cultural valuing of sunsets is reproduced in paintings and descriptions written for tourists (see[70]). Indeed the local Destination Management Organisation describes, '… glorious sea views and sunsets fine enough to be recorded for posterity by Turner, the famous landscape artist'[71] It was also mentioned in the interviews, '*these beautiful sunsets, wow, there is nothing like it, that view across the Criffel and a really lovely sunset, it's just amazing really'*. (6). This

[64]Solway Firth Partnership. 'Solway Review'. November 18th 2022 https://www.solwayfirthpartnership.co.uk/solway-review/physical/coastal-change/#chapter_0

[65]Walton, John K. 'Railways and resort development in Victorian England: the case of Silloth'. *Northern History* 15, no. 1 (1979): 191–209.

[66]Department of Environment and Rural Affairs. Consultation on the proposal to remove Silloth from the list of designated bathing waters. Bathing Water Team (2018) DEFRA, London.

[67]Gaventa, John. 'Finding the spaces for change: a power analysis'. *IDS bulletin* 37, no. 6 (2006): 23–33.

[68]Smith, W. R. 'Silloth: A Product of Yesterday'. *Industrial Archaeology Review* 3, no. 1 (1978): 75–85.

[69]Walton, John K. 'Railways and resort development in Victorian England: the case of Silloth'. *Northern History* 15, no. 1 (1979): 191–209.

[70]Ploner, Josef. 'Narrating regional identity in tourism–sketches from the Austrian Danube valley'. *Language and Intercultural Communication* 9, no. 1 (2009): 2–14.

[71]Visit Cumbria, 'Silloth'. November 18th 2022 https://www.visitcumbria.com/wc/silloth/

visual consumption of seascape[72] relates to a romantic frame valuing qualities such as timelessness, dynamism and power.

On the Edge of the Lake District

Another important 'edge' which emerged in the interviews is the difference between the coastal plain and the nearby mountainous tourist destination, the Lake District. Several respondents referred to the Lake District as the natural first choice for tourists – '*Unfortunately for us, you have to drive through one of the most beautiful places in the world to actually get here'* (7). Some commented that these visitors needed to be lured to the Solway coast, '*... one of our main publicity efforts is... to draw people, certainly from the north of the Lake District to the Solway coast'* (3). This reproduces the view that wild, rugged places[73] are superior tourist attractions to a coastal plain, although a few interviewees stressed advantages the Solway might have over the relatively busy Lake District, '*... it gets you away from all of the crowds in the Lakes'* (8).

The Political Landscape

The previous insecurities of living on the Scottish/English border are now romanticised as part of the area's cultural heritage, with Hadrian's Wall World Heritage Site, Hadrian's Wall cycle and walking routes, the nearby Reivers' cycle route and a Smugglers' Walking route.

Today, the Solway Coast's peripherality relates more to its distance (both metaphorical and literal) from seats of power than from threats of incursion. There are also internal boundaries. Despite being wholly within Cumbria and almost all within Allerdale Borough Council, the area contains different territories, regulations and practices such as the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Sites of Special Scientific Interest, a Special Area of Conservation[74] stretching across the Firth, Hadrian's Wall World Heritage site and its buffer zone.[75] Other organisations also advise and comment on measures which impact on tourism or the landscape, including Natural England, the Environment Agency, RSPB, Wildlife Trust and English Heritage.[76]

[72]Jarratt, David. 'Seasideness: Sense of place at a seaside resort'. In *Landscapes of leisure*, pp. 147–163. Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2015

[73]Macnaghten, Phil and John Urry. *Contested Natures*. Sage, 1998.

[74]Taylor, Pam, *Across the Waters: the Solway Firth*. (Dumfries: Solway Firth Partnership 2009)

[75]Hadrian's Wall Country. *Hadrian's Wall Management Plan 2008–2013*, (2008)

[76]Solway Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. *Solway Coast AONB Management Plan 2015 – 2020 'A shared responsibility for a very special place', Draft,* (pp. 32). (Silloth: Solway Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, 2014).

Like the physical landscape, the political landscape is subject to a number of flows and forces. The financial crash in 2008 and a UK government ideologically averse to public spending have accelerated global trends to transfer power from public to private organisations.[77] Responsibility for national and local tourism is being shifted to private–public partnerships,[78] with more emphasis on economic benefits and less on public interest and ideals such as equity, social justice and environment;[79] 'exacerbated by the fragmentation of agencies involved in tourism management'[80] Some respondents and sources felt this showed a lack of understanding of tourism and the shortage of data about number of tourists, their spending or activities compounded this ignorance. For instance one said,

> *'... one of the problems is that the people in the government and the County Council and Allerdale do not understand the importance of tourism' (2)* and another commented, *'Allerdale Council have just cut the funding for the toilets in Bowness'* (8). Similarly, the local council acknowledged, "The lack of funding in the public sector is having a serious impact on the promotion of the local Solway tourist economy".[81]

The lack of research and tourism information was mentioned by respondents too. More generally, the restructuring, shrinking of public resources, loss of networks and institutional memory was affecting morale. One interviewee commented, '*I can remember when I used to take work home, work in the evenings or at weekends. I just don't do it now…. the passion is drained from you'(3).*

UK Government spending on local development, previously channelled through the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs), has moved to much smaller Local Enterprise Partnerships. In the Northwest, RDA public funding to Cumbria Tourism encouraged Cumbria-wide promotion; its loss has resulted in a re-centring on the Lake District, where most subscribers operate. This issue was highlighted in the interviews – one commented, '*... the first thing they* (RDA) *did was to create a number of slipstream brands, like West Cumbria ... that gained momentum we were getting a bit more delivery, we were getting a bit more interest, we were getting project officers who were with us if you like. And then, with the demise of the Northwest Development Agency, they* (Cumbria Tourism) *lost that funding ... They've gone back to control through their members' (3).* Indeed, the local council wrote, 'The local tourist economy has gone from being supported by a West Coast-centric organisation based in Maryport to an organisation (i.e. Cumbria Tourism) that is based in Kendal and whose main focus is the promotion of tourism in the Lake

[77]Kjaer, Anne Mette. *Governance in the 21st century.* Polity Press, 2004.
[78]Coles, Tim, Claire Dinan and Fiona Hutchison. 'May we live in less interesting times? Changing public sector support for tourism in England during the sovereign debt crisis'. *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management* 1, no. 1–2 (2012): 4–7.
[79]Selin, Steve. 'Developing a typology of sustainable tourism partnerships'. *Journal of Sustainable tourism* 7, no. 3–4 (1999): 260–273
[80]Dredge, Dianne and Philippa Thomas. 'Mongrel management, public interest and protected area management in the Victorian Alps, Australia'. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* 17, no. 2 (2009): 249–267. p249
[81]Silloth-on-Solway Town Council. *Annual Report 2013/2014*. Cumbria. (2014) p9

District'[82] Hadrian's Wall Trust, praised by both private and public sector, also suffered budget cuts – '*It's a shame that the Hadrian's Wall people have run out of government funding, the second biggest attraction in the country and the Government has just said "no"'(2).*

In West Cumbria, Britain's Energy Coast, funded by the nuclear industry and the Treasury has taken over local development. During the research period, it decided to pull out of local tourism promotion and focus on creating a centre for nuclear excellence in the area, with apparently greater potential to create long-term wealth and employment than tourism. This was a severe blow to hopes of attracting more tourists and spending to the area. One interviewee clearly detailed this, '*We* (Britain's Energy Coast) *supported tourism because it was seen as one of the key sectors for West Cumbria. … West Cumbria has the potential of 3000 new jobs to be created, and I think that they give us something like £100 billion worth of investment through the nuclear industry, we really do have to make sure that West Cumbria benefits from that as much as possible because that industry is an industry that isn't going to disappear'* (7). Another interviewee bemoaned this lost opportunity, '*It would have funded marketing, yes, and it would have funded business upgrading as an accommodation upgrades and things like that. It would have provided a web presence and a booking site on the web, but a whole raft of tourism related output. Even down to things like bits of car facilities, you know toilet facilities, infrastructure … '*(3).

Deciding to support the nuclear industry and not tourism effectively focusses development on Sellafield, excluding Solway. Yet, even when tourism received public funding, other areas closer to seats of power or with more tourists appeared to be prioritised, leaving Solway Coast tourism marginalised by industry and geography – '*Silloth falls between the two economic centres of Workington/Whitehaven and Carlisle and as a result it is difficult to attract funding from organisations focused on the regeneration of these two areas'*. Interviewees agreed and considered their area to be marginalised when compared to nearby places with a thriving tourism industry (such as Keswick) – '*They* (West Cumbria Tourism) *never really did very much for us. From Allerdale's point of view, how do they represent one area like Silloth, when Keswick is in the same patch?'* (2).

Resources have come into the area through grants from the Heritage Lottery Fund. Although not directly aimed at tourism, the Solway Wetlands Project aims to enhance the local physical and cultural landscape – '*The project is about restoring and conserving the Solway landscape … with a large focus on the wetland landscape, the wetland sites and also about the heritage landscape on the Solway'* (6). Such projects avoid the long-term responsibilities and processes of permanent organisations, often with long time horizons (30 years in this case) and bureaucratic procedures. Yet, the short time span of the projects results in fast staff turnover and lack of continuity – *'…we have our five-year statutory management plan; from that we produce an annual business plan. Within that plan is the year's work against the budget'* (3). Another commented, *'We've had a little bit of staffing change which has held things up a little bit, …. There are four of us in the team but we don't ever really had three people because as one person starts, someone else's left' (6).*

[82]Silloth-on-Solway Town Council. *Annual Report 2013/2014*. Cumbria. (2014) p9

The restructuring away from a policy of spreading regeneration to one measured by total economic benefits has further marginalised this peripheral area. The increased involvement of the private sector has also focussed spending onto established industries and locations, reducing the resources: money, expertise and enthusiasm available to support small-scale rural tourism.

The Tourist Landscape

Tourists

When asked about the typical tourist to the area, many respondents admitted their knowledge was limited to whom they had spoken to and what they saw, which was not the full picture. The different categories referred to include:

- local day trippers coming for the beach,
- bird/nature watchers
- day trippers from the Lake District (possibly more aspirational than actual)
- short breaks in the caravan sites, encouraged by discounts
- families in caravans or tents, again related to economy
- families and older repeat visitors with memories of earlier holidays either from the local area or traditional areas of Scotland and the Northeast
- walkers starting/completing the Hadrian's Wall trail
- cyclists

Although these segments appeared to be increasing, others appeared to be declining, for example, catered accommodation and both visitor spend and tourism's contribution to the local economy was seen as below potential – '*It looks as if the Golf Hotel, the only hotel in Silloth, will probably close'* (2); '*You know a typical day on the Solway by birdwatchers is a flask and sandwiches so there's no income to the patch'* (3).

In the absence of data, stereotypes were used to categorise types of visitors and their preferred activities. The people staying in the caravan sites were viewed as unlikely to be interested in the more passive activities offered by the AONB or nature reserves and possibly liable to inappropriate behaviour. Even the manager of a caravan site, who described how some of her customers appreciated the AONB, cycling and walking, apologised for slipping into a cliché. She was asked 'What about locally what are they likely to go to?' and responded, '*Car boots, would you believe and markets. I think that when the weather is good they do like to go to the beach. ... They probably like more than that, it sounds a bit condescending* (4).'

'Romantic solitude' can be seen as a middle class pre-occupation,[83] possibly why that the guardians of the countryside largely ignore the large holiday population of the caravan sites as potential visitors to the nature conservation sites.

[83]Walter, J. Anthony. 'Social limits to tourism'. *Leisure Studies* 1, no. 3 (1982): 295–304. p303

Interviewees tended to see the caravan site/holiday park visitors as uninterested in rural or wildlife areas – *'That's the traditional side if you like, you know you get families there, they go down the beach with a bucket and spade,… They are not interested, as a group if you like, they don't have any real interest in the culture, the heritage, the wildlife. Some will, don't get me wrong, but in the main…they are interested in having a beer in the social club on a night and maybe a bite to eat and spend the rest of the day sitting in the ?? in the caravan* (3)'. Furthermore, visitors, or, at least, certain types or concentrations of visitors, were sometimes unwelcome in these areas '*… you don't want people, lots of people coming and leaving gates open'* (8).

Tourist Provision

It became evident that there were a number of motivations for wanting more and better tourism, mostly instrumental. These were linked to the role, or potential role of tourism in the area, Figure 2 briefly describes some of the reasons interviewees gave for wanting to improve and increase tourism.

Many of the respondents could see potential which would improve the area, not least in environmental terms, but were frustrated by lack of action or co-ordination to achieve joint goals. A number of 'edges' emerged between different groups; there was a perceived lack of cooperation – '*what I'm saying is get a few people together, like-minded people and start looking at how you're going to deal with it and you will create work, you will create jobs'* (2).

Predictably there was a tension between entrepreneurs and people working to conserve the landscape and habitats. Russell and Faulkner[84] argue that tensions will always occur between the private and public sectors because of different mentality, goals and worldviews. Entrepreneurs act as 'chaos makers',[85] generators of change and are flexible and open to new opportunities,[86] while public sector employees want continuity, stability and consensus, to moderate change, making them risk averse and possibly less responsive to local circumstances because of bureaucracy.[87] For some, the AONB resisted opening the area to tourism and other public authorities put up unnecessary barriers – '*You've got the Tourist Board that wants to get people in and the AONB management that doesn't want people in'* (2); '*We are getting more people cycling now, but the highway people say that road's too busy for cycles and so they send them all inland* [missing Silloth], *it adds about another 5 miles on the Hadrian's Wall trail, sending them round the back roads'* (2).

Tourism was seen to generate more income for the area, through accommodation provision on farms or in the town or creating service jobs, particularly for young people, in an area which had lost a lot of manufacturing and fears losing more, causing young people

[84]Russell, Roslyn and Bill Faulkner. 'Movers and shakers: chaos makers in tourism development'. *Tourism Management* 20, no. 4 (1999): 411–423.
[85]Russell and Faulkner, Movers and shakers. p411
[86]Russell and Faulkner, Movers and shakers
[87]Eagles, Paul FJ. 'Governance of recreation and tourism partnerships in parks and protected areas'. *Journal of sustainable tourism* 17, no. 2 (2009): 231–248.

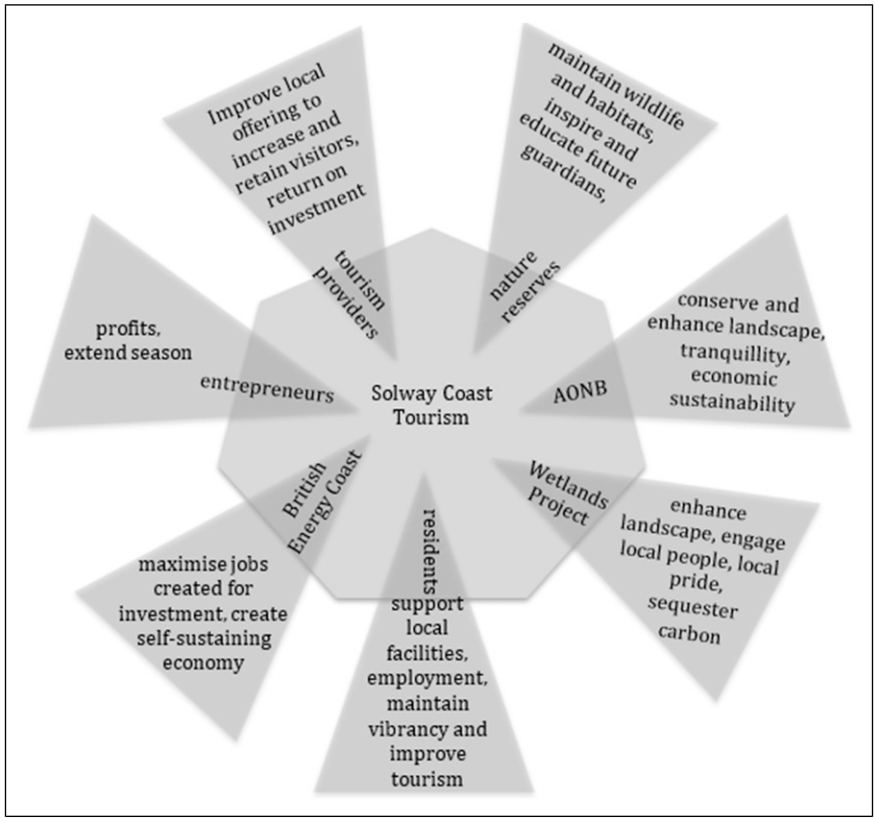

Figure 2. Reasons for wanting tourism in the area.

to leave the area. It might also help maintain services. However, it was admitted that the low level of service in the countryside was on the edge of being viable or acceptable to visitors, that the marketing and welcome could not compete with other areas and specifically, there was poor provision for wet weather and for children. A number of independent solutions had been found or tried including: a toy soldier museum run by volunteers, a Jurassic theme park, arranging pony rides, using a social club to house craft fairs, and developing exhibition space at the old airfield.[88] Nevertheless, the lack of a critical mass, in terms of tourism and retail provision, was consistently referred to, as the following quotes demonstrate: *'The lack of shops, pubs, things like that in the area. Some of them don't open on lunchtimes in the winter, some of them are only open at lunchtimes at weekends… if you're staying in the pub, what would you do in the evening? There is nothing to do absolutely nothing to do... '(8); 'We've got an indoor pool, we've got a farm,*

[88]Silloth-on-Solway Town Council. *Annual Report 2013/2014*. Cumbria. (2014)

but it's not enough' (4). Although the lack of activities is not new to Silloth and the area: *We eat, we drink, we bathe, we walk, we sleep; and then we eat and drink and bathe and walk and sleep again. Only for variety's sake sometimes we bathe before we walk, and sometimes we walk before we bathe.*[89]

There was universal praise for the events organised in and around the town, bringing visitors in and increasing local spending, although some of them are now threatened by the end of funding grants and lack of volunteers to run them. One interviewee commented '*... because some of the events they've been having over the last 18 months in particular have been really good and attracted a lot of people into the town. A good thing there's the Carnival and there's the beer festival, the Kite Festival and all those things help bring people in'* (4). The local press reported, 'It was feared that Silloth Carnival would not continue after former committee members retired in the wake of this year's successful event. A bid to hand over the reins to other townsfolk failed at the beginning of last month when too few volunteers turned out to the AGM. …. Now a group of 14 enthusiastic Silloth residents and business owners have stepped in to save the day and cement the carnival's future'..

Many respondents felt there needed for more co-ordination and co-operation between groups to achieve common goals. Yet, possibly because of different priorities, lack of trust, personality clashes or failure to find suitable forums, this was not always accomplished; local newspaper reports seem to confirm this.[90] Sometimes frustrated interviewees clearly indicated this too, as the following quotes show:

> *'It has got so much potential, if people would just broaden their horizons…. coordination, people working together. It needs that political will.'* (2)

> *'It would also be useful if more businesses got involved in sustaining tourism and if warring businesses could understand the benefits of working together for the benefit of the Town.'* (1)

> *STAG* (Silloth Tourism Action Group) *feel it is very important to work with the Council, however, I have not witnessed much trust or harmony between the two'* (1)

> *'Furthermore, STAG members were not talking to AONB staff.'* (2)

In the absence of any collected data, providers' perceptions of the actual and potential markets vary according to the contact they have with visitors. Although these differed and priorities and aims pulled in different directions, there does seem to be some consensus that there is untapped potential of increasing the number of visitors, what they spend in the area and improving the tourism offering given the necessary resources and co-ordination. The tourism provision in this area results from the conjunction of a number of forces such

[89]Silloth Gazette, 1860, cited in Walton, John K. 'Railways and resort development in Victorian England: the case of Silloth'. *Northern History* 15, no. 1 (1979): 191–209, p. 205

[90]Coleman, P. (2020). Former Silloth town councillor says allegation against group is "malicious", News and Star. 10th September 2020 https://www.newsandstar.co.uk/news/18712691.former-silloth-town-councillor-says-allegation-group-malicious/

as resources, expertise, information and personal relations. Different players look to tourism for different outcomes, but with common interests.

Discussion

This article started with the description coastal area on the periphery of a region, county and country, also on the edge of another more successful tourist area and on the brink of economic viability for its tourism sector. Other 'edges' became apparent when decisions had to be made about priorities between landscape and habitat conservation, economic development and public investment, many decided outside the area.

It was found that peripherality and 'otherness' to more 'central' places was reproduced in descriptions of the area to its advantage such as providing solitude, space, nature, rurality, being a backwater, a traditional seaside resort and sea views, particularly of the sunset. These fashion a 'constellation' of overlaid imaginaries[91] which creates an area identity, by tapping into a variety of cultural frameworks (see[92]) such as a romantic view of nature[93] and the sea,[94] nostalgia for a bygone age or memories of family holidays.[95]

In other ways, the area's, and to some extent tourism's, peripherality was constructed as powerlessness to influence forces impacting negatively on the area. It was talked about as having less voice than other parts of the district and its tourism seen as less important than the Lake District, while central and local government were seen as not having grasped the importance of tourism and its need for support.

These aspects coincide with temporal edges, changes in practices, with moves away from public spending,[96] particularly for tourism, the increasing involvement of commercial organisations in decisions about development,[97] the 'fragmentation of agencies involved in tourism management'[98] and the reduction of 'public interest' to economic benefit.[99,100] In this case, the decision by Britain's Energy Coast to drop funding for tourism on grounds of better returns for investment in the nuclear industry was also a geographical decision not to support the Solway coast. In effect, Britain's Energy Coast

[91]Stewart, Kathleen. 'Ordinary affects'. In *Ordinary affects*. Duke University Press, 2007.
[92]Löfgren, Orvar. 'Learning to be a tourist'. *Ethnologia Scandinavica* 24, no. 1994 (1994): 102–125.
[93]Macnaghten, Phil and John Urry. *Contested Natures*. Sage, 1998.
[94]Jarratt, David. 'Seasideness: Sense of place at a seaside resort'. In *Landscapes of leisure*, pp. 147–163. Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2015.
[95]Jarratt, David and Sean Gammon. '"We had the most wonderful times": seaside nostalgia at a British resort'. *Tourism Recreation Research* 41, no. 2 (2016): 123–133.
[96]Kjaer, Anne Mette. *Governance in the 21st century.* Polity Press, 2004.
[97]Selin, Steve. 'Developing a typology of sustainable tourism partnerships'. *Journal of Sustainable tourism* 7, no. 3–4 (1999): 260–273
[98]Dredge, Dianne and Philippa Thomas. 'Mongrel management, public interest and protected area management in the Victorian Alps, Australia'. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* 17, no. 2 (2009): 249–267. p249
[99]Dredge, Dianne and Philippa Thomas. 'Mongrel management, public interest and protected area management in the Victorian Alps, Australia'. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* 17, no. 2 (2009): 249–267.
[100]Selin, Steve. 'Developing a typology of sustainable tourism partnerships'. *Journal of Sustainable tourism* 7, no. 3–4 (1999): 260–273

reproduced its own power to shape the space of West Cumbria[101] by maintaining material differences and devaluing the relative significance of tourism on the Solway.

The move towards viewing all expenditure through an 'economic' lens also confronts other views of the countryside such as an asset worth preserving for future generations or as a habitat for wildlife, the basis for establishing protected areas and reserves. These again represent particular constructions of the countryside which have evolved through time. Such negotiations of meaning are very real power struggles over space and material practices.[102] Although it appears that the 'economic benefit' view is in the ascendency, the authority of the AONB and its focus on preserving landscape was recognised, even 'internalised',[103] by Britain's Energy Coast who appeared to have ruled out a tidal barrage near the AONB.

Within the destination, there are also 'edges' where individuals and organisations have to make choices which influence local tourism. The call for volunteers from businesses to help with events may prompt difficult decisions about time priorities with consequences for the future of the events and tourism.

Although nominally supporting economic development through tourism, the AONB appears to have embraced this more fully recently with the Solway Wetlands project and deciding to participate in local tourism forums. Yet its constitution still provides for and requires detailed reports on the state of the landscape,[104] but minimal research on the current or potential tourist impacts on the area.

It could appear that tourism on the Cumbrian Solway coast is on a cusp of being viable and that recent changes in funding and policy have made it less likely to achieve the critical mass of services and visitors to thrive. However, there is no sign that tourism will cease in the area, although it might dwindle. It still offers the potential of creating jobs and augmenting incomes within the area, which may appeal to people facing the alternatives: being poorer, finding work in another industry or moving away. It also appears to offer opportunities to protect the landscape, habitats, maintain or grow services for residents and generate local pride and sense of place.

If these differing aims can be aligned and co-ordinated under strong leadership, local tourism may flourish, even under averse political conditions. It seems likely that Solway coast tourism will continue 'on the edge' both of the coast and mountains, but of viability. It is unlikely to be 'killed', but neither is it likely to become a very popular destination (which would threaten its constructed identities of being a quiet, peripheral place to find nature and solitude). The choice of an approach premised on change (which is a characteristic of all systems, entities are in a permanent state of "becoming") guarantees finding "edges" or conjunctions of forces affecting the topic of study. It reminds readers and researchers of how dynamic the tourism context is, with changes in natural forces, personnel, policies, practices and meanings and how many of these changes operate on

[101]Gaventa, John. 'Finding the spaces for change: a power analysis'. *IDS bulletin* 37, no. 6 (2006): 23–33.
[102]Gaventa, 'Finding the spaces'
[103]Gaventa, 'Finding the spaces'
[104]Land Use Consultants. *The Solway Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty: Landscape and Seascape Character Assessment* (Solway Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, 2010).

different time scales. For example, changes to the coast may take thousands of years, while governments may change in a few years and policies overnight. Accepting that entities are 'internally heterogeneous, i.e. contradictory',[105] encourages the unpacking of terms such as tourists, coast and countryside increasing understanding of the processes at work. However, like other qualitative approaches, this does not offer closure or simplification which may help decision-making. This could be considered a weakness of this article but also an opportunity for future research.

Conclusion

'Being on the edge' of the coast, county and country as well having a 'backwater' image can be used to advantage to promote tourism, yet this research reveals that it can, potentially, bring more challenges than it does opportunities – at least for those involved with tourism provision. We investigated tourism on the Cumbrian Solway coast as an example of a resort on the margins. Through the words of interviewed tourism providers, we explored multiple 'edges' currently shaping tourism in the area. These include different interpretations of the coast and countryside, shifting patterns of public funding, changing political practices and priorities and the internal dynamics of delivering of tourism in the area. Many of the processes shaping the local industry are from outside and beyond the control of local providers. Recent restructuring of tourism organisations, restrictions on public spending and a local decision to stop supporting tourism have been to the detriment of the area. Peripherality was associated with powerlessness, which was reproduced through discourse and material practices.

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[105]Harvey, David. *Justice, nature and the geography of difference*. 1996. Oxford, Blackwell, p51