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## **Managing Tourism Decline: Insights from the Isle of Man**

### **Abstract**

*Qualitative interviews conducted in the Isle of Man investigate local perceptions of a tourism industry in long-term decline: a development stage typically overlooked. Negative impacts of decline are revealed; including facilities loss, landscape erosion, and a heightened sense of peripherality. Together such impacts undermine local identity and attractiveness of place. Tourists are welcomed as they help to affirm the pride residents have in their island, create atmosphere, provide social interaction opportunities, stimulate positive emotions and combat negative stereotyping. Emphasised is the on-going importance of tourism impacts in a peripheral location. Practitioner recommendations are therefore made calling attention to the need to more carefully manage the process of decline. Potential strategies for achieving this are signposted.*

**Keywords:** Tourism Decline; Isle of Man; Resident Attitudes; Post-Mature Destinations; Consequences of Tourism Decline; Qualitative Research

## 1.0 Introduction

The stagnation and decline of tourism resorts is an international problem. As tourism becomes ever more global, with attendant increased competition between ever more homogenised destinations (Chapman and Speake, 2011), increased fragmentation of tourist behaviours (Urry, 2002), and in light of the environmental damage frequently associated with tourist hosting which may undermine destination attractiveness (Mihalic, 2000), many locations have increasingly struggled to compete for visitor arrivals. Thus the stagnation decline and battle to revive first generation tourism resorts, such as those of Northern Europe, or North America, is widely noted (Baum, 1998, Bergsma and Dehaan, 2001, Bramwell, 2004, Brooker and Burgess, 2008, Cooper, 1995, Strapp, 1988). Similarly highlighted is a trend towards stagnation of second generation destinations, such as those of the Mediterranean (Ayres, 2000, Bull and Weed, 1999, Leslie, 2005, Theuma, 2004).

Such a process, which may moreover be happening with increasing speed in emergent destinations (Chapman and Speake, 2011), is of concern to tourism practitioners because of the challenges faced by communities in post-mature destinations. Tourism downturn poses an existential threat to tourism enterprises, as indeed it may do to the wider stakeholder communities built around, evolved alongside, and dependent upon tourism as a whole (Canavan, 2014; Cooper, 1995; Hampton and Christensen, 2007; Latimer, 1985). Decline is linked to interrelated economic, social, and environmental (referring to both natural and cultural environments throughout this paper) problems. These include increased unemployment, poverty, benefits dependency, health problems, fewer facilities, loss of social opportunities, reduced business prospects and outward migration (Agarwal, 2002, Canavan, 2013, 2014, Getz, 1994, Sheil *et al.*, 2002). Such issues of decline may be especially heightened in small islands and peripheral areas, often highly dependent on tourism, and with few realistic development alternatives (Brown, 1998).

Imperative therefore, is that tourism theorists and practitioners understand the potential impacts of decline, in order to plan and respond accordingly, and where possible, manage decline

effectively. Yet resorts suffering long-term stagnation (in the broad terms outlined by Butler (1980) in the ubiquitous tourism area lifecycle model) are little covered by past tourism literature (Agarwal and Brunt, 2006). Focus tends instead to be upon nascent, growing or mature destinations, as it does on primary destinations and those orientated towards warm water, sun, sea and sand pursuits (Baldacchino, 2006, Canavan, 2014, Ritchie and Inkari, 2006). Moreover, there is a lack of research investigating attitudes of stakeholders in such places. There are a limited number of cases studying attitudes in cold water islands (i.e. Ishikawa and Fukushibe, 2007, Ko and Stewart, 2002, Tovar and Lockwood, 2008). Yet none have been conducted in small islands. Based on definitions of Milne (1992), small islands may be considered as those less than 1000km<sup>2</sup> and with fewer than 100,000 permanent residents. Such islands, because of their small population and geographic size, have unique social, economic and environmental challenges, and henceforth are places where impacts of tourism decline may be expected to be especially acute.

Consequently, there is a lack of evidence upon which to base theoretical and practical recommendations for tourism decline management and marketing. Thus traditional theoretical models, which typically fail to investigate the post-mature context, may be overly deterministic (Ivars i Baidal *et al.*, 2013). Likewise, flawed policy and planning may result. For example, a tendency to underappreciate the negative consequences of decline and hence inadequately plan and compensate for its impacts (Canavan, 2014). More generally, limited representation or understanding of residents' experiences in such locations does them a disservice, undervalues their potential contribution to wider debates, and further isolates what are frequently already marginalised communities (Lewis, 2008).

Emphasised therefore, is a need for relevant research in untypical locations, in order to better understand attitudes towards, dynamics, experiences and management of, decline. Both theoretical and practitioner perspectives would benefit. The following research aims to address such a gap. This paper outlines stakeholder perceptions of the tourism industry in the Isle of Man, a small cold water island destination experiencing long-term decline of its tourism industry. Research was

conducted in order to explore local stakeholders' experiences of, and attitudes towards, tourism in a destination which is experiencing long-term stagnation and decline.

## **2.0 Literature Review**

### **2.1 The Small Island Context**

A brief overview of the small island context highlights the number of challenges to their continued habitation. Peripherality of small islands referring to their geographic isolation, both from physical mainland and population centres (Wilkinson, 1989), and small geographic and population size (Briguglio *et al.*, 1996), limits economic and social opportunities. Further restrictions are placed on economic growth because of typically expensive and restricted infrastructure, import dependencies, foreign control of assets and limited economies of scale (Ayres, 2000, Baum and Hagen, 1999, Buhalis, 1999, Marcouiller, 1997). Meanwhile, socially, isolation may result in a dearth of relationship and entertainment opportunities, social restrictions and stagnation of cultural development (Brown, 1998, Duffield and Long, 1981, Marjavaara, 2007).

The most serious consequence of peripherality is the outflow of residents putting community continuity in doubt as residents are attracted by greater financial and social opportunities abroad (Andriotis, 2005). For example, the islands of Ireland in 1841 held a population of 38 138 across 211 islands, but in 1999 just 9700 inhabited 66 (Berry, 2009). Abandonment represents absolute cultural loss (Royle, 2003). Likewise, it may accompany mutually evolved natural landscape degradation (Rouan *et al*, 2010). Keane (1992) argues that depopulation and abandonment is a spectre which overhangs all small islands as a consequence of their economic and social restrictions.

In light of these challenges, tourism development is often pioneered by small islands worldwide (McElroy, 2006). Tourism may be an easy industry to establish in areas with limited

resources (Buhalis, 1999) and where the scope for developing or attracting other industries is restricted (Brown and Hall, 2000). For instance, tourism is geared towards unskilled labour with low barriers to individual entrepreneurship, thus allowing local involvement in and ownership of the industry (Almeyda *et al.*, 2010).

The impacts of tourism may be particularly relevant in the small island context (Wilkinson, 1989). Economically, tourism development has been associated with increased employment (Buhalis, 1999), support for, and development of, facilities and infrastructure (Keane, 1992), and linkages with other economic sectors, such as farming (Ayres, 2000). As such tourism can be a pioneer industry helping to stimulate wider long-term economic transformation (Mansfeld and Winckler, 2008). Socially, enhanced civic pride and social cohesion is noted to result from tourism (Pennington-Gray *et al.*, 2005), as is greater social opportunity and variety (Marjavaara, 2007), entertainment options (Duffield and Long, 1981), and increased social space in what may otherwise be restrictive environments (Canavan, 2013b). Environmentally meanwhile, tourist interest can stimulate revivals and reinterpretations of traditions (Simpson, 1993). Tourism may also both fund (Eagles, 2002) and motivate (Rodriguez *et al.*, 2010) conservation efforts. Marcouiller (1997: 353) summarises: “(the) effects of tourism (are) in developing a sense of place and pride, increased awareness and appreciation of environmental, historic and cultural resources, provision of recreational activities for lower income residents and political benefits.”

Hence tourist success has been linked to stabilising island populations. This is as a consequence of contributing to more attractive local landscapes, making habitation prospects more viable, and encouraging new and returning migrants attracted through social exchanges and in pursuit of economic opportunities (Andriotis, 2005, Buhalis, 1999, Royle, 2008, Tsartas, 1992). Nevertheless, alongside such diverse benefits many negative impacts can be caused or worsened by tourism development. Development damaging scenic vistas, degrading natural sites, polluting and consuming habitats, is repeatedly discussed (Buckley, 2002, Sharpley, 2003). Cultural landscapes can be similarly altered and degraded. The physical pressure of tourist crowding causes social

change, congestion, resource damage, acts as a physical burden on everyday life, and subsumes integrity and traditions of the local culture (Smith, 1989, Rodriguez *et al*, 2010). Negative impacts of tourism may furthermore, be both heightened, and especially observable, in the fragile and confined environments of small islands (Marwick, 2000; Briassoulis, 2004).

## **2.2 Tourism Decline**

By consuming and degrading the very resources on which touristic appeal rests, destinations risk becoming through the process of development itself, attractive to neither host nor guest (Mihalic, 2000). Linear depictions of increasingly developed, degraded, and undesirable destinations, are repeatedly identified (Ayres, 2000, Marwick, 2000, Tsartas, 1992, Wheeler, 1993). Broadly these follow the predictions of the tourism area lifecycle (Butler, 1980), whereby increased development brings increased environmental degradation and eventually undermines tourist attractiveness.

Tourism development has thus been suggested as inevitably short-termist, an initial route to further economic development, to be moved beyond where possible and perhaps inevitably fated to decline (Agarwal and Brunt, 2006, Aramberri, 2005, Wheeler, 1993). Nonetheless, such linearity of tourism development is increasingly challenged. Critics view as overly-simplistic (Lim and Cooper, 2009), deterministic (Brooker and Burgess, 2008), or failing to capture the unique nature of evolution of each resort (Choy, 1992). And locations are not necessarily fated to decline (Ivars i Baidal *et al*, 2013). Many destinations have for example, maintained long-time successful tourism economies (i.e. Blackpool; Hughes and Benn, 2010).

Furthermore, tourism may be an unpredictable, unreliable, cyclical, or short term industry (Aramberri, 2005). Experience shows that destinations tend to go through periods of relative expansion often followed by stagnation or decline (Chapman and Speake, 2011). This process may be fostered by the innate restlessness of travellers keen to experience the new and swayed by changing fashions (Urry, 2002). The experiences of many north European coastal destinations,

including the Isle of Man, would confirm such a perspective. Here changing tourist tastes for more exotic holidays, in locations with guaranteed sunshine rapidly undermined the appeal of traditional destinations (Rawcliffe, 2009, Walton, 2000).

Therefore, tourism stagnation and decline linked to pressures of development and changing consumer tastes is as noted, a phenomenon experienced by many destinations worldwide. The consequences of tourism decline can be severe. This may again be particularly so in small islands often highly dependent on the sector and with few other avenues for development (Brown, 1998, Latimer, 1985). In such places the cultural interactions, stimulation and mutual learning brought by tourism, are highlighted as important to community identity, vibrancy and overall well-being (Pennington-Gray *et al.*, 2005, Simpson, 1993, Stronza and Gordillo, 2008). The reduction in tourism thus threatens loss of this valued cultural interconnectedness (Canavan, 2014). Moreover, natural and cultural landscapes are likely to have evolved alongside, and shaped by tourism, over long time periods (Sindiga, 1996). “The reduction of tourism thus places the architectural, economic and social future of traditional resorts in jeopardy” (Cooper, 1995:63).

In general, socio-economic deprivation may result from failures to transition to new economic models (Agarwal and Brunt, 2006, Brown, 1998). Economic stagnation has been linked to unsustainable levels of youth emigration, as in Anglesey, UK (Shiel *et al.*, 2002). Peron (2004) finds in French Atlantic Islands those most isolated and least visited showing largest population declines. Similar is noted in islands of Ireland (Royle, 2008). Even where a successful post-tourism transition is made, such a process can be traumatic, involving considerable socio-cultural upheaval and landscape change (Canavan, 2014, Hampton and Christensen, 2007).

### **3.0 Methodology**

Resident attitudes have been extensively used in tourism studies to measure the success or otherwise of tourism destination management and marketing. Nunkoo and Ramkissoon (2010)



consider overall attitude to be a function of the economic, social, cultural, and environmental impacts of tourism. Thus briefly speaking those locations with more positive resident attitudes towards tourism tend to have industries more sustainable in terms of their balance of impacts and longevity (Iranlu, 2004; Lepp, 2007). Hence capturing resident attitudes towards tourism, in order to draw inferences regards, was used here as has been the case throughout tourism development stage research (Getz, 1994, Haley *et al.*, 2005, Madrigal, 1993).

Qualitative research was identified as the most appropriate method for data collection. The approach is recognized for being used to explore the phenomena of interest in detail, within local context, and as they emerge and change over a period (Flick, 2006, Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). This enables the researcher to capture knowledge within its wider social-specific context (Milner and Mezias, 1996) and offers holistic descriptions of realities that cannot be reduced to a few variables (Gephart, 2004). In-depth interviews were considered the most suitable qualitative technique to apply to best gain these advantages because of their ability to capture the meanings and interpretations actors subjectively ascribe to phenomena (Johnson *et al.*, 2006).

Research was part of a longitudinal study conducted in the Isle of Man from 2010 – 2014. A total of 30 in-depth interviews were conducted by the author, speaking to 38 individuals over a 12-month period. A number of interviews were conducted with more than one individual according to particular requests or arrangements. Interviews lasted for an average of 35 minutes, with times between 20–55 minutes, and took place at various locations convenient to participants, such as in workplaces, at home, or at a cafe. Four were conducted via email or telephone exchanges due to mutual access constraints, or following participants' request. All interviewees were current island residents, and included general community members, politicians, tourism planners, managers, employees, community organizations and conservationists.

A variety of stakeholders were targeted and recruited for interview, using purposive sampling, which aimed to select subjects of interest to the study (as per Adu-Ampong, 2014).

Identified targets of interest were contacted via phone or email explaining the nature of research and

asking to arrange an interview. Although not used explicitly some network sampling may have taken place, as a number of respondents were known to the researcher, to a greater or lesser extent. In all cases, subjects were approached for their potential interest to the subject area, not because of personal contact; although this may have influenced participation. Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007) do suggest that theoretical sampling is opportunistic in this manner.

Questions asked covered general discussion about life in a small island and the advantages and disadvantages of. This was followed by discussion of the local tourism industry, involvement with this, impacts and role in the Isle of Man. Attitudes towards the past, present and future of the local tourism industry were sought out during. Interviews were allowed to largely free flow, with a discussion guide used as a point of reference.

All interviews were transcribed within 48 hours of conduct by the author. This process assisted immersion in the data and the process of developing emergent theory, particularly as more interviews were processed. These patterns were allowed to emerge from the data itself, thus following the largely inductive approach to analysis outlined by Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007). Research was an inductive process based upon pragmatic use of principles of social constructivism to explain how data is created, and grounded theory to frame the interpretation of data. As no new patterns emerged, no further interviews were arranged. NVIVO computer software was used to assist data coding and analysis.

A number of initial themes were identified from interviews that evolved over the research process and were further refined at the analysis stage. Themes quickly developed around the role and impacts of tourism. Patterns established around economic, social and environmental impacts of tourism, albeit with overlap between. Themes regards life in a small island, including isolation, local cultural, social and economic characteristics, also emerged and could be related to and analysed alongside. Themes of tourism decline emerged in relation to these two aspects. These themes identified are outlined during the following findings, before being analysed and related to theory and practice within the discussion and conclusion.

### 3.1 The Isle of Man

Located in the centre of the Irish Sea the Isle of Man has an area of 588 km<sup>2</sup> and is home to circa 75,000 inhabitants (Isle of Man Digest, 2010). Politically the island is a self-governing crown dependency of the UK, and lies outside of the EU. The locally elected island parliament (the Viking established Tynwald reputed to be the oldest in continuous existence in the world) has power to pass legislation that affects the island without outside influence. The island has a varied landscape of central moorland bisected by wooded glens, with agricultural plains, cliffs or dunes towards the coast. Flora and fauna of the islands is diverse, the many different habitats of the island leading to descriptions of it representing the British Isles in miniature. Many rare and migrant seabirds breed on the island (Hopson and Lamb, 1995). Natural beauty combines with a unique local culture informed by the islands' geographic position and contested history. This is manifest in a rich variety of cultural traditions and sites, such as the Manx Gaelic language, Laxey Wheel, Rushen and Peel Castles, and Tourist Trophy (TT) motorbike racing festival. This celebrated its centenary in 2007 and attracts upwards of 40,000 tourists annually (Isle of Man Government Digest, 2010).

From the 1890s to the 1960s, the Isle of Man was a major British domestic tourism destination. A legacy of Victorian hotel architecture and tourist infrastructure still dominates urban landscapes. However, from the mid-1970s onwards visitor arrivals rapidly declined to levels around one third of past levels (Isle of Man Government Digest, 2010). Similar declines in tourist spending, available bed-spaces and length of stay are recorded. Following this dramatic decline, stagnation has persisted for over two decades, despite initiatives to revitalize the industry. "In the Isle of Man, a period of 20 years saw a fall of 13.7% in the total number of visitors, from 319,000 visitors in 1990, to 275,203 visitors in 2008. However, from 2008 visitor arrivals have grown from 275,203 to 294,460 in 2012, an increase of 7%" (Tourism Visitor Economy Strategy 2012-15). Today tourism is only the sixth biggest sector of the island economy, creating around 5% of GDP

and 14% of jobs. The offshore finance industry now accounts for the bulk of local economic activity: 23% of jobs, and 36% of GDP (Isle of Man Government Digest, 2010).

**Table 1: The Isle of Man**

<b>Key Statistics</b>		
<b>Location</b>	Irish Sea, British Isles	
<b>Geographic size</b>	520km <sup>2</sup>	
<b>Population size</b>	80,000	
<b>Visitor Numbers</b>	287,000	
<b>Visitor Spending</b>	£113 million	
<b>Bedspace</b>	8000	
<b>TALC stage</b>	Long term decline	
<b>Primary industry</b>	Finance	
<b>Political status</b>	UK crown dependency	
<b>Attractions</b>	Laxey Wheel, Tynwald Hill, Heritage railways, Peel and Rushen Castles, Birdlife, Beaches, Countryside, TT Festival	

#### 4.0 Research Findings

Interviews revealed that stakeholders on the Isle of Man had highly positive attitudes towards tourism. Despite long-term decline the local tourism industry is viewed as bringing significant, relevant, and largely positive (with few negative), economic, environmental, and social impacts. These help to diversify respective island landscapes, contributing to the island being an attractive and viable place to inhabit. Hence findings were also of the concern at continued industry decline expressed by all participants. The benefits brought by tourism were seen to be placed under threat by this decline. In many cases they were thought to have already reduced. All interviewees thought that the tourism industry had capacity for future growth, wished to see this and believed that continued investment in the industry was a good thing. Indeed, greater investment in promoting

local tourism was desired by a majority. Future emphasis was sought on natural and cultural landscapes considered unique and the island's main source of tourist attractiveness.

#### **4.1 Impacts of Tourism**

Interviewees shared common perspectives of tourism in the Isle of Man as bringing many advantages. The economic benefits of tourism to the Isle of Man were thought to be both positive and significant by all interviewees. It was expressed that economic impacts benefitted the entire island through employment and increases in government revenue. This in turn could be used to support community infrastructure. Tourists themselves supported a wide range of facilities available on the island through their spending. Beyond paying for upkeep of visitor attractions, which residents also use, benefits to transport services and shopping facilities were discussed. A majority of respondents believed that tourism played an important role in the island economy and that industry growth would be desirable. It was thought that more tourists would bring greater benefits and should be encouraged.

*“It’s not just the increase in the share of tax from what they spend on the island. The way I see it more tourist spending would increase government income as well as the local hoteliers and pubs and restaurants and whatever.”* (P, Attraction Manager)

*“I know for a fact that they spend a lot. You might not think it but it would be different if they didn’t come; places would close.”* (N, Tourism employee)

*“That is why you need the visitors. . . There aren’t enough of us (island inhabitants) to keep things going.”* (V, Accommodation Manager)

Secondly, tourism could be seen to contribute to the diversity and vibrancy of local cultural and natural landscapes. Economic input from tourism was thought by many participants to be a

source of funding for protecting natural and built resources. Furthermore, visitor interest generated awareness among the public and politicians, which could assist conservation.

*“It is the fact that you can say this is something tourists visit that is something they enjoy which makes them (government) have to appreciate and look after more.”* (J, Conservationist)

*“Yeah and also awareness, that’s also the key. If people don’t know there is anything there to look after then why the hell would they look after it? I guess, yeah, money and awareness for us from tourism.”* (K, Conservationist)

There were meanwhile, few negative comments about impacts of tourism on the natural environment. These tended to be reserved for specific policies or niche groups, and qualified by comments that the majority of visitors were environmentally sensitive. Indeed, two conservationists believed the tourists were more so than local inhabitants, who took environmental resources for granted. Hence all interviewees largely disagreed when asked whether tourists caused environmental problems or would bring them if numbers increased. Opinion seemed to be that the island could handle more tourism without environmental harm, and that if problems were to emerge, they would be dealt with.

*“I don’t think there will ever be enough boats (to cause disturbances to marine wildlife) and by the time that happens there should already be codes of conduct to pre-empt. The impacts are pretty well known so would pre-empt. So yeah tourism is good.”* (K, Conservationist)

*“I think I’d like to see us moving towards that and then worry about it rather than worry about it in advance.”* (P, Attraction Manager)

Thirdly, social benefits of tourists hosting were discussed at length by participants. Much cited was the added atmosphere, social space, social variety, and social opportunities which tourists

bring to the islands' bars and clubs. Discussion was of (within island) domestic tourism sharing public spaces and experiences with visitors who helped to create a convivial and holiday atmosphere. Distinctions were frequently made between the vibrant summer season and quieter winter period, with participants often stating how much they looked forward to having visitors about. Examples of migrants moving to the island, friendships, business partnerships, and romantic relationships, between hosts and guests, exemplified the socio-cultural exchanges stimulated. And stories about sexual encounters with tourists were recounted. These were novel, memorable, exciting and positive events. Such interactions appeared to be made all the more possible because of the anonymity of encounters with tourists in an otherwise small close knit community. Such communities were discussed by some in terms of being restrictive and homogenous. For instance, sexuality might be suppressed for fear of being subject to 'gossip'.

*"All the bikers are everywhere having a nice time and it gives the town a busy feel... I'm really sorry the day after they've gone."* (J, Conservationist)

*"A visitor is in the pub; finally someone can flirt with not related to!"* (S, Resident)

*"There were two of them (tourists) in the pub. . . Took him home with me (laughs). The next night went back and got his friend!"* (R, Resident)

*"I hate how everybody knows all your business; nothing is private."* (A, Resident)

Other respondents discussed affirmative emotions of seeing others enjoy their locale, positive social interactions with visitors and appreciation of the extra bustle created. The added atmosphere of the summer season was a welcomed contrast with the quieter winter period. Triggering memories was important for residents, whether reminding them that they live in an attractive location and hence feeling fortunate they do so, or bringing back nostalgia for past experiences of their own.

*“Ramsey on a summers day; it only takes a few tourists wandering round and you feel like you could be in the south of France.” (S, Resident)*

*“Reminds me that I live here in this place people want to come on holiday, how lucky I am I actually do live by the sea everyone wants that and it is two minutes from my door and I don’t even notice it’s there now in a way, so, so they coming, it reminds me.” (C, Retired Accommodation Manager)*

*“It is lovely to see the kiddies playing on the beach. It used to be full of kiddies years ago and I’d take my (x) down and sit under the pier. . . reminds me of that time.” (B, Resident)*

#### **4.2 Consequences of Tourism Decline**

Research highlighted the largely positive assessments of local tourism by Isle of Man stakeholders across economic, environmental and social dimensions. Accordingly a downturn in tourism was believed by all participants to undermine such positive impacts. Economically speaking many examples were given of closed shops, hotels and other tourist focussed facilities. At the same time some respondents worried that the increasingly limited range of island facilities could disappoint visitors and potentially damage the tourism industry. Two industry managers described the industry as at risk of losing ‘critical mass’ and becoming unviable in terms of adequate infrastructure or bed-spaces to host tourists. Moreover, the state of decline of town centres viewed as increasingly littered, dirty, and with many empty shops, was a source of disappointment for many residents. Tourism decline was henceforth described as something of a vicious circle, with reduced economic impacts undermining investment in the industry, predicating further loss of competitiveness and decline.

*“I haven’t got a job if tourist numbers go down. . . local people don’t use the trains, if tourists go down I don’t think, (pause), they cost a lot, I don’t think they can keep it up.” (A, Tourism employee)*



*“I am concerned we seem to be gaining fewer visitors each year which in my opinion leaves the economy quite vulnerable.”* (S, Resident)

*“Douglas is very ordinary really; you have so few shops it isn’t even a small town across. It probably does not give a good impression to people getting off the boat and then if they stay there.”*  
(P, Attraction Manager)

*“I think that is why (tourist numbers are declining); because the civic centres are quite run down and for most visitors that is what they see, not the country.”* (N, Tourism employee)

Regards the environmental dimension, tourism decline had for a significant minority of respondents caused natural, cultural and built landscape damage. This was described through loss of architecture and facilities replacement. Respondents talked about the loss of historic buildings, hotel and leisure facilities. Others were disappointed by habitat loss and scenic damage. It was clear from discussion that such facilities loss and landscape damage also had social impacts, such as restrictions on indoor and outdoor leisure opportunities. There was feeling that such changes had made the island less unique, less attractive, and severed links to the past. By contrast one long term resident remembered the diverse facilities associated with tourism in the past, including many activities provided such as dances, tennis and plays. These and the social interactions and associated atmosphere were all missed by herself and others.

*“If you could have seen it: all the way down to the beach it was boarding houses, shops at the bottom all along the terrace. . . It’s not the same now they’ve all gone and they’re going to pull the rest down now aren’t they but it does need it now to look at the state of it. It was beautiful, lovely, really lovely.”* (B, Resident)

*“They closed the Grand Island (hotel) last year. It isn’t just the loss of a historic building, or that they are just putting up a load more flats we don’t need, but it was a facility for all the community... school concerts held there... now they have nowhere to go.”* (J, Conservationist)

*“If they (developers) had their way, they would turn the whole island into one big housing estate. . . They have done it to Jersey, it is (now) a horrible place. . . and they are letting it happen here.”* (X, Resident)

Socially speaking meanwhile, just as sharing the island with outsiders appeared to bring a sense of affirmation for many participants, loss of tourism had brought one of rejection. A heightened sense of peripherality emerged because of reduced outsider interest. All interviewees regarded off-islanders awareness of the Isle of Man’s existence limited. At best knowledge was of few attributes; typically, unfavourable ones centred on offshore finance and social conservatism.

*“We are not the Isle of Wight! Oh for God’s sake we are not the Isle of Wight!”* (L, Resident)

*“Well it certainly doesn’t help does it; no one knows we exist which is actually better than the image we have amongst those that do; sort of a cold, wet Jersey with attitudes out of the Wicker Man.”* (X, Resident)

*“I mean nobody outside of the Isle of Man knows anything about the Isle of Man, I mean before I moved here I knew TT and that’s pretty much it. That’s why history and culture (need to be better promoted to attract niche tourists); I knew nothing about them... We get a lot of tourists asking us about it, saying they never knew there were whales and dolphins in Manx waters. They are kind of amazed by it.”* (K, Conservationist)

*“I came here from England and I was amazed at how ignorant I was about the Isle of Man when I got here.”* (P, Attraction Manager)

Ignorance of the island was perceived by residents to rob them of their identity, as the Manx nationality is little recognized in wider contexts, such as job application forms. Furthermore, vocal and often offensive stereotypes about the Isle of Man had been encountered by a significant minority of participants. These serve to undermine identity and generate negative emotions.

*“You say ‘I’m Manx’ and people just look at you like you’re crazy. To most people that doesn’t exist. Even after I explain it they just say; ‘so you’re English’.” (S, Resident)*

*“It’s horrible the way people see the Isle of Man. I hate it.” (A, Resident)*

*“I introduced myself, and first thing was asked: ‘Oh so is your father also your brother then and your mum your sister? You’re all interrelated over there aren’t you?’ I was so angry I just wanted to leave.” (N, Tourism Employee)*

## **5.0 Discussion**

Research on the Isle of Man illustrates tourism, despite long-term decline, continues to be viewed as an important contributor to local economic, environmental and social diversity. As outlined in the literature, such increased diversity makes the island a more attractive and viable place to inhabit (see also Andriotis, 2005, Buhalis, 1999, Keane, 1992, Marjavaara, 2007). To illustrate, tourism was valued for maintaining facilities, generating government revenue and providing employment. Both more people, and the facilities supported by more people, add to the atmosphere and entertainment opportunities available to residents. Important social space and potential social opportunities are also supported by tourism. Findings confirm literature which demonstrates the diverse and community wide economic, environmental, and social benefits of hosting tourism (for summary see Rodriguez *et al.*, 2010).

Such impacts of tourism strongly influenced stakeholders’ civic identity. This identity is made up of one’s own enjoyment and pride in living in a place, and is influenced by the range of facilities, quality of environments, and social variation available, as well as the pride generated through experiencing external interest in local culture (Canavan, 2013a, 2014, Marcouiller, 1997, Pennington-Gray *et al.*, 2005, Smith, 2003). For example, tourist attention confirms the attractiveness of a location to a resident. Research additionally illustrated how hosting tourists can trigger positive emotions associated with nostalgia, or a re-appreciation of surroundings sometimes

taken for granted. In this way, visitor hosting both stimulated positive emotions, including nostalgia for older residents, and confirmed the pride invested by residents in their location.

Conversely, a reduction in tourists had created a sense of loss for many, and concern was expressed regards continuing decline of the industry. Comment was on the closure of facilities, demolition of traditional architecture, lessened atmosphere, and reduced distinctiveness. Furthermore, for almost all participants, tourism decline was associated with a growing sense of peripherality, as the island was seen as increasingly isolated from, and irrelevant to, the wider UK. Increasing ignorance about and negative stereotypes of the island, was widely felt to result.

Therefore, a contribution of this study is to reveal that tourism decline can lead to a sense of lost attractiveness of place. This is in terms of the loss of important economic, social and environmental benefits brought by tourism, and also respective changes wrought. For example, tourism decline may bring accompanying disruption to traditional roles, crafts, facilities, and architectural landscapes (see also Cooper, 1995, Hampton and Christensen, 2007, Lim and Cooper, 2009). This is also in terms of a widely held perception of rejection by and increased isolation from the outside world (Canavan, 2013a). Both of these appear to undermine civic identity. Findings extend current literature by demonstrating that the benefits of tourism remain persistent, relevant, and significant, despite decline and shifts to other economic sectors (Canavan, 2013b, 2014). Research has identified the unique, diverse and persistent benefits of the tourism industry perceived by local stakeholders despite long-term decline. As a result of decline, there is a sense of economic, social and environmental loss.

### **5.1 Practitioner Recommendations**

A contribution of this paper is to call attention to problems of tourism decline. The Isle of Man serves as a warning of the many challenges faced by post-mature destinations. Irrespective of problems associated with economic decline, fortunately avoided by the Isle of Man, considerable

landscape upheaval resulting from tourism decline was noted. The various economic, social and environmental changes that accompany tourism decline, such as changing facilities use and availability, may be difficult for stakeholders to adapt to. Yet evidence is that severity of tourism decline continues to go underappreciated.

Attention is therefore called to the importance of destination management during the post-maturity period. As a first step towards successful management, practitioners must bear in mind the importance of maintaining tourism, at least in part, in order to avoid some of the negatives associated with decline. This is likely to be especially the case for peripheral locations where tourism may bring especially unique, relevant and valued impacts. Strategies which seek to more sustainably manage tourism de-growth and decline, ought therefore, to be considered by industry practitioners in such contexts. Practitioners could adopt some of the many strategies outlined in the literature for combating decline (Aitchison and Evans, 2003, Baum, 1998, Cooper, 1995), or revitalising destinations which have previously stagnated (Bull and Weed, 1999, Scherrer *et al.*, 2009, Sedmak and Mihalic, 2008, Swann, 2010, Theuma, 2004).

Typically these strategies place emphasis on conservation and rehabilitation of environments. Hence a particular focus should be upon establishing protected areas, designating particular landscapes, buildings and cultural practises as a conservation priority, and funding organisations involved with environmental and cultural conservation. Such efforts may counter some of the negative effects of tourism decline, ease the transition to a post-tourism economy, preserve environments, and potentially even revive the industry by restoring and emphasising unique cultural and natural landscapes. As noted, such revival was widely desired by residents in the Isle of Man. Creating a National Park on island was an idea mooted by several participants which would appear an ideal solution in terms of providing landscape protection and promotion which may benefit both inhabitants and tourism.

Likewise, focus on developing niche tourism is a component of many sustainable tourism development strategies. This would appear relevant during the stagnation and decline phases also.

Niche tourists may be a viable target in that they are typified as willing to travel to out of the way, less well known, and less well serviced locations, in search of their own particular interests (Robinson and Novelli, 2007). Hence niche visitors might be a realistic target group with which to continue to support industry, maintain linkages with the wider world, and combat an increased sense of isolation; as noted in the Isle of Man. Niche trends towards ironic or nostalgic tourism might for example offer potential, as has been the case in other previously stagnant resorts (Swann, 2010).

Lastly, increasing micro-domestic tourism might offer valuable support to local tourist enterprises, maintain a touristic atmosphere of benefit to both inhabitants and visitors, and help to make up for declines in overall visitor numbers. As outlined by Canavan (2013b), such micro-domestic tourism encompasses those touristic activities undertaken by island residents within their own island, and may be a potentially significant as well as reliable niche tourism market. Practitioners might focus on stimulating local demand for tourism products through local marketing campaigns. Special offers and events may foster domestic tourism during shoulder and off-seasons when there is limited scope for attracting overseas visitors.

Recommendations for supporting tourism in the post-mature context are summarised in Table 2.

**Table 2: Recommendations Outline**

Recommendation	Reasoning	Good Practise
Appreciate the unique and long-term relevant role of tourism	Rapid declines in tourism can be difficult for local stakeholders to adapt to. Tourism decline can reduce advantages brought by the sector and negatively affect economic, social and environmental landscape diversity.	Recognise the importance of tourism. Continue to invest in the sector. Work with and monitor local stakeholder attitudes and respond to these.
Environmental conservation	Tourism decline can undermine landscape diversity and reduce funding for conservation etc. Conservation measures will help to protect these for the benefit of local inhabitants. Niche visitors may value high quality cultural and natural resources. Conservation and rehabilitation may support future tourism revitalisation.	Establish protected areas. Conserve resources. Coordinate with local stakeholders. Limit environmental impacts of new industries.
Target niche visitors	These may be realistic targets to attract. Reduces isolation. Maintains cultural and social exchanges. General trends towards niche tourism may support revitalisation opportunities.	Identify niche tourists to whom local landscapes may hold special appeal. Target resources at marketing to and then providing high quality visit experiences for.
Stimulate local (micro-domestic tourism)	Local demand for entertainment may be recruited to maintain atmosphere, facilities, and incomes for tourism. This brings mutually rewarding benefits to residents and industry alike.	Promote local events, festivals and attractions within as well as without a community. Make discounts and special offers available to local residents during shoulder and off-seasons.

## Conclusion

Interviewing revealed the great affection for tourism in the Isle of Man among island stakeholders. This was based upon the perceived economic, environmental and social contributions of the industry. In each case tourism is viewed as having a significant and positive impact, with few negative side effects. Widespread support for tourism translated into a common desire for further investment in and expansion of the sector in order to further benefit. Tourism decline meanwhile has negatively affected landscape diversity. Facilities closure, fewer social opportunities, lost atmosphere and social space, physical heritage loss, reduced atmosphere, and perceived outsider ignorance, rejection and stereotyping, were all identified. These were found to undermine civic identity and increase a sense of isolation from the wider world. As such, findings concur with much of the extant literature in highlighting the important role of tourism in peripheral areas, where outsider attention helps to create a sense of value by and engagement with wider society (see Ireland, 2003, Saarinen, 2006).

Current lack of research into cold water islands and post mature destinations may contribute to assumptions that tourism is only of economic value to a community and therefore that it is a sector interchangeable with others. Yet tourism is recognized in this case, as potentially bringing diverse and unique economic, environmental and social benefits. Moreover, these impacts may often be more so than other industries, potentially more equitably distributed, and may be particularly relevant in peripheral locations. Hence tourism theory and practise needs to better reflect that tourism decline may bring significant negative change, particularly in peripheral locations, and even where successful replacement industry is established.

Current assessments of tourism, which largely fail to investigate the post-mature context, may be overly pessimistic and serve to undermine investment in sustainable industry management long-term (see Lepp, 2007, Scheyvens and Momsen, 2008, Tao and Wall, 2009). As with sustainable development, sustainable decline may be associated with the speed and scale of change.



Reductions in these may facilitate the adaptability of local stakeholders (see Canavan, 2014). Hence continued support for tourism in post-mature locations is a necessity. A number of post-mature destination management recommendations have been briefly illustrated to highlight potential practitioner responses. Although overall decline may be difficult to address, there is potential to better manage the process in a more gradual, less disruptive fashion (Canavan, 2014). Perhaps the most important step to take is in embedding awareness of the uniqueness and importance of tourism to peripheral area communities, hence potential side effects of decline.

As a single-case study, ability to generalize from this paper may be limited, particularly as islands are each unique and far from homogenous (Milne, 1992). Limitations also exist as qualitative methods can only research and portray a small sample. However, as an initial exploration of an under-researched topic, research reveals that tourism decline can bring social problems not easily addressed by other industries. Further study is now required to draw stronger conclusions and improve ability to generalize from results.

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