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**Title: Food tourism and events as tools for social sustainability?**

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**Abstract****Purpose:**

Food tourism and events are often prefaced as tools for sustainability within national and intra-national food and agricultural policy contexts. Yet, the realities of enhancing sustainability through food tourism and events are problematic. Sustainability itself is often conceived broadly within policy proclaiming the benefits of food tourism and events, with a need for further deconstruction of the ways each dimension of sustainability – economic, environmental, social and cultural – independently enhances sustainability. The lack of clarity concerning the conceptual utilisation of sustainability works to compromise its value and utilisation for the development of food tourism and events in peripheral areas. In recognition, this paper turns attention to social sustainability within the context of a local food festival, to ask: in what ways is social sustainability enhanced through a local food festival, who benefits from this sustainability, and how?

**Design:**

The paper examines the development of a local food festival in a rural coastal community, on Scotland's west coast. The concept of social capital is utilised to examine the unfolding power relations between committee members, as well as the committee and other social groups. Observant participation undertaken over a 10 month period, between December 2015 and September 2016, renders insights into the ways event planning processes were dependent on the pre-existing accrual of social capital by certain individuals and groups.

**Findings:**

Local food festivals have the potential to enhance social sustainability, in offering opportunity to bridge relations across certain diverse groups and foster an environment conducive to cohabitation. Bridging, however, is dependent on preconceived social capital and power relations, which somewhat inhibits social integration for all members of a community. The temporally confined characteristics of events generates difficulties in overcoming the uneven enhancement of social sustainability. Care, thus, needs to be upheld in resolutely claiming enhancement of social sustainability through local food events. Further, broad conceptualisations of 'community' need to be challenged during event planning processes; for it is difficult to develop a socially inclusive

approach that ensures integration for diverse segments without recognising what constitutes a specific 'community'.

### **Originality:**

This paper is situated within the context of a peripheral, yet growing body of literature exploring the potential of events to develop social sustainability. In extending this work, the paper turns attention to the gastronomic - examining the extent to which social sustainability is enhanced through a local food festival, for a rural coastal community – Mallaig, on Scotland's west coast.

### **Introduction**

Food tourism and events are often prefaced as tools for sustainability in peripheral areas within national and intra-national food and agricultural policy contexts (cf. Scotland's Ambition 2030 (Scotland Food and Drink, 2017a), the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy (European Commission, 2010) and United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) (2017)). Perceived beneficial in the incorporation of outcomes beyond the economic – food tourism and events are claimed to serve as alternative food outlets that improve the sustainability of 'traditional' farming (including the landscape and communities sustained through such activities), whilst simultaneously combatting certain challenges experienced by food producers, rendered through the mainstream commercial 'conventional' sector (Boniface, 2003; Ilbery and Kneafset, 2000). More specifically, local food networks, formed through spaces such as markets and events, have been found to enable closer relationships between producers, as well as producers and consumers (Einarsen and Mykletun, 2009; Everett and Aitchison, 2008). Increased demand for food festivals has been found to animate the emergence of educational visitor attractions, inspire the retention and development of culinary and agricultural skills, and offer dynamic traditional industries and small businesses a lifeline (Everett and Aitchison, 2008). For attendees, local food promotion is understood to enhance the visitor experience in connecting consumers to the region and its perceived culture and heritage (Sims, 2009).

Yet, the realities of enhancing sustainability through food tourism and events are problematic for several reasons (Sims, 2010). By way of example, straight forward narratives claiming the potentials of local food promotion overlook debates concerning how environmentally sustainable local food actually is (Edwards-Jones et al 2008); there are also issues relating to the potentials of small producers to compete with the global food and tourism sectors (Ilbery et al 2003), as well as the normative value judgements that stem through food promotion relating to the ways food, tourism

and event sectors ought to operate within particular landscapes (de Jong and Varley, 2017; Lee and Arcodia, 2011; Sims, 2010).

Further to this, sustainability itself is also broadly conceived within national and intra-national food and agricultural policy proclaiming the benefits of food tourism and events (cf. Scotland Food and Drink, 2017a, 2017b; UNWTO, 2017); with a need for further deconstruction of the ways each dimension of sustainability – economic, environmental, social and cultural – independently enhances sustainability. Through holistic conceptualisations of sustainability, certain dimensions have been prioritised, without sufficient attention granted to the complex, and at times contradictory, ways each aspect of sustainability unfolds within specific place based contexts (Everett and Slocum, 2013). Moreover, social and cultural sustainability are not monolithic and dichotomous, where a practice either is, or is not, sustainable (McClinchey, 2017; Stevenson, 2016). Such recognition is crucial in understanding how sustainability works differently across various social groups, and ensuring analysis of sustainability within tourism and events is focused beyond a specific individual practice or social group (Blichfeldt and Halkier, 2014). What remains peripheral is work examining the ways particular groups make use of and benefit from particular practices longer term, while others remain marginal or restricted; as well as recognition of how certain individuals possess the ability to construct understandings of ‘sustainability’ and claim certain phenomena as ‘sustainable’.

The lack of clarity concerning the conceptual utilisation of sustainability, within tourism and events scholarship, works to compromise its value and utilisation for the development of food tourism and events in peripheral areas (Stevenson, 2016). Further, despite its contested positioning, understandings of the various aspects of sustainability ought to be examined in consideration of the continued interest by policy-makers in the incorporation of sustainability narratives within food tourism and event contexts. In consideration, we here turn focus to *social* sustainability, examining the complex and nuanced ways the social unfolds through a food festival in a rural coastal community.

This paper is situated within the context of a peripheral, yet growing body of literature exploring the potential of events to develop social sustainability (c.f. Arcodia and Whitford, 2006; McClinchey, 2017; Pernecky, 2013; Stevenson, 2016; Thomson, and Schlenker, 2011). In extending this work, the paper turns attention to the gastronomic - examining the extent to which social sustainability is enhanced through a local food festival, for a rural coastal community – Mallaig, on Scotland’s west coast. It does so by examining the perspectives of those involved in the event, and asks: in what ways is social sustainability enhanced through a local food festival, who benefits from this sustainability, and how? To answer this question, we turn first to the conceptual framework,

identifying social capital as a useful way through which to examine the dynamics of social sustainability within event contexts. Having outlined the conceptual framing, the paper moves to discuss method, outlining how *observant* participation was utilised to generate nuanced insight into the positioning of a local food festival for a rural coastal community. We turn next to a background discussion of Mallaig, and the festival, Taste the Wild, before moving to the results and discussion. Across three discussion sections it is shown how uneven social capital ensures that this event's potentials to garner social sustainability is confined through pre-existing and historically informed relations, as well as the temporal constraints characteristic of event planning by small community groups. The paper ends in assessing the possibilities of local food events in generating social sustainability and the feasibility of a socially inclusive approach.

Whilst not wanting to prescribe essentialised understanding of social sustainability, before moving to a discussion of the literature, it is helpful to provide a working definition. We begin with the World Commission on Environment and Development's (1987) framing, which suggests social sustainability as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Whilst WCED's definition is helpful in highlighting the importance of long term accountability, it is limited in its acknowledgement of how development influences social groups in varying ways within the present. In recognition, Polese and Stern's (2000, 15-16) conceptualisation is further drawn on:

'Development that is compatible with harmonious evolution of civil society, fostering an environment conducive to the compatible cohabitation of culturally and socially diverse groups while at the same time encouraging social integration, with the improvements in the quality of life for all segments of the population'.

We here prioritise a focus on social sustainability, in light of its marginal positioning within discussions of sustainable development. We acknowledge, however, that essentialised distinctions between social, cultural, economic and environmental sustainability are superficial and unproductive – with ontological realities complex and overlapping.

### **Understanding social sustainability through social capital**

In making sense of social sustainability, the concept of social capital is useful (Stevenson, 2016). In the presence of social capital accumulation across a community, it is perceivable that its accrual is likely to contribute towards a locations social sustainability (Stevenson, 2016). What is particularly productive in the deployment of social capital in examining social sustainability, is the ability to use the concept to help interpret power relations within social groups and across a community.

Inequality and social exclusions are understood to increase in the absence of social capital. If a phenomenon leads to the exacerbation of existing marginalisation and uneven power relations, it is conceivable that there is an absence of social sustainability (McClinchey, 2016).

The possibilities of social sustainability are largely dependent on the specificities of place. Unequal power relations within host communities (Yang, Ryan and Zhang, 2014), differences in government priorities at the local and national scale and pressures exerted by forces outside the local area (such as, industry and trading interests (Scheyvens, 2011)), all influence social capital, and the consequential ways social sustainability unfolds. Disparities within communities (unemployment, socio-economic background and skill set), mean that certain segments of a community are able to participate in social activities more than others and thus undertake more active roles in decision making (Dugarova and Lavers, 2014). Further, claims relating to what is sustainable are contested and constantly negotiated by individuals and social groups (Stevenson, 2016), with such contestations and negotiations indicating the power dynamics at play.

In examining the ways social sustainability and power relate, we draw on both Putnam's (1993, 2000) and Bourdieu's (1984) conceptualisations of social capital. Putnam's theorisations of social capital assisted in conceptualising the broad social context of the food festival – attending to the ways capital effects outcomes at the scale of organisations, institutions or societies – rather than individual performance within particular social structures and contexts (Putnam, 1993). A Bourdieusian approach assisted in turning attention to the individual, providing explanation for the relations between individual agency and broader social structures (Stevenson, 2016). This was helpful in characterising the ways social groups or individuals are bound up in social structures, whilst simultaneously possessing potential to (re)confirm or trouble social structures – depending on their own subjectivity (class, gender, nationality and so on) and the spatial and temporal context.

There are diverging understandings relating to the extent in which social capital relates to the individual or social group (Arneil, 2007). For the purposes of the present paper, social capital is a collective asset, associated with all members of a social group. At the same time, however, members within certain groups possess varying forms and levels of social capital, in response to their subjectivity and position of power within the collective. We therefore follow Bourdieu (1997) in understanding social capital as:

'The aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to... membership in a group, which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively owned capital, a 'credential' which entitles them to credit in the various senses of the word.' (1997, p. 51)

Social capital is produced through networks of relationships and membership within particular groups. Engagement with such groups engenders bonds and trust, and over time, works to create shared values, obligations and a sense of community that shape action and cooperation. On this view, through group engagement, mutual benefits are developed – which accumulate over time – reinforcing collaboration and thus strengthening the potential social power of the group. Following Bourdieu (1997) society is unequal, with inequalities dependent on class, nationality, age, historical power relations and so on. In response to inequalities, there is a constant struggle for power and resources between social groups. Those possessing stronger networks and engagement are advantageously positioned in this ongoing social struggle. Social groups who have historically held power are positioned as more likely to possess power into the future, because their networks, experience and knowledge enable further development of connections and access. Following Putnam (1995, 2000), there are two forms of social capital. First, ‘bonding’, refers to close links within a social group, possessing a pre-existing shared identity. Second, ‘bridging’ related to weaker links that work beyond shared identities.

Increasingly, festivals and events are claimed to enhance social capital, and in consequence, social sustainability. By way of example, in an examination of multicultural leisure festivals in Canada, McClinchey (2017) argued for the importance of planned, organised and performed festivals in uniting ethnic cultures. Festivals, for McClinchey (2017), are cultural phenomenon entangled within everyday life; involvement through volunteering thus offered a way for migrants to build and maintain social networks not previously available. Arcodia and Whitford (2006) turned attention to festival attendance, suggesting shared experience and collective knowledge leads to shared world views. Moufakkir and Kelly (2013), conversely, challenged the positive potential of such claims, identifying cultural dissonance and controversy in the development of a local street music festival into a larger international event. Building on the critical approach of Moudakkir and Kelly (2013), Stevenson (2016), likewise questioned the extent to which festivals unite and empower individuals across diverse communities. Stevenson (2016) identified how social capital accrues for those members already engaged in producing the events, where those who know the rules of engagement become privileged through event implementation – exacerbating existing inequalities. Importantly, much of this work has prioritised multicultural events, examining the ways through which cultural festivals provoke stronger relations for migrant social groups. The present paper builds on this work, turning attention to food festivals, as a way to further understand the politics of social sustainability within the context of a small scale event, in a rural, coastal community.

### **Mallaig, Scotland**

Mallaig is a coastal village and port, located on Scotland's west coast. The population is approximately 800. Positioned 100 miles south west of Inverness and 150 miles north west of Glasgow (Figure 1), it is located within the sparsely populated Highland council area; the United Kingdom's largest local government area, with a population of 233,000 across 25,659 km<sup>2</sup> (Highland Council, 2017). Mallaig sits within a taiga biome, which is characteristic of a barren mountainous landscape, mixed with coniferous forests, high rain fall and low temperatures – ensuring a limited carrying capacity for grazing and agriculture. As a result, wild venison and seafood are prevalent, while locally grown fruits, vegetables and dairy produce are scarce compared to the more southern, temperate areas of the United Kingdom. International food systems and a relatively small local population ensure the majority of food produced within the region is exported to markets across Europe and Asia (The Scottish Government, 2016).

***Insert Figure 1 somewhere here. Figure 1: Map of Scotland, illustrating Mallaig's location***

In the early 1900s increasing success of Mallaig's fishing industry led to investment in the rail network, enabling faster connections of trade to larger markets. With new technologies in fishing, by the 1960s Mallaig became the busiest herring port in Europe (Mallaig Heritage Centre, 2017). It was at this time that the majority of Mallaig's infrastructure, as it stands in 2017, was developed (Figure 2) (ref). Mallaig remains physically commanded by the harbour; with only a small number of streets hugging the industrial marine infrastructure and coast (Figure 3). Mallaig's success as a herring port was short. By the 1970s, fish stocks were in decline, while at the same time more direct routes to market were introduced in other locations across the United Kingdom. More recent tightening fishing quotas and the introduction of a number of marine protected areas located just off the Mallaig coast, are claimed to have led to further declines in fish production (Scottish Fishermen's Federation, 2016). The number of vessels and the numbers employed in sea fishing have, in consequence, decreased considerably over the previous decade (Table 1).

***Insert Figure 2 somewhere here. Figure 2: Image of Mallaig harbour***

***Insert Figure 3 somewhere here. Figure 3: Mallaig, Scotland***

***Insert Table 1 somewhere here. Table 1: Individuals employed and number of vessels in Mallaig harbour, 2000 and 2014***

The Marine Harvest<sup>1</sup> harvesting station has served as particularly important in enabling fishing families to remain in the area, with moves from employment in sea fishing to fish harvesting. In 2014, 6.8% of Mallaig's population remain employed in 'agriculture, forestry and fishing', compared to Scotland's average of 1.5% (Office for National Statistics, 2014). The Mallaig Harbour Authority (2017) approximated that 200 Full Time Equivalent positions, more than half of Mallaig's workforce, are employed in positions relating to the harbour; whilst the harbour is understood as crucial in indirectly supporting employment in the tourism and service-related sectors. The harbour and ocean thus remain significant economic and cultural symbols in the region. This continued significance is crucial in understanding the way through which social capital and power relations circulate through Mallaig, and influenced the planning of Taste the Wild.

Tourism and hospitality are also crucial industries, with 11.8% of the population employed in 'accommodation and food services', compared with 7.2% at the national level (Office of National Statistics, 2014). There are no visitor statistics recorded for Mallaig. It is possible, however, to identify growth trends in the region, which are telling of increased tourism experienced within Mallaig. By way of example, Mallaig's main ferry route to Armadale, on the Isle of Skye, increased by 33,490 individual passengers between 2012 to 2016 – from 217,274 to 250,764 (Caeldonian MacBrayne, 2017). Moreover, estimated spend by overseas visitors to the highlands increased by £54 million between 2012 and 2015, while the spend by domestic visitors to the highlands increased by £143 million between 2012 and 2015 (Visit Scotland, 2013 and 2016).

### **Contextualising Taste the Wild**

In understanding the impetus for Taste the Wild, it is important to understand that the development of food tourism and events has become a strategic focus of The Scottish Government. Knight (2016) connects this shift to the establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1999, and the consequential establishment of public sector bodies focused on growing Scotland, rather than the broader United Kingdom. The establishment of the industry leadership body Scotland Food and Drink, in 2007, further generated a narrative around Scottish food. Following from this came the introduction of the first National Food and Drink Policy, *Recipe for Success*, in 2009. Prior to these events, the role of food within tourism policy was marginal. Current policy aims to position Scotland as the 'Land of food and drink', through a number of initiatives promoting local, pristine, high quality food and

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<sup>1</sup> Marine Harvest is an international seafood company, involved in the production, processing and sale of farmed salmon. Marine Harvest has a strong presence on Scotland's west coast, with 49 sea farms. Salmon from all 49 sea farms are transported through the Mallaig Harvest Station, located on Mallaig harbour, then transported 43 miles east for processing in Fort William, before being distributed internationally (Marine Harvest Scotland, 2017).

drink. Food tourism and events has thus become a prioritised government supported avenue for (primarily economic) growth in Scotland, through a number of initiatives including, but not limited to, *EatScotland*, *Provenance on a Plate*, *At Your Service*, *A Taste for Events*, and most recently, *Year of Food and Drink 2015*.

Sustainability narratives are central to Scotland's food and drink initiatives (Scotland Food and Drink 2017a, 2017b). Within the context of Scottish food and drink, however, sustainability is conceived as relating to two dimensions, 'to make a healthy and growing contributions to the Scottish economy; and that by continuing to behave responsibly towards the environment we benefit our reputation and success' (Scotland Food and Drink, 2017b). Here it is clear that 'sustainability' equates to economic and environmental responsibility, to ensure the continued economic success of the industry.

Scotland's *Year of Food and Drink 2015* was a government programme, led in partnership with EventScotland, VisitScotland and Scotland Food and Drink, and was designed as an opportunity 'to enhance the food and drink experience for the visitor' and to 'spotlight, celebrate and promote Scotland's natural larder and quality produce to our people and our visitors' (Business Gateway, 2016). A number of initiatives were implemented by The Scottish Government to support the themed *Year of Food and Drink*. One of which being particularly enticing for smaller, community based organisations: the Community Food Fund. The Community Food Fund entailed £150,000 in funding, to support marketing, events, growth and measurement projects across Scotland. Following an application process, 59 projects organised throughout 2015 and 2016 were supported by the Community Food Fund (The Scottish Government, 2016); one of which being Mallaig's Taste the Wild food festival. The Community Food Fund granted £6,900 to the Taste the Wild organising committee. The largest funding source for the event; serving as the central impetus in organising the event. Additional smaller donations and sponsorship were also received during the organising process.

The Road to the Isles Marketing Group led the development of the Community Food Fund application and were the central actors in the organisation of Taste the Wild. Road to the Isles Marketing Group have a remit to market the 'road to the isles' – that is, the area between Fort William and Mallaig (Figure 1). The group consists of small business owners from the tourism and hospitality industry. The group works on a membership basis, with all hospitality and tourism businesses in the region eligible to become members. It is difficult to ascertain exact numbers of membership, due to membership fluctuations - however, there is a core group of four active members, with many others forming lesser participatory roles. Crucially, neither Road to the Isles or

the Taste the Wild organising committee are representative of Mallaig tourism and hospitality, with a number of tourism and hospitality businesses not participating in either.

Two leading objectives stemmed from the event. First, Taste the Wild was to assist in the development of a West Highlands food identity. Second, the event was to aid in developing stronger regional networks between producers, as well as producers and consumers. The event itself took place over one day in September 2016. The festival was held on the harbour, and within the fish and prawn markets; featuring 22 food stalls from local producers and restaurants, cooking demonstrations, panel discussions about local food politics and competitions (see Figure 4 for event programme).

***Insert Figure 4 somewhere here. Figure 4: Taste the Wild Programme***

## **Method**

Clear articulations of ‘researcher’ and ‘community member’ were far from clear cut in undertaking this research, and were further blurred through the positionality of the researchers. The first author is Australian, having moved to the area to undertake the research project. Newly arrived, the first author held limited knowledge of place and community prior to involvement – although became increasingly entangled within the community through involvement with the event over an 18-month period throughout 2015 and 2016, as well as through more informal social involvement in the area over this time. The second author, while originally from Yorkshire, had lived in the area for eight years where he established a tourism research centre based at the local university. Through his role at the university and various community projects, the second author was familiar with the area of Mallaig and much of its community. So much so, that much of the university’s involvement in this event stemmed from the second author’s personal relationships with particular members of the organising committee. This level of personal involvement is important to the direction that this work took. Both members of the research team became part of the organising committee, attending meetings and assisting in plans – requiring constant negotiation of identity positions. Without the second authors prior involvement it is unlikely either author would have been invited to become committee members to the same extent, thus inhibiting insight and observation. Following Brown (2007), our material engagement with the event is most aptly described through the method of observant participation, rather than the more conventional and detached participant observation.

More specifically, involvement included attending meetings at least once every two weeks, between December 2015 and September 2016. Here insights were generated into decision making processes undertaken by the committee and its varying motivations and expectations. These insights enhanced

understanding relating to how social capital worked within the organising committee, and with the committee's relations with other social groups across Mallaig. The authors also contributed their own skills when and where relevant, and thus became involved in organising stallholders, licencing, marketing, branding, setting up on the day of the event and so on. Such close involvement aimed to assist organisers in gaining support for and implementing the event, whilst also rendering insights regarding for whom social sustainability might have been enhanced through the event.

Besides the two researchers, committee members were all voluntary, and were members of the Road to the Isles Marketing Group. Not all members of the Road to the Isles Marketing Group, however, were festival committee members. Committee numbers fluctuated throughout the process, being as low as 5, and reaching to as high as 15 – depending on each individual's commitments, levels of engagement and the amount of work required for the event at any one time.

A research diary, with reflections written after each meeting, assisted in collating encounters and discussions relating to the circulation of social capital within the organising committee, and other individuals and groups more peripherally involved in the event. We recognise that the nature of the authors involvement resulted in co-production of the both the research and the event itself. The authors are further alert to the ways we too have accrued capital through event organisation. Perhaps most evidently, through the opportunity to publish research findings as academic articles.

There are a range of interdisciplinary approaches grouped together under the term 'discourse analysis'; all of which broadly seek to understand the powers and systems of knowledge mediated through text and textual performance. Certain scholars have turned to Foucauldian approaches to understand the ways discursive contexts are constantly (re)figured and (re)created through individual talk, text and performance (Hannam and Knox, 2005). For the present paper, Foucauldian discourse analysis was chosen because we were concerned with the power relations relating to social capital; specifically, the ways individuals and social groups accrue power through the production of a local food festival. Alternative forms of discourse analysis, such as semiotic analysis, have, by contrast, been noted as limited in their ability to understand the role of power, and the way through which it circulates between individuals and social groups (Hannam and Knox, 2005).

Foucauldian discourse analysis was applied to the research diary to identify themes, emotive language and understandings drawn on, by both the committee members and author, to make sense of the food festival. The Foucauldian approach enabled insights into the sets of ideas individuals draw on to help make sense of the world around them. Rather than seeking to discover truth or the origin of a statement, Foucauldian discourse analysis uncovers the internal mechanisms through which certain structures and rules over statements are maintained about people, events, food and

so on, that position 'what is' as unchangeable, normal and common-sense. Priority, in utilising discourse analysis, was to focus on the effects a particular cultural text has on one's performance, speech and thought, by examining its production and social context (Waite, 2005). The methodological strength of this approach is thus in its ability to move beyond representation, to uncover power relations that affect the ways individuals act, feel and think.

Following Rose (2001), Foucauldian discourse analysis involved a three-step process: familiarisation, coding and silences. Familiarisation involved reading and rereading diary entries, examining the relationships between statements, groups of statements and relations between different texts. Coding, required listing emergent themes and noting where they occur in text. Here, particular attention was granted to the ways each theme is given meaning, by whom and the particular kinds of knowledge produced through text. Incoherence and inconsistencies were granted particular attention as they pointed to potential moments where dominant discourses could be troubled. Finally, it was crucial to acknowledge who and what was missing from texts. Attending to silences underscored the social differences between people and the ways discourses are used to maintain understandings of local food festivals, place and social sustainability.

## **Results and discussion**

### *The role of power in defining the 'local'*

In organising Taste the Wild member's objectives were not united – with two broad motivating, yet competing, discourses permeating the group. A small number of members, driven by the politics of the alternative food movement, sought to use the festival as a catalyst to encourage Mallaig residents to source food from closer to home, by increasing awareness and networks between producers, and producers and consumers, in the region. For the majority of members, however, the festival was conceived as more than just a space and outlet for seasonal local produce – although this was still a key concern and used as justification for event funding. For this latter group, the festival rather formed part of efforts to add value to the local economy, through branding Mallaig as a foodie destination. Local food advocacy, therefore, was much more than a desire for alternative local food systems. Members of the latter group possessed the social capital to dominate decision making within the organising committee; this is because this latter group were of a larger representation within the committee, having positioned themselves as the initial instigators of the festival and possessing more time and resources to attend festival meetings.

Broadly, this latter group was driven by particular notions of 'quality'. Given the limited local produce available in the region (broadly understood as the area linking Fort William and Mallaig

(Figure 1)), a number of products understood by this group to be integral to a successful local food festival were absent. While there was some resistance to the inclusion of stallholders from further afield led by a concern with food miles, the position of the core committee members prevailed. Beef, wine, sea salt and coffee businesses located across Scotland up to 160 miles (Scotland's total width being 192 miles) were invited to take part. Stallholders located beyond the region were chosen through very particular understandings of quality, rather than proximity. The construction of quality, in this context, referring to brands drawing on conceptualisation of small scale, artisanal practices, which promoted raw materials and methods, and fair-trade sourcing practices – rather than the produce being necessarily Scottish. Figure 5 illustrates the geographical positioning of each stallholder – with markers 6, 11, 14 and 16 identifying the locations of the coffee, wine, sea salt and meat businesses involved in Taste the Wild. The remaining markers represent stallholders located within the Mallaig region.

***Insert Figure 5 somewhere here. Figure 5: Business locations of Taste the Wild stallholders***

The inclusion of stallholders located from further afield created interesting intersections between the local, national and global. Stemming from a perception of the region as lacking in foods recognised to be imperative to a successful contemporary food festival, generated impetus to question essentialized characterisations and extend the boundaries of 'local'. The intersection of all these elements worked to break down facile distinctions between local and global food systems and troubled simplistic assumptions relating to what belongs within a regional food identity (Sims, 2010). At the same time, however, this small example brings into question what it even means to eat locally and promote local food through food festivals in a taiga environment with a low carrying capacity, increasingly influenced by globalised, contemporary trends positioning foods and food events in very specific ways. National pressure in promoting Scotland as the 'Land of Food and Drink', and the various initiatives and forms of funding directed at the regional scale to enact such promotion, overlooks such specificities of place and the decision making processes through which understandings of local produce are determined.

Characterisations of quality raised questions around what is meant by, and who gets to determine, meanings of the 'local'. Within the context of Scotland, where food tourism and events are central players in the promotion of food and drink, the tourism and hospitality industries are positioned with the power, to a certain extent, to determine such divisions through the planning and promotion of events. At the local scale, power was further leveraged by the organising committee itself, because it was this group who had time, funding and a particular skill set who were able to utilise

the event to determine the requirements of belonging and publicly present particular framings of 'local'.

Within the context of Scotland, local event funding serves as a way to bring communities together and enable them to collaborate. However, contradictions in event objectives within the organising committee sit uneasily with such government initiatives, emphasising a potential limit in a community's capacity to enhance social sustainability through an event. There are tensions between processes associated with promoting and staging events for branding purposes and those related to fostering civic engagement and strengthening local relations. A combination of committee power dynamics, member's positionalities and fixed timescales provoked pressure in generating decisions efficiently. Inevitably, quick and pressured decisions influenced the ability of all committee members to engage and contribute to decision making, in ways that represented equity in involvement.

#### *The dynamics of social capital and place*

Mallaig's power dynamics were complex. Whilst the organising committee was powerfully positioned to brand the Mallaig region through the event, they were cautious to align this image with the symbols, performances and discourses associated with Mallaig's fishing industry. By way of example, in designing the event layout, the organising committee focused on reinterpreting the spaces and symbols of the fishing industry, positioning stallholders in the prawn and fish markets and around the harbour - while once utilitarian fishing materials (such as nets and creels (wicker baskets used to catch seafood)) were reimagined as decorative devices. Narratives drawn on in the promotion of the event focused on Mallaig's historic positioning as Britain's busiest herring port, in attempts to add authenticity to the food tourism experience. Images of 'fresh', 'wild' langoustines, scallops, crab and herring, and the hardworking, working class, masculine fisherman, were central framings through which marketing promotion unfolded (cf. Devine, 2016; Patrick, 2016; Trew, 2016).

Aware of the continued social capital of the fishing industry within Mallaig, the organising committee were willing to go only so far with their own agendas without recognising their considerations. Unlike other types of food producers in the region, for example, all of Mallaig's fishing industry was invited to take part in the event. This was despite awareness among organisers that some in the fishing community relied on contentious fishing practices, such as dredging and fish farming. While the environmental consequences of particular techniques were well known amongst committee members (even within the fishing community there is much contention revolving around the varying methods), it was nevertheless unanimously understood that it would not be possible to exclude in any way those enacting such practices. Despite the environmentalism some on the

organising committee espoused, there was an intimate understanding, and for some first-hand experience, regarding the complexity of marine politics as it played out within the space of Mallaig – where fishing is intimately bound up with global consumer demand affecting the practices utilised by those at the local level to ensure economic sustainability. Here, the importance of socially sustainable relations between the fishing industry and that of the organising committee outweighed concerns for environmental sustainability.

In discussing potential celebrity endorsement for the festival, understandings of the Mallaig fishing community were again prioritised. UK celebrity chef and well known campaigner on a number of food and environmental issues (including, importantly, marine sustainability), Hugh Fernley-Whittingstall, was in the West Highlands region filming a television program at the time of planning the event – generating a possible opportunity to seek endorsement. Fernley-Whittingstall's philosophies around wild and local food were viewed to strongly align with that of the group's, and it was understood his involvement would attract media attention throughout the UK. Any potential Taste the Wild endorsement was, however, quickly dismissed because his environmental campaigns relating to marine sustainability were viewed as out of touch with the nuanced realities of the fishing industry as they are played out through Mallaig, and would thus conceivably offend members of the fishing community. Crucial again here were certain committee member's awareness of the fishing industry's needs and desires, as well as an understanding of the importance of the cultural symbols, performances and materialities of the fishing industry in the development of a food identity in the region. Yet, more than this, in a village of 800 individuals there was also a recognised requirement to prioritise the social over other agendas because anonymity in festival decision making was not a possibility. As a key committee member voiced during celebrity endorsement discussions: 'I have to see and work with these people every day. I'm not going to make a decision here that will put them offside, whatever my own agendas are' (Committee meeting, June 2016).

Careful consideration of Mallaig's fishing community did not only stem from within the festival organising committee. In seeking stallholders for the event a newly established seafood delivery service from the Inverness region (100 miles north) chose not to take part, following much deliberation. Their reasoning was complex, yet largely stemmed from a hesitation in being perceived by Mallaig's fishing community to be encroaching on the region. Such hesitations illustrate the continued power of the fishing industry in territorialising place and determining bounded place based identities on Scotland's west coast. Despite declines in fishing, the fisheries continue to anchor performances, discourses and materialities through which Scotland's west coast is

constructed – which serve as central in understanding the ways through which social sustainability unfolds within this place.

A perceived continued importance in the fishing industry complicated the way through which power circulated within and through event planning. Whilst a certain level of social capital was granted to Taste the Wild's organising committee – the requirements of the fishing industry represents the limits of the organising committee's enacted power because the fisheries are perceived to remain central to both the identity and livelihood of the cultural landscape. While such decision processes hint at the limits of Taste the Wild as a vehicle to enhance environmental sustainability through local food promotion, it does point to the complex ways through which the bridging of social capital was formed and negotiated between the fishing industry and tourism and hospitality industries. To ensure the potentials of Taste the Wild as an avenue for social sustainability between these two groups, it was crucial that committee members remained aware of complex social dynamics, so as not to generate opposition towards the event. While it is helpful to understand broad divisions between the fishing and tourism and hospitality, they also represent highly contested boundaries in such a small town where Mallaig residents consistently perform and shift between multiple identities – sometimes performing roles in various industries. Moreover, as previously alluded, voices within either industry are far from united, but are rather messy, complex and contradictory.

#### *Reinforcing social capital*

In contrast to the organising committee's commitment towards the fishing industry, actors involved in the fishing community did not place the same value in the potentials of Taste the Wild. This was particularly evident during planning, where in certain circumstances particular actors avoided involvement. For example, discursive and bureaucratic barriers were initially enforced regarding the utilisation of the harbour front for the event – which worked to reemphasise notions of Mallaig as being a *working*, rather than aesthetic and touristic, harbour. This continued throughout the planning process, as we learned of the required signage, barriers and limited utilisation of the space that would be possible for implementation of the event. The organising committee anticipated that celebration of Mallaig's marine heritage, was not just crucial to the event's marketing strategy, but also the possibilities of the event in facilitating social sustainability. For this reason, the committee purposely attended to these moments of disconnection in an attempt to ensure events were planned in ways that garnered solidarity with a fishing identity.

This was particularly evident in the planning and implementation of the 'Big Fish Debate' – a panel discussion that took place in the afternoon of Taste the Wild. The organising committee initially

aimed for the debate to be hard hitting; seeking to examine marine politics, and in particular, unsustainable fishing methods – bringing attention to the ways the fishing industry might work differently within Mallaig. As planning unfolded, however, the committee met with opposition from some within the community. In particular, there was hesitancy from within the fishing industry to take part in the panel; with some advising against the planned focus on fishing methods. Committee members more intimately connected to actors involved in fishing also began voicing concern during festival meetings, subtly shifting the narrative direction of the debate away from the industry and its methods, and towards a broader politics of supply chains and consumers. Over a number of meetings, the debate became reconstructed and solidified as a way to question consumer practices and globalised food systems and policy, rather than the industry itself. Following much consideration at meetings, panel members were chosen to reflect this reorientation; eventually including restaurateurs, policy makers and a national food journalist – rather than including strong representation of Mallaig fishing industry voices.

During the debate panel members reinforced a food system narrative, generating consensus that it was a community responsibility to purchase, prepare and consume local produce – and that it was consumer decisions that had gone some way to influencing the current context. Narratives of openness and opportunity were generated through the framing of discussion questions in particular ways – such as, ‘what should retailers do to help make sure people get locally caught fish?’ and ‘what should consumers and retailers do to help?’ Audience members working in the fishing industry further bolstered this discourse during the question and answer session, expressing that they held an interest in selling far greater quantities of their catch to the home market. These uniting discourses shifted political onus away from the fishing industry, towards that of the local consumers and broader issues of policy and retail; somewhat simplifying issues of accessibility of seafood at the scale of Mallaig. Through this narrative the fishing industry was praised in possessing the resilience to prevail, despite increased marine policy and declines in employment.

The above is one example of the way through which power relations unfolded through Taste the Wild; facilitating and inhibiting social sustainability. The festival debate fostered the enhancement of social sustainability in providing a space to renarrate negative characterisations of the fishing industry and generating opportunity to bolster relations and bridge the social capital between the two industries. The social bridging developed through the event privileged the fishing industry – emphasising the social capital this group already possessed, accrued through its historical positioning within Mallaig. The residential community was not included in this process. Rather, in prioritising the fishing industry, the practices of the ‘community’ were brought into question in ways

that attached blame to a constructed notion of community, that overlooked the limited power many local actors actually possess in purchasing west coast seafood. Here the consequence of enhanced social capital between the fishing industry and organising committee led to outcomes that are contrary to interpretations of social sustainability.

## **Conclusion**

The consistent utilisation of food tourism and events within food and agricultural policy sustainability narratives served as the impetus for this paper. Food and agricultural policy proclaiming the benefits of food tourism and events, often perceives sustainability holistically, rendering a prioritisation of economic and environmental aspects of sustainability, over that of the social and cultural. In consideration of the prioritisation of the economic and environmental aspects of sustainability, the paper examined *social* sustainability, attending to the complex and nuanced ways the social unfolds through a food festival in a rural coastal community. We suggested that a local food festival is a multifarious way through which to enhance social sustainability.

Despite event funding enabling the hospitality and tourism industries collaborative opportunity, it was still those who possessed capital and time that were able to leverage event development and branding, in line with their own politics and objectives. Collaborative opportunity was further hindered through the temporalities required in planning a one day event; a particular concern for a volunteer, community organised committee, with all members simultaneously managing their own small businesses or full time employment.

Opportunities to enhance social sustainability through this local food festival were further confined through pre-existing and historically informed relations, where the continued importance of the fishing industry complicated the way through which power circulated within and through event development. The fishing industry was perceived by committee members to remain central to both the identity and livelihood of place. For this reason, whilst the event's organising committee possessed a certain level of social capital – the requirements of the fishing industry represented the limits of the organising committee's power. In fact, in preferencing the fishing industry's core values, the practices of the residential community were questioned through the Big Fish Debate. Enhanced social capital between the fishing industry and organising committee thus led to outcomes that are contrary to interpretations of social sustainability.

Local food festivals have the potential to enhance social sustainability, in offering opportunity to bridge relations across certain diverse groups and foster an environment conducive to cohabitation. Bridging, however, is dependent on preconceived social capital and power relations, which somewhat inhibits social integration for all members of a community. Social sustainability, following Polese and Stren (2000) ought to relate to all segments of a community. It is not necessarily conceivable to claim a one off event can enhance social cohesion, long term, for all members of a community. Care needs to be upheld in regards to the extent to which enhancement of social sustainability can be claimed through local food events. Further, broad conceptualisations of 'community' need to be challenged during event planning processes; for it is difficult to develop a socially inclusive approach that ensures integration for diverse segments without recognising what constitutes a specific 'community'.

The limits of social sustainability, as illustrated through this local food festival, raises questions around governmental approaches to food tourism and events. Initiatives, such as The Scottish Government's Year of Food and Drink, are successful in generating narratives around food and drink. Yet, in prioritising themed years, and economically supporting once off community events, such initiatives run counter to the very foundations of sustainability as long-term development. If sustainability narratives are to be meaningfully enacted, rather than serving as merely promotional rhetoric, focus ought to be shifted to the ways initiatives might be developed over a number of years to ensure longevity, as well as attending to how such initiatives might provoke shifts away from those with pre-accrued social capital.

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