

# Re-conceptualising rural resources as countryside capital: The case of rural tourism

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## Abstract

Commentators tend to agree that the rural resource is becoming increasingly subject to pressures arising from an ever wider range of economic, social, political and environmental influences. This paper focuses on the case of rural tourism in illustrating the advantages of adopting a sustainable development approach to identifying suitable policies and strategic action plans to assist in addressing these increasingly complex challenges. The central proposition is that much can be achieved in raising the profile of rural tourism and the nature of its interdependence with rural resources by re-conceptualising the rural resource as a kind of ‘capital asset’ of the rural tourism industry. Drawing on recent thinking by ecological economists, an approach based on the concept of the constant capital rule is set out. The paper then outlines some of the benefits of re-casting the rural resource as ‘countryside capital’, using two case-study vignettes by way of illustration. A major conclusion is that re-conceptualising the rural resource as countryside capital provides a more holistic and integrated understanding of the rural tourism production system, which will be required if rural communities are to capture more effectively the potential benefits rural tourism has to offer them. This, in turn, enables a much clearer articulation of the rationale for public-, private- and voluntary-sector investment in rural resources to be made.

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## 1. Introduction

One of the few things that rural commentators would seem to agree on at present is that the countryside is currently undergoing a period of unprecedented change (Blunden and Curry, 1985; Robinson, 1990; Allanson and Whitby, 1996; Ilbery, 1998; Napton et al., 1999).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>This is not to suggest that any degree of consensus has been reached among rural commentators about the nature and extent of such changes. In the UK, for example, the problems facing rural areas are said to range from the uncertain future of farming and increased pressures on farmers to diversify their activities, to the lack of affordable housing in rural areas and the creep of suburbanisation, to concerns relating to the out-migration of younger people and transport problems in rural areas (Countryside Agency, 2003a). Hodge and Monk (2004), on the other hand, argue that many generalisations about changing conditions in ‘rural England’ are based on essentially

Moreover, the pace of change is considered to be increasing, making it ever more difficult for countryside decision makers to address the challenges they are being presented with. The increasingly complex and interconnected nature of these challenges has led writers such as Marsden (1998) to employ the term ‘rural restructuring’ to reflect the fundamentally different nature of the changes that are now taking place in the countryside.<sup>2</sup> This complexity and interconnectedness is said to increase the potential for conflicts to arise (Butler et al., 1998), so that progress in meeting any one of the specific challenges identified would seem inevitably to detract from efforts to address one or more of the others. This tends to encourage a view that trade-offs

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*(footnote continued)*

fallacious presumptions, and warn against over-simplification of the policy concerns of rural areas.

<sup>2</sup>See also Hoggart and Paniagua (2001), who critique and further develop the concept of rural restructuring.

will increasingly need to be made in the rural policy-making process. Typically, such trade-offs are depicted as being between economic, the environmental and the social interests. For example, proposals aimed at improving the economic status of a particular rural area are often opposed on environmental grounds or because they are thought to threaten rural ways of life.

It is increasingly being recognised, however, that the challenges facing the countryside can be more effectively addressed by applying new ways of thinking and doing based on the principles of sustainable development (Sharpley, 1996, 2000; Shepherd, 1998). Such an approach enables social, economic and environmental objectives to be harnessed together and jointly met: an outcome that has been described by the UK's *Countryside Agency* (2003a, p. 34) as a 'triple whammy' for the countryside. Central to the sustainable development approach is a clearer appreciation of the nature of the linkages between the economic, environmental and social dimensions of rural change.

This paper focuses on the case of rural tourism in order to illustrate how sustainable development thinking can be applied to addressing the problems of the countryside. Rural tourism is considered to be particularly appropriate as a case study because of the strong linkages that exist between rural tourism and the countryside. Indeed, the fabric of the countryside is very much the lifeblood of rural tourism. Without an attractive and vibrant countryside in which to operate, rural tourism businesses would not have a viable product to sell to their customers. Meanwhile, rural tourism has often been identified as a vehicle for safeguarding the integrity of the countryside resource, enhancing the rural economy and maintaining rural ways of life (Lane, 1994; Hall and Jenkins, 1998; Roberts and Hall, 2001). It may even be argued that the tourism industry has now become the lynch pin of many rural communities, having effectively replaced agriculture in this role. Indeed, tourism is said now to be more economically significant than agriculture in many parts of England (*English Tourism Council/Countryside Agency*, 2001).

The central proposition of this paper is that much can be achieved in pursuit of raising the profile of sustainable development in the rural context by re-conceptualising rural resources as 'countryside capital'. Essentially this involves re-casting the rural resource as a kind of capital asset that can be invested in and from which a stream of benefits may be drawn, provided that the asset base is not overstretched by the various demands that are put upon it. This approach borrows from the principles of ecological economics, who have long used the concept to assist in delivering the central messages of their discipline (e.g. Pearce et al., 1989; Daly, 1991; Pearce and Turner, 1992; Costanza and Daly, 1992; Prugh et al., 1995). The core proposition of

this approach is that human well-being in the long run depends on the prudent use of natural, social and built (manufactured) resources in the short run. Since built resources are all derived ultimately from natural resource inputs, and because social and human resources are themselves dependent on a high-quality natural environment for their continued well-being, economic activity of all kinds depends ultimately on the maintenance of a sound natural capital base.

## 2. What is countryside capital?

While terms such as natural capital are long-established in the literature, the specific term 'countryside capital' has entered into academic parlance only in the past few years. As such, it has no widely agreed definition. The term seems to have first been used in the UK by the *Countryside Agency* as a means of conceptually connecting two of its programmes, which *Slee* (2003, p. 16) describes as being at that time 'disparate but connected'. The first of these programmes involved the establishment of 'Land Management Initiatives' (LMIs), which aimed to address the problems facing farming by promoting sustainable land management (*Countryside Agency*, 2002). This implied the adoption of land-management practices that attempted not only to benefit the economies of rural areas but also to help maintain the quality of their natural environment and the vitality of their local communities. The second initiative, known as 'Eat the View', sought to encourage tourism businesses to connect better with their local economy by using and selling locally produced food and drink products (*Countryside Agency*, 2004). The aim was therefore to help tourism business to capitalise on their local assets, as well as to address some of the externalities that are typically associated with the transportation of food and drink products. Hence it could be argued (*Slee*, 2003) that while the LMIs focused on encouraging rural businesses to invest in building up their countryside capital, the Eat the View initiative concentrated on persuading them to make better use of their existing countryside capital assets.

The definition of countryside capital presently adopted by the *Countryside Agency* is 'the fabric of the countryside, its villages and its market towns' (*Countryside Agency*, 2003b, p. 45). While this definition might be considered somewhat simplistic, it is nevertheless valuable in that it depicts countryside capital as comprising various components of the fabric of the countryside. These may be primarily natural, such as wildlife populations, primarily built, such as rural settlements, or primarily social, such as local cultural traditions. In practice, of course, most countryside capital assets represent an amalgam of these three main

Table 1  
Constituent elements of countryside capital

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Landscape, including seascape
Wildlife, both fauna and flora
Biodiversity
Geology and soils
Air and air quality
Hedgerows and field boundaries
Agricultural buildings
Rural settlements, from isolated dwellings to market towns
Historical features, such as historic buildings, industrial remnants
Tracks, trails, bridleways, lanes and roads
Streams, rivers, ponds and lakes
Water and water quality
Woods, forests and plantations
Distinctive local customs, languages, costumes, foods, crafts, festivals, traditions, ways of life

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Source: Garrod et al. (2004).

types (Slee, 2003). Further, the essential components of countryside capital may either be tangible or perceptual. For example, while hedgerows make a physical contribution to countryside capital as field boundaries and sanctuaries for biodiversity, they also make a wider contribution to countryside capital in terms of the role they play in forming distinctive patterns of landscape. It is relevant to note that this definition covers not only open countryside but also villages and market towns, which are considered to be functional elements of the rural economy. Given this definition, Table 1 illustrates the range of countryside features that may be considered to be countryside capital assets.

Rural tourism businesses and destinations employ all of these features of the countryside, albeit to various extents, both in attracting tourists to their local area and in providing them with satisfying experiences while they are there. This is further illustrated by Fig. 1, which identifies a range of components of countryside capital that might be drawn upon by the rural tourism industry at various stages of the rural tourism value chain. This can range from the provision of countryside images used to promote a rural tourism destination, through providing rural tourists with things to do and attractions to visit, to the contribution made by local traditions and customs in making a tourist's stay memorable.

As such, the various elements of countryside capital can be thought of as essential components of the asset base of rural tourism businesses. This implies that the quality of the rural tourism experience depends on the quality of the countryside capital that supports it. This is not to suggest that countryside capital is the only determinant of the quality of the rural tourism experience: other determining factors include amenable facilities, plentiful information, high standards of service and excellent customer care. Rather, the intention is to emphasise the tendency for the contribution of countryside capital to be relatively neglected in terms of its

contribution to the quality of the rural tourism experience.<sup>3</sup>

Arguably, however, a particular shortcoming of the Countryside Agency's definition of countryside capital is that it does not sufficiently emphasise the 'capital' dimension of the term. The principal merit of depicting the fabric of the countryside as capital is that doing so highlights the critical role it plays in putting together the products of rural businesses. Tourism, like any other economic activity, can be thought of essentially as a production process in which raw materials are taken in and assembled into final products, which are then sold to consumers (McKercher, 1993). In the case of rural tourism, many of these raw materials are in fact components of the countryside capital stock—landscape, biodiversity, historic buildings, etc.—which can be considered part of the 'capital assets' of the rural tourism industry. Hence, while tourism business might not recognise these components of countryside capital as valuable raw materials, they are nevertheless vital inputs into the rural tourism production process and, as such, are clearly valuable (Lowe, 1996; Garrod and Fyall, 1998).

Another important clarification is that countryside capital, like any other form of capital, is simultaneously both a stock and a flow concept (Prugh et al., 1995). The fabric of the countryside represents the capital stock. By careful management of flows to and from this stock, society can ensure that sufficient countryside assets remain available to rural businesses, such as those involved in assembling and selling rural tourism products.<sup>4</sup>

As previously stated, the concept of capital has long been used by ecological economists. A critical recognition

<sup>3</sup>It is also important to recognise that the importance of countryside capital goes far beyond its role in underpinning rural tourism. Indeed, the Countryside Agency (2003b) identifies four further dimensions of the importance of countryside capital:

- Providing a market advantage to farmers, food processors and distributors
- Representing as asset for heritage and related businesses
- Supplying key services, e.g. wind energy, flood defence, recreational resources
- Serving as an attractor of inward investment.

<sup>4</sup>A financial analogy is often employed to reinforce this point. If an individual inherits a capital sum and places it in a bank account at a certain rate of interest, the capital asset will generate a given flow of income that will be available to the investor *ad infinitum*. If, however, the individual were to draw out a sum larger than the interest earned in a given period of time, the value of the capital sum must fall, thereby reducing the amount of interest it is able to generate in the future. Profligate spending today will result in the need for austerity in the future. If the investor wants to benefit from his or her investment in the long run, he or she clearly needs to look after it better. Indeed, a wise investor would be able to regain his or her original standard of living by replacing sums that were unwisely withdrawn in the past with his or her own money.

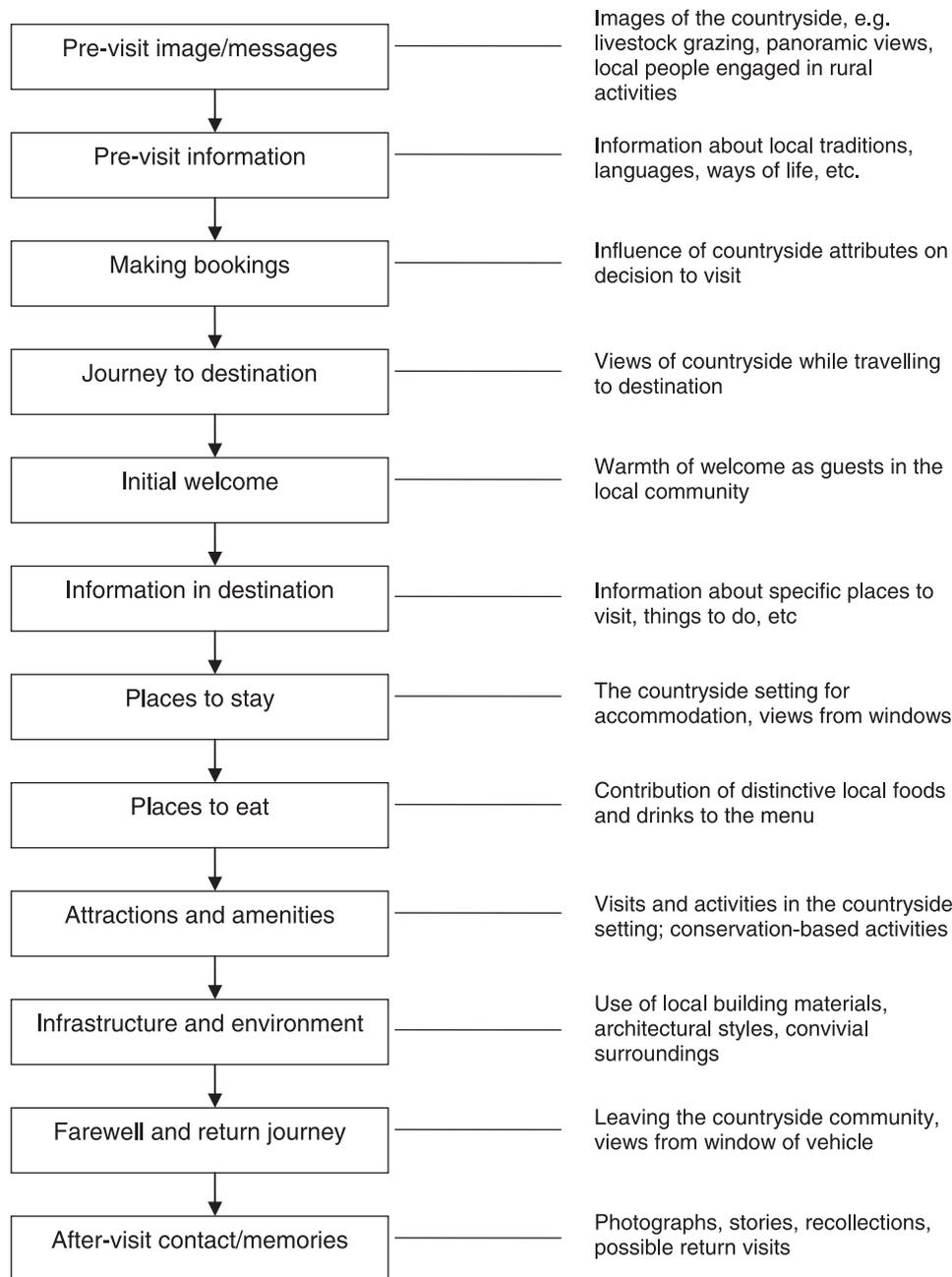


Fig. 1. The role of countryside capital in the tourism value. Source: Garrod et al. (2004)

is that past, present and future generations in fact all share the same asset base: the capital stocks that underpin all economic activity. As such, the quality of life of today's generation depends to a significant extent on how wisely past generations have managed these capital stocks. By the same token, the welfare of future generations depends substantially on their prudent use by the present generation. This realisation reflects the need for considerations based around the concept of 'intergenerational equity' (fairness across the generations) to be integrated into economic decision making. According to writers such as Pearce et al. (1989), the best way of achieving this is for the present generation to

ensure that it passes on a stock of capital as a bequest to the next generation that is neither smaller in size, nor lower in quality, than the one it inherited from the previous generation. This has become known as the 'constant capital rule' and it underpins a great deal of recent thinking on sustainable development.

### 3. A conceptual model of the linkages between rural tourism and countryside capital

In coming to appreciate more fully the importance of countryside capital, it is helpful to distinguish clearly

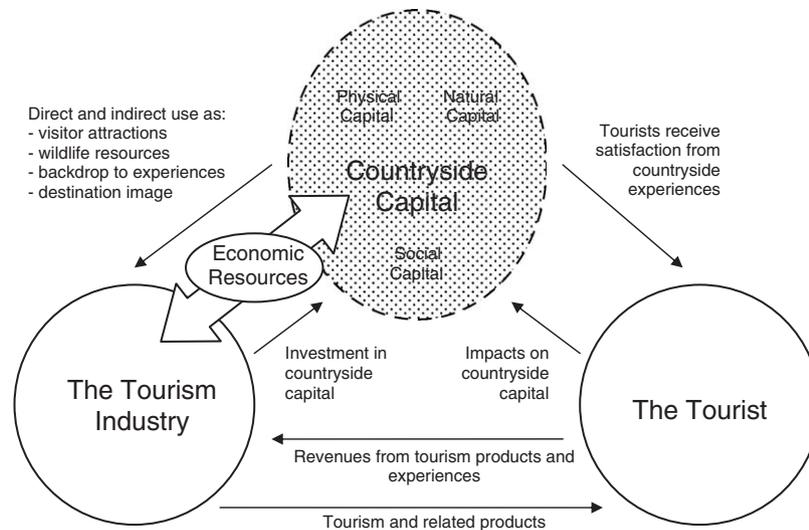


Fig. 2. A model of the interactions between rural tourism and countryside capital. *Source:* Garrod et al. (2004).

between countryside capital assets and the wider economic resources employed by rural industries. Fig. 2 clarifies this in the context of rural tourism. The economic resources of rural tourism are the buildings, equipment, raw materials, infrastructure, workforce, skills and knowledge, and so on, that are employed by the industry as inputs in assembling their products. These resources are generally recognised as having value because the costs associated with them are (at least in greater part) reflected in the market prices of the final goods and services they are used to produce. This means that the use of such resources must be paid for and as such they become explicit costs to specific rural tourism businesses. Many of these economic resources are, of course, also part of the countryside capital stock available to be used by rural tourism businesses. For example, the building in which a farming museum is based might be converted from a disused outbuilding, which is part of the countryside capital stock. Once the building has been converted into a museum, however, it becomes formally part of the ‘economic capital’ asset base of the rural tourism industry.

Fig. 2 also indicates that the contribution of countryside capital to the rural business may be direct or indirect. Many components of countryside capital make a direct contribution to the tourist experience. For example, tourists may wish to see a particular waterfall or to take in a specific panoramic scene. However, countryside capital may also have an indirect role to play in providing a backdrop to the rural tourism experience and in generating an image that attracts tourists to a particular destination area. This role should be considered no less important than the direct role. Attracting tourists, satisfying their expectations and, perhaps most importantly, encouraging them to return in the future, are all vital elements of successful rural

tourism. Countryside capital has an indirect role to play in supporting all of these activities.

It is also important to recognise that other rural industries employ countryside capital assets in the production of their goods and services. For example, agriculture, energy production, forestry and the equine industry are all likely to share key countryside capital assets with the rural tourism industry (Sharpley and Sharpley, 1997). Rural tourism is therefore likely to find itself competing for the use of countryside capital assets and this leads to use conflicts. Indeed, since countryside capital assets are often common-pool resources, conflicts can arise between different stakeholders attempting to use them in mutually contradictory ways. Moreover, in some instances this conflict may be internalised, especially when the tourism business is the result of diversification from another of the rural industries, such as a farming or equine business. Under such circumstances, decisions about how best to employ the countryside capital assets available to a business may be far from clear cut.

Another important linkage seen in Fig. 2 relates to the role of the tourism industry in investing in countryside capital. Rural tourism businesses in general may invest in countryside capital either directly or indirectly. Direct investment in countryside capital involves developing tourism attractions, facilities and products that recognise the value of the countryside as a vital capital asset and the need to manage such assets in sustainable ways. Examples in the rural tourism context might include:

- Developing an interpretive wildlife-watching tour
- A farm tourism enterprise implementing a habitat restoration scheme
- A country estate encouraging public access to the land it manages

- Developing a mountain-biking trail in an area of woodland.

Indirect investment in countryside capital, on the other hand, involves investing in projects and programmes that create or strengthen positive links between rural tourism and countryside capital. Examples might include:

- Membership of an environmental accreditation scheme
- Implementing a policy of buying only local food and drink products
- Making payments into conservation funds
- Destination branding based on local distinctiveness.

Direct investment in countryside capital is thus distinct from indirect investment insofar as it is likely to have more immediate and tangible effects. Ultimately, however, both are valid means of investing in countryside capital.

There are therefore three main benefits to depicting the fabric of the countryside as a capital stock of the rural tourism industry. The first is that doing so focuses attention on the vital role played by the countryside at every stage of the rural tourism value chain (see Fig. 1). This implies that the quality of the countryside must to some extent determine the quality of the rural tourism experience.

This leads on to a second benefit of adopting the notion of countryside capital, which is that doing so highlights the need for rural tourism businesses to pursue more sustainable relationships with the countryside in which they operate. If countryside capital is an essential input to the rural tourism production process, then a decline in its quality is likely to be reflected in a similar reduction in the quality of the final product. The reduction in the quality of the countryside capital assets may, of course, be due to lack of on-going investment in conserving or maintaining them. According to this same logic, if rural tourism businesses were to invest in protecting and enhancing its countryside capital stocks, the quality of their final products would also likely be increased. If rural tourism businesses are systematically unable or unwilling to make these investments themselves, then a condition of market failure may be considered to exist. In this case, government intervention to make strategic investments in maintaining or enhancing the available stocks of countryside capital on society's behalf may be deemed warranted.

This helps in turn to identify a third benefit of conceptualising the rural resource as countryside capital, which is to recognise that activities that damage or degrade this capital stock, such as poorly managed rural tourism, are clearly not contributing to the sustainable development of the economies, environments and

communities in which they are located. Such activities should either be prohibited or, if they are deemed to make a wider contribution to rural communities, managed so as to minimise their draw upon various stocks of countryside capital assets.

#### 4. Who invests in countryside capital?

Examining investment in countryside capital is a complex process in view of the multiplicity of agencies or enterprises that, in theory at least, have an interest in making such investments and could potentially do so. To take just one example, investment in hedgerows and field boundaries is undertaken by a wide range of countryside stakeholders, from farmers to private land-owners, local authorities and voluntary conservation groups. The situation is further complicated by the tendency for such investments to be funded from a wide variety of sources, from private funds to European funding, central government financing, council tax revenues and charitable donations.

Table 2 offers a simplified overview of investment in a range of countryside capital assets in England, providing examples of organisations and agencies that are currently making such investments, be they direct or indirect. The investors included in the table clearly span the public, private and voluntary sectors. What is remarkable is that many of these investors in countryside capital do not actually have rural tourism as their primary remit. English Nature, for example, is currently the government agency whose primary role is to champion countryside conservation in England. However, many of its activities, including the implementation of Biodiversity Action Plans, offer indirect benefits to rural tourists, businesses and destinations in the form of the provision of a varied and stimulating rural environment in which their activities may take place. In a similar vein, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds contributes directly to countryside capital through its conservation work, while at the same time offering tourism and recreational activities for visitors which are based on and draw from the countryside. The table also demonstrates that investment in countryside capital takes place at national, regional and local levels.

The rural tourism industry clearly invests in countryside capital for a number of reasons. From a purely tourism point of view, destination managers may feel that this kind of investment is likely to help them to gain or retain a competitive edge over rival destinations with broadly similar products in offer. This might be in the form of cost advantages such as financial savings associated with 'green' activities such as energy reduction or waste recycling. For example, a 1997 survey of users of the Countryside Agency's 'Green Audit Kit' found that the average cost saving in the order of £1525

Table 2  
Examples of investment in countryside capital

Component of countryside capital	Examples of investors	Types of investment
Landscape (including seascape)	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), National Trust, Forestry Commission, Woodland Trust, local authorities, National Park authorities, Countryside Agency, farmers and other landowners	Conservation, food production, access for tourism and recreation, agri-environment schemes, 'protected landscapes', e.g. National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs), Heritage Coasts
Wildlife (fauna and flora)	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), English Nature	Nature reserves, Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), advisory services
Biodiversity	English Nature, local and national conservation non-government organisations (NGOs), farmers and other landowners, Forestry Commission, Environment Agency	Advisory services, national and local biodiversity actions plans, agri-environment schemes, SACs
Geology and soils	Farmers and other landowners, Geological Survey, English Nature	Cultivation
Air and air quality	Environment Agency, local authorities, individuals	Monitoring, capital investment
Hedgerows and field boundaries	English Nature, DEFRA, farmers and other landowners, Forestry Commission, Woodland Trust	Planting, advisory services, grant aid
Agricultural buildings	Farmers and other landowners, DEFRA, English Heritage	Construction, conversion of redundant buildings, advisory services, grant aid
Rural settlements, from isolated dwellings to market towns	Local authorities, Regional Development Agencies (RDAs), Countryside Agency, private sector, private individuals	Planning guidelines and regulations, capital investment, advisory services
Historical features, such as historic buildings, industrial remnants	English Heritage, National Trust, local conservation societies, Civic Trust, private individuals	Conservation, maintenance, promotion for tourism
Tracks, trails, bridleways, lanes and roads	Highways Agency, local authorities, Forestry Commission, Countryside Agency	Maintenance, provision of access, tourism and recreational use, agri-environment schemes
Streams, rivers, ponds and lakes	Environment Agency, local authorities, farmers, water companies, industry	Pollution monitoring, advisory services
Water quality	Environment Agency	Blue Flag Award, Seaside Award, Green Coast Award
Woods, forests and plantations	Forestry Commission, private sector, Woodland Trust, local and national conservation NGOs	Timber production, access for tourism and recreation, conservation
Distinctive local customs, languages, costumes, foods, crafts, festivals, traditions, ways of life	RDAs, local authorities, Regional Tourist Boards (RTBs), individuals, private sector enterprises, campaign groups	Initiatives, e.g. food and tourism, advisory services, special events

Source: Garrod et al. (2004).

was made by those who had followed the kit's advice and recorded the cost savings made (Countryside Agency, 2001). Alternatively, competitive benefits might present themselves in the form of improved market share or the ability to charge premium prices. Thus, for example, access to attractive landscape images can give a vital marketing edge to the area as a tourism destination, provided of course that these images are successfully captured and promoted effectively. This

issue is discussed further in the following section of this paper.

The public sector, meanwhile, may be more interested in bringing about sustainable rural development more generally. In this respect, investment in countryside capital can benefit the local community by providing recreational opportunities, facilities and amenities that would otherwise be unavailable. Alternatively, investing in countryside capital may help to secure or improve the

quality of the rural environment, and thereby to enhance the quality of life experienced by people living in rural communities. It may also help to stimulate inward investment that may well be to the economic and social benefit of the rural community. Such motivations are, of course, not wholly limited to public-sector organisations; voluntary organisations may well have very similar aims, and will find that investing either directly or indirectly in countryside capital is an efficient and effective means of achieving them.

### 5. How countryside capital contributes to the identity, success and promotion of rural tourism destinations

The available evidence tends to suggest that while the use of images and imagery within tourism promotion does not necessarily convince uncommitted potential customers to visit a destination, it can serve to reinforce the intentions of those who are already pre-disposed to visit (Morgan et al., 2002). Destination choice is greatly influenced by a perceived sense of empathy with the area and this itself is a function of the destination identity that is being projected.

The role of destination imagery is becoming ever more critical. Indeed, Buck (1993, p. 14) argues that ‘tourism is an industry based on imagery: its overriding concern is to construct, through multiple representations of paradise, an imagery that entices the outsider to place him or herself into the defined space’. However, as the number of tourism destinations continues to rise, it is becoming increasingly difficult for tourism destinations to differentiate themselves from one another. In effect, a dilution of destination identities seems to be taking place. At the same time, the intangible nature of the tourism product makes it hard for potential customers to inspect or try the product before purchasing it (Seaton and Bennett, 1996). Consequently, destination managers are finding it increasingly difficult to establish and maintain distinctive identities that not only appeal to target market segments but also reflect the reality of the experiences their destination has to offer (Butler and Hall, 1998).

Rural tourism destinations face particular challenges in respect of creating and projecting effective marketing identities. One important reason is the relatively limited pulling power that rural destinations are able to achieve in increasingly competitive and global tourism markets (Ritchie and Crouch, 2003). Another is that the rural tourism industry remains highly fragmented, tending to comprise a large number of relatively small, generally family-run businesses (Roberts and Hall, 2001). This limits the industry’s ability to work together to create and maintain a clear and competitive destination image (Dolli and Pinfold, 1997). An important implication is that in rural areas, full agreement on which particular

rural tourism destination image to project is rarely forthcoming. In such circumstances there is the potential for an ambiguous and potentially detrimental destination image to emerge.

Morgan et al. (2002) propose that destination image and identity comprise both functional and non-functional attributes, where the former includes ‘physical’ aspects such as location, ease of access, accommodation, activities and service, and the latter includes the more ‘emotional’ aspects such as landscape, atmosphere and friendliness of the host population. These attributes combine together to form the overall identity of the rural tourism destination and, as such, represent a critical link between rural tourism and countryside capital. In order to meet with continued success in the marketplace, a rural destination will need to build an identity or brand image that sums up for potential visitors the essence of the physical qualities, landscape, people, culture, quality and vibrancy of the area. There is a considerable body of evidence to suggest that visitors to the countryside place a high value on these elements (Scott, 2002; Tress and Tress, 2003; Wakeford, 1999). These are, of course, all constituent elements of the stock of countryside capital a destination has to offer.

Two short case-study vignettes follow.<sup>5</sup> These are intended to illustrate the links between rural tourism destination imagery and countryside capital. The first examines an instance in which tourism destination marketing based on television images of the ‘rural idyll’ has promoted ambiguous and unrealistic imagery, which in turn has resulted in low satisfaction levels among visitors. The second examines an instance of destination branding in which some re-investment has been made in the countryside capital of the area, mainly by encouraging visitors to make specific and targeted contributions. Moreover, and somewhat unusually for the UK, this approach has been promoted in a very overt manner by destination managers. Despite this overt approach, however, it is clear that this example is still only scratching at the surface of the potential for visitor contributions to help maintain and enhance the countryside capital of the rural tourism destination area.

<sup>5</sup>Both case-study vignette locations are in the north of England, UK. The rural village of Goathland is located in the Yorkshire Dales National Park. Its connection with rural tourism is relatively recent, beginning in earnest in the mid-1990s when it became famous as a filming location for a popular television drama. The Lake District, on the other hand, represents one of the UK’s strongest rural tourism images, having developed on the back of its status as one of Britain’s first National Parks. The case studies were developed using a combination of literature review techniques, supplemented by a small number of interviews with key informants. Interviewees were all employed in managerial positions within rural tourism stakeholder organisations (as illustrated more generally in Table 2) and were selected on the basis of their likely interest in the application of the concept of countryside capital.

### 5.1. Case study: 'Heartbeat Country'

The television programme 'Heartbeat', set in the 1960s and filmed in the real rural village of Goathland, inspired the brand development of the Heartbeat Country brand image. The TV series and subsequent tourism promotion in the mid-1990s depicted a rural idyll that idealised the countryside in such a way as to create the anticipation of an experience similar to but more immediate than that offered by watching Heartbeat on television.

The recognition that the promotional imagery of Heartbeat Country utilises images of countryside capital to the full—the expanses of inviting walking country dotted with stone walls, agricultural activity, and so on—is not to say that these images are false. Rather, they are used in such a way that limits the Goathland offer to that of the TV series, in place of the relationship of the village and its surroundings being promoted as an additional aspect that could be experienced and appreciated by visitors to the area. Focus group research carried out in the late 1990s (Mordue, 1999) showed that the tourism market has changed considerably over the period in which the TV show has been running. The publication of maps, guides and trails packaging the Heartbeat experience led visitors to expect the landscape and rural community depicted in the series.

The use of images of countryside capital for tourism purposes in effect commodifies the destination or landscape involved, making it easier for the visitor to 'buy into' the experience. The previously examined analogy between countryside capital and economic capital highlights that in order to survive and flourish, countryside capital needs to be maintained in the same way as economic capital. Indeed, the depiction of Goathland as 'Heartbeat Country' resulted, in the late 1990s, with both visitors and residents being dissatisfied. For instance:

I expected to come here and see it how you see it on the TV ... it should be more sixties-like really ... (Visitor, quoted in Mordue, 1999, p. 641)

This dissatisfaction may result, in such cases, with the depletion of the capital stock of the countryside as visitors are less likely to contribute through such means as purchasing local goods, spending on local accommodation or in local shops. This is then compounded by a lack of repeat visits or recommendation to friends and family.

... we call them where I work the fifteen p people, all they have time to do is spend fifteen p. Now that is not adding to the economy of the village really<sup>6</sup> (Shop Worker, quoted in Mordue, 1999, p. 637)

<sup>6</sup>Here 'p' stands for pence, which is one hundredth of a UK pound sterling, the British unit of currency.

The imagery of countryside capital as used in the 1990s promotion of Heartbeat Country led to an expectation in visitors of being able to interact with the media depictions of Goathland: to experience a 'window on the past'. The reality of Goathland did not satisfy or reinforce the pre-experience identity of the village and therefore visitors felt no incentive to contribute either economically or socially (through interaction with the community and the landscape) to maintaining the countryside capital of the area.

This example highlights the potential negative aspects of using aspects of countryside capital in touristic promotion and imagery. However, areas such as Goathland are dependent on tourism and the Yorkshire Tourist Board has recently moved to use the association with the Heartbeat programme as adding value to the area's existing offer, rather than attempting to represent it as the prime attraction.

### 5.2. Case study: Cumbria—The Lake District

Despite the role played by Cumbria Tourist Board (CTB) in the utilisation of countryside capital and the encouragement given to visitors to 'go out and use it', the Board recognise that their role in maintaining countryside capital is one of advocacy and facilitation rather than direct economic input. Yet Cumbria is one of the more active regions in its attempts to encourage the links between tourism and countryside capital to be made more overt to tourists, residents and stakeholders in the area.

The Lake District Tourism and Conservation Partnership is perhaps the most widely acknowledged organisation in the region that recognises the importance of countryside capital to both rural tourism and to the wider community. Despite being seen initially as competition for the likes of the National Trust and the National Park Authority, the key public-sector stakeholders in the Partnership are now English Nature, the National Park Authority and the CTB (to the tune of 40% of total funds). The remaining 60% of funding comes directly from the private sector through membership fees (Pers. comm. 2003, Lake District Tourism & Conservation Partnership).

The Partnership does not create projects itself: rather it works within the existing programmes of such bodies as the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers; Cumbria Wildlife Trust; the National Trust; the National Park Authority and Red Alert (a body interested in protecting red squirrels). This allows projects to be adopted that can be offered to participating members that are matched to their target market. Projects range from the well-known 'Our Man at the Top', where funding is given towards employment of three National Trust footpath repair wardens, to four participating tourism accommodation providers

operating a visitor payback scheme,<sup>7</sup> to 25 members supporting conservation schemes such as the maintenance of dry-stone walling, hedgerows and red squirrels through various methods such as proceeds from bike and map hire, visitor payback and donation boxes.

Tourism operators have the choice to adopt a project as ‘their own’, such as the restoration of Howe Ridding Damson Orchard, adopted by one hotel using the payback scheme, which in a few years aims to be using the produce from the orchard in their menus, jams and chutneys. Alternatively, operators within an area can join together to adopt a project such as the Grasmere Lakeshore Footpath whereby six tourism operators in Grasmere are contributing towards the maintenance and enhancement of the only public access to the lakeside.

Visitors are made aware of the work of the Partnership and its members through information made available at the time of enquiry to the tourism operator with further information made available on line at the Partnership’s website (<http://www.lakespartnership.co.uk/rtscheme.html>). That tourism operators are enthusiastic about the work of the Partnership is encouraging, revealing an understanding of the importance of the countryside in a holistic sense and a commitment to contributing towards its maintenance as countryside capital. Tourism businesses contribute in a very real sense, both financially and otherwise, towards the success of both individual projects and the Partnership as a whole. Not only do the industry have ownership of the Partnership, which is considered “vital for its integrity” (Pers. comm. 2003, Lake District Tourism & Conservation Partnership) but the majority of businesses also match-fund each contribution made by visitors to projects, thereby doubling the prospective funding base.

The Partnership does not limit its membership to tourism organisations, although these are best placed to make financial contributions towards maintaining countryside capital. Other businesses such as printers, solicitors and even a laundry are members of the Partnership, giving of their time and services rather than direct financial contribution. This reveals a wider recognition not only of the importance of tourism to the area, but also recognition of the importance of the work of the Partnership in contributing towards the maintenance of the fabric of the countryside.

However successful the Partnership and its projects has been so far, there is still recognition that more could be achieved. Despite 85% of all monies raised being spent on environmental projects and almost all visitors who utilise members’ tourism resources opting to contribute to the projects, the Partnership recognises that there is a need for increased information and

education amongst both tourism operators and the wider community (Pers. comm. 2003, Lake District Tourism & Conservation Partnership). This is echoed by CTB’s recognition that visitors need to be made more aware of where their money is going and what it is being used for. For example, money paid in a National Park car park will contribute in an indirect way towards the maintenance of countryside capital and yet the visitor will remain unaware of their contribution to this.

Currently the Partnership recognises itself as a ‘visitor payback expert’, concentrating on environmental conservation and enhancement. Future plans for the Partnership include a more holistic outlook, with an aim of funding social, cultural and heritage projects that play a part in the tourism satisfaction chain and that could benefit from the kind of support currently available to environmental concerns through the Partnership. There is little doubt however that the work of the Partnership plays an important role in maintaining the countryside capital of Cumbria through tourism resources, and by so doing plays an important role in maintaining tourism activity within the region

## 6. Conclusions

The central tenet of this paper has been to recognise that while rural tourism has long been understood as an important force in the countryside, there has been little understanding of its crucial linkages to and dependence on the countryside capital assets that are its fundamental resource. By utilising established thinking surrounding sustainable development as a framework for understanding the links between rural tourism and countryside capital, it has been illustrated that countryside capital assets are crucial in putting together and providing rural tourism products.

A better understanding of this dependence is vital if tourism is to continue to make a positive contribution to sustainable rural development. If the tourism industry and its stakeholders neglect this resource base then the quality of the tourism experience is bound to decline, and so will the rural tourism industry itself in turn.

By re-conceptualising the rural resource as countryside capital, the rural tourism industry, from theorists through managers to operators, will be better able to understand and communicate the need for a holistic approach to managing the rural resource base. The fact that contributions can be made both in direct ways (e.g. footpath maintenance work undertaken by a local authority) and indirect ways (e.g. an accommodation base participating in an environmental grading scheme) is not often recognised by tourism practitioners. Indeed, many of the public-sector and other organisations that do make valuable contributions, such as those illustrated in this paper, do not necessarily recognise the

<sup>7</sup>For a general discussion of such schemes see Scott et al. (2003).

fact that they are so doing. In this context, there is a need to establish and promote best practice among all those involved in rural tourism. This should of necessity include disseminating and understanding that investment in countryside capital should not be seen as an optional extra but rather as a core component of successful and sustainable rural tourism.

The case-study vignettes presented in this study focus particularly on the tendency for rural tourism to draw on its countryside capital in terms of the images that are adopted and sometimes manipulated in order to attract rural tourists to the destination area. The vignettes also highlighted the need for constituent businesses and stakeholder organisations in the rural tourism industry to invest, either directly or indirectly, in this element of countryside capital. These relationships are both depicted in Fig. 2 of the paper, while the latter is illustrated in Table 2. In this particular respect a number of important conclusions were drawn.

First, with respect to the case of Goathland, it is clear that in drawing marketing and promotional images for rural tourism from an area's countryside capital, ambiguous and potentially detrimental public perceptions of a place can emerge. This is important, since it is also argued that the growth of rural tourism destinations has led to a dilution of destination identities; creating and maintaining a strong set of destination images is becoming increasingly crucial to the vitality of rural tourism destinations. Meanwhile it was argued that the commodification of various elements countryside capital in the form of promotional images effectively brings them into being part of the economic capital of the destination area's rural tourism industry. As such, it is important that the capital stock is maintained. The vignette suggests two important ways in which this should be done: by disentangling the fictional elements of the destination's image and its factual characteristics, in order to create an unambiguous and robust destination image; and by investing further in the imagery component of the area's countryside capital, either directly or indirectly. The former has to some extent already taken place, with the de-emphasis of 'Heartbeat' in the Tourist Board's promotional material. The latter, however, needs more work; possible mechanisms for investing in countryside capital are illustrated in Table 2 of this paper.

The second case study, meanwhile, which focuses on rural tourism in the Lake District, presents some specific mechanisms by which investment in countryside capital by all of the various stakeholders in rural tourism can be encouraged. In particular, the benefits of creating an umbrella organisation were highlighted. In this case the key organisation is Lake District Tourism and Conservation Partnership, the role of which is both to stimulate and support investment in countryside capital. Examples include the 'Our Man on Top' scheme, which

funds footpath repairs in the area and the visitor payback scheme operated by a small group of accommodation providers. An important feature of the Partnership is that it does not create such projects itself; rather it provides a framework within which such projects can be identified, nurtured and brought to fruition. Many projects are match-funded by participating rural tourism businesses. This enables rural tourism providers to develop a sense of ownership of the projects, strengthening the link between the economic success of rural tourism in the area and the maintenance of a secure and sustainable countryside capital base. An additional encouraging factor has been the extent to which such projects have been able to win the commitment rural tourists themselves and this has been supported by well-directed promotional work on the part of the Partnership. Directly asking rural tourists themselves to assist in supporting the countryside capital of the place they have come to visit—and therefore presumably value—has also assisted greatly in this process. This could nevertheless be further strengthened by making tourists more aware of where their money is going and what it is being used for.

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