# Culture, identity and tourism representation: Marketing Cymru or Wales?

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# Culture, identity and tourism representation: marketing Cymru or Wales?

Annette Pritchard*, Nigel J. Morgan

*School of Hospitality, Leisure & Tourism, University of Wales Institute, Cardiff, Colchester Avenue Campus, Wales CF3 7XR, UK*

## Abstract

This article attempts to contribute to the development of a critical analysis of tourism representations through an investigation of destination branding strategies. Based on an analysis of the marketing campaigns of the Wales Tourist Board and Welsh local authorities, it argues that the influence of repressive and liberating historical, political and cultural discourses can be discerned in the tourism representations used in contemporary branding strategies and these explain why Wales is differentially branded in its overseas and UK markets. Whilst Wales provides the focus for this discussion of the relationship between discourse, tourism representations and destination marketing, the same analysis could be applied to representations of other tourism destinations. © 2001 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

*Keywords:* Destinations; Space; Discourse; Representations; Branding; Wales

## 1. Ways of Seeing Tourism Representations

As the new cultural and feminist geography permeates tourism research, space and place are increasingly being recognised as socio-cultural constructions rather than simply as physical locations. As such, tourism sites, attractions, landmarks, destinations and landscapes are seen as spaces through which "… power, identity, meaning and behaviour are constructed, negotiated and re-negotiated according to socio-cultural dynamics" (Aitcheson & Reeves, 1998, p. 51). The same processes shape the relationship between culture, identity and the touristic marketing of places and peoples. Central to this contention is the argument that powerful discourses shape our ways of seeing the world (Berger, 1983) — a process from which tourism is by no means immune — since historical, political and cultural discourses influence how peoples and places are seen and represented in contemporary marketing. Said (1991, p. 5), in discussing how the West constructs the Orient, pointed out that "ideas, cultures and histories cannot seriously be understood or studied without … their configurations of power also being studied". Tourism is clearly a cultural arena which reflects these configurations of power

— thus, for instance, whilst colonialism may have been rejected economically, it continues to exert cultural power in terms of how tourism imagery constructs peoples and places (Britton, 1979; MacCannell, 1984, p. 377; Silver, 1993).

Imagery is one of the most researched aspects of tourism marketing, and many authors — including Gunn (1988), Chon (1990), Gartner (1993) and Gold and Ward (1994) — have discussed image-related issues in destination and tourism product marketing (Selby & Morgan, 1996). Much more limited attention has focused on how the marketing of destinations can reflect socio-political, economic and cultural change. McCrone, Morris and Kiely (1995, p. 5) have examined the making of Scottish heritage and discussed how the landscape of that country is a cultural product, greatly influenced by 19th century aristocratic cultural representations of Scottish landscape. Hall (1994) has examined how countries in Eastern Europe have tried to change how they are seen by Western tour operators and tourists and Morgan and Pritchard (1998) have discussed how the emergence of black heritage attractions in the USA (marketed to African-Americans) reflects changing power structures within that country.

Notwithstanding the contributions of studies such as these, there remains little recognition that repressive and liberating discourses are reflected in the marketing of

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*Corresponding author. Tel.: 029 20416315; fax: 029 20416390.

*E-mail address:* apritchard@uwic.ac.uk (A. Pritchard).

tourism destinations — and almost no acknowledgement that such discourses shape the marketing of communities or countries within the developed (as well as the less developed) world. In part, this is a reflection of the continuing lack of critical analyses of image representation in tourism (Mellinger, 1994). In spite of this absence of work, it is important to note that the ways in which landscapes and destinations are imaged do have significant implications for how those places and their peoples are perceived. Tourism representations do not exist in isolation but are inexorably intertwined in a circuit of culture whereby representations utilise and reflect identity and in which images are continuously produced and consumed (Hall, 1997). As Weightman (1987, p. 230) commented: "The tour brochure directs expectations, influences perceptions, and thereby provides a preconceived landscape for the tourist to "discover". Thus, the directed landscape becomes the real landscape and as Peirce Lewis (1979, p. 21) notes, "The advertisement… becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.""

This article contends that tourism experiences and processes are part of a much wider discursive framework grounded in complex, multi-dimensional, socio-cultural and historical systems. In particular, it attempts to contribute to the development of critical analyses of tourism representations through its investigation of the branding strategies adopted by Welsh local authorities and the Wales Tourist Board (WTB) — the organisation charged with promoting Welsh tourism both within the United Kingdom (UK) and internationally. The article argues that the nature and the use of the tourism representations used by these tourism marketing bodies in their branding strategies is constrained by historical, political and cultural discourses. The identity of Wales — just as much as destinations in Asia (Said, 1978,1991), the Southern States of America (Fredrikson, 1987; Mellinger, 1994) and in Africa (McClintock, 1995) — has been shaped by powerful discourses which "…intersect, so that certain identities are constituted as more powerful and more valuable than others" (Rose, 1993, p. 6).

Importantly, however, such discourses are not immutable but are constantly evolving and Wales is currently a country in considerable transition (economically, socially, politically and culturally). As such, whilst the article examines how the socio-cultural — and thus the touristic — identity of Wales continues to be shaped by powerful historical and political discourses, it also highlights that those discourses are beginning to be challenged. Thus, contemporary Wales is witnessing a fusion of cultural and political processes which have facilitated the promotion of a more overtly Welsh tourism brand image in international markets. By contrast, however, such remains the power of certain negative discourses that a marketing strategy which promotes a distinctively Welsh brand image in the UK is still considered problematic by WTB marketers.

The article begins by reviewing work which has examined the social construction of space and contends that critical analyses of destination marketing activities should involve consideration of their wider socio-political framework. After briefly introducing the case study destination of Wales, it then focuses on the discourses which have influenced perceptions and representations of this country. Central to this discussion is the complex relationship between Wales and England – the former's nearest neighbour and most significant tourism-generating market. The main body of the article examines the separate international and domestic branding strategies pursued by the WTB and Welsh local authorities – the latter being important in domestic marketing. The empirical basis for this discussion is a content analysis of 29 tourism brochures – the WTB's main domestic and overseas brochures and those produced by Welsh local authorities. This is complemented by an in-depth interview with a recently retired key WTB decision-maker, formerly in post at the Board for over 25 years. It then analyses these tourism representations within the wider socio-cultural discourses which have a far-reaching impact on the images of Wales (and the hence the branding strategies) that can be effectively promoted in England (and in the rest of the UK). By contrast, the existence of alternative discourses overseas has facilitated the promotion of a more distinctively *Welsh* identity in other markets. The article thus concludes that Wales' marketing representations (as those of any destination) are inextricably intertwined with historical, political and cultural processes and are not solely the outcome of effective marketing practice.

## 2. The socio-cultural construction of space and place

Sociologists, geographers and students of international politics have argued for some time that there are no politically neutral spaces. For instance, cultural and feminist geographers have focused on the ways in which places and spaces are heterosexualised (Valentine, 1993; Ashworth & Dietvorst, 1995; Bell & Valentine, 1995; Duncan, 1996; Aitcheson, 1999) and racialised (Segal, 1990, pp. 172–173; Anderson, 1996, p. 202). Thus, there is now a significant literature which contends that landscape is "a form of representation and not an empirical object" (Rose, 1993, p. 89). Despite this growing body of work, however, this conceptualisation of space has yet to receive adequate attention within mainstream tourism research — with some exceptions. For example, Morgan and Pritchard (1998, pp. 197–205) have analysed how the tourism consumption of space affirms and resists gendered identities, Hughes (1997), Pritchard, Morgan, Sedgley and Jenkins (1998) and Aitcheson (1999) have focused on the interplay between sexuality and tourism

space, and Ringer et al. (1998) have discussed several aspects of tourism destinations as cultural landscapes.

To date, however, tourism research has largely failed to address the premise that space is "relative and symbolic, rather than absolute and material, [and] enhances the "geographical imagination" by providing alternative ways of seeing" (Aitcheson, 1999, p. 19). In many ways this reflects tourism studies' attachment to more positivist paradigms which have subsequently defined 'appropriate' research agendas within the field. Analyses of social exclusion and the marginalisation of peripheral peoples and places are rare in mainstream tourism studies and:

> Questions of critique of the system of domination that gives rise to the human condition under study, the extent of the researchers' political commitment to emancipatory social change, dialectics… and the account taken of historicism… are simply not found (Botterill, 1999, p. 10).

To begin to provide a more critical framework for the study of tourism, it is essential to locate the industry in the wider social, economic and political systems which shape our world. It is essential, for instance, that analyses of the nature of tourism representations begin to incorporate discussion of the relationship between tourism marketing and ideology. To date, however, these ideological aspects have received relatively little attention, resulting in an incomplete analysis of what is a powerful political and cultural phenomenon: despite its importance, "discussions of the ideological dimensions of tourism have been virtually non-existent" (Hall, 1994, p. 11). Recognising this, we need to re-examine the interplay between power, culture and history if we are to fully understand contemporary tourism process (Foucault, 1980, p. 187). This is particularly true of the touristic construction and representation of peoples and places – as Shurmer-Smith and Hannam (1994, p. 13) contend:

> Place is a deceptively simple concept in geographical thought; we want to make it difficult, uneasy. We want to show that places do not exist in a sense other than culturally, and as a result that they can appear and disappear, change in size and character… according to the way in which people construct them. Places then have no objective reality, only intersubjective ones.

Shields (1991, p. 260) has argued that these intersubjective realities inherently 'express… social divisions' and that since place and space have certain meanings and associations, any examination which involves place therefore also necessitates an exploration of its 'emotional' geography (Shields, 1991, p. 6). In the same way as cultural forms have been divided into 'high' and 'low', Shields (1991, p. 3) describes how spaces have been mapped as 'systems of "centres and peripheries"'. Marginal places are those which have been "'left behind'" in the modern race for progress… not necessarily on geographi-

cal peripheries but… on the periphery of cultural systems of space in which places are ranked relative to each other'. Space thus reflects "the development of cultural marginality [which] occurs only through a complex process of social activity and cultural work" (Shields, 1991, p. 4).

The new cultural geography thus "demonstrates that space, place and landscape – including landscapes of leisure and tourism – are not fixed but are in a constant state of transition as a result of continuous, dialectical struggles of power and resistance among and between the diversity of landscape providers, users and mediators" (Aitcheson, 1999, p. 29; see also Morgan & Pritchard, 1999). As Rose (1993, p. 89) contends, 'a landscape's meanings draw on the cultural codes of the society for which it was made' and thus permeate that society's social and cultural norms and symbols. The following case study-based discussion attempts to contribute to such debates over the socio-cultural and political construction of space through a critical examination of tourism marketing. In doing so it first attempts to demonstrate how historically and culturally Wales has been constructed as England's 'Other' – a process conceptualised by Rose (1995, p. 116) as Othering – "defining where you belong through a contrast with other places, or who you are through a contrast with other people".

## 3. The othering of Wales

Wales, along with Scotland, Northern Ireland and England, is one of the four constituent countries of the UK. Tourism is extremely important to the Welsh economy – worth £2 billion, accounting for seven per cent of its gross domestic product and employing nine per cent of the workforce (WTB, 1998). Wales has a range of assets which underpin its tourism appeal and its diverse natural environment (particularly its coastline and mountains) is the main factor in attracting UK and European visitors. Wales' other principal tourism asset is that it is a distinctive country with its own language, culture and heritage. At the present time, Wales is being separately and simultaneously branded in the UK and in its key overseas markets. The promotion of Wales' language and culture is being used by the WTB as a marketing advantage in overseas markets where visitors are seeking a 'new', culturally diverse experience (WTB, 1994a, p. 55; Pritchard & Morgan, 1996, 1998). Conversely in the UK, it is the natural environment which forms the basis of Wales' marketing appeals. To fully understand why these quite different strategies are being pursued we need to briefly review how Wales has been constructed as a social and cultural landscape both historically and contemporaneously. It is only then that we can begin to unravel the "multiplicity of behaviours, meanings, consumption trends and identities

constructed in and through leisure and tourism" (Aitcheson, 1999, p. 30).

### 3.1. Historical constructions of Wales

Definitions of ethnicity and nationhood are always problematic and multifaceted – as Weber (1978, pp. 385–398) suggested, neither ethnicity nor nation can easily be defined precisely for sociological purposes. McCrone et al. (1995, p. 45) have commented how "Ethnicity... becomes a form of rhetoric read off a dominant white culture which is highly implicit. Hence there is a black but no white consciousness, female but no male... Scottish but little English... ethnicity helps to define the periphery to the centre rather than the other way round". In the case of the Welsh, they have long been defined by their language – *Cymraeg* – which is one of the oldest living languages in Europe (Williams, 1985, p. 3). Howell and Barber (1990) have also listed a range of attitudes (in addition to the Welsh language) which distinguish the Welsh, including: "Their separate history, instinctive radicalism in religion and politics, contempt for social pretentiousness, personal warmth and exuberance, sociability, [and] love of music..." Defining Welsh identity is, however, very difficult (Bowie, 1993), indeed, "This is the first point to grasp about the history of this people.... A country called Wales exists only because the Welsh invented it. The Welsh exist only because they invented themselves" (Williams, 1985, p. 2). The Welsh have never existed in isolation of course and since "different modes of domination are implicated in the social construction of ethnic and other identities" (Jenkins, 1997, p. 73), it is essential that we attempt to understand the various discourses which have contributed to the shaping of Wales and the Welsh identity.

Clearly, it is not possible to review here Wales' entire history, however, its historians have demonstrated that the cultural history of Wales has long been sharply politicised and is inherently conflictual (Williams, 1985; Davies, 1993). As Thomas (1992, p. 6) has pointed out, from the earliest historical period Wales has been defined by conflict – the very word *Cymru* (Wales in the Welsh language) "... was derived from *Combrogos*, a concept of an united people fighting against their enemies". In a similar vein, the English word for the country – Wales – derives from *Wealas*, Anglo-Saxon for foreign (Williams, 1985, p. 3; Adams, 1996, p. 10), whilst Chapman (1992) has also commented how the term 'Celtic' served to distinguish non-Anglo-Saxons. Notions of conflict, foreignness and Otherness have thus defined Wales and the Welsh both historically and culturally (Adams, 1996). Wales' relationship with England has been pivotal in this process and Jenkins (1997, p. 132) argues that ultimately one of the defining features of the Welsh is the "sharing of a common ethnic boundary – with and against the English". To notions of conflict and foreignness must also be

added dependence as, since the 1536 Acts of Union, Wales has been a country defined by its lack of political independence.

Some historians, sociologists and tourism researchers have suggested that for many Welsh people these historical and political processes have culminated in the notion that the Welsh are "second class citizens... [and] that status creates a very real feeling of inferiority...." (Thomas, 1992, p. 10). Similar sentiments have also been attributed to the Scots (McCrone et al., 1995, pp. 68–70), although, unlike Wales, Scotland's Union with England was later and more a joining of equal partners. Thus, Davies (1987, p. 60) has described Wales as 'a classic example of an internal colony', and Pitchford (1994, p. 37) argues that the 1536 Union with England:

> marked the beginning of a sustained campaign of cultural homogenization by the central state... Welsh... was banned for administrative and legal purposes.... children were punished for speaking Welsh in schools.

One of the key themes in this attempted cultural homogenisation of Wales was the belief that the Welsh "like all natives were in need of instruction, conversion and control" (Adams, 1996, p. 28). This, of course, has to be set in the wider context of a 'fractured and ambiguous' transformation of nineteenth century British society (Joyce, 1991, p. 3) in which articulate, middle-class Victorian reformers sought to 'forge more effective behavioural constraints' over the British working class (Bailey, 1987, p. 170). In Wales, this attempt at incorporation was highlighted by the desire of the English state to eradicate the Welsh language, the most obvious symbol of a culturally distinct country – a process which was repeated elsewhere in the British Isles with much greater success – as witnessed by the virtual eradication of Gaelic, Irish, Cornish and Manx (Thomas, 1992). Ironically, therefore, the Welsh language – the most visible element of 'Welshness' – remained the greatest remnant of 'difference' within the Union. Indeed, it helped to define not only Wales and the Welsh but also England and the English through the process of 'Othering' (Rose, 1995). As Hall (1997, p. 258) comments, this:

> sets up a symbolic frontier between the 'normal' and the 'deviant'... the 'acceptable' and the 'unacceptable', what 'belongs' and what does not or is Other, between 'insiders' and 'outsiders', Us and Them.

This "... marking of 'difference' is... the basis of that symbolic order we call culture" (Hall, 1997, p. 232). People who differ from the majority (them as opposed to us) have traditionally tended to be represented in binary terms – bad as opposed to good; primitive in contrast to civilised; ugly rather than attractive. Thus, for Wales, this marking of difference revolved around its language, which – as the 1847 Report on the State of Education in

Wales confirmed – was regarded by the English state as a 'barrier to moral progress'. The same report described the Welsh themselves as "degenerate… dirty, ignorant, bigoted and contented; promiscuous; wanting chastity; immoral; violent and vicious…" (quoted in Adams, 1996, p. 28) – implying a binary contrast with the civilised, progressive and moral English. Thus, whilst the 1870 Education Act provided free education for children in Wales it also made English the compulsory language: "Many of the school teachers in the new schools practised cultural genocide… a child's… punishment for speaking his or her own language has become notorious" (Williams, 1985, p. 246). At the same time as this sustained state-sponsored campaign (supported by many Welsh educators) was having a significant impact on the Welsh language and culture, the history of Wales was also deemed to be "something primitive and contemptible and best forgotten" (Williams, 1985, p. 246).

This Othering of Wales vis-a-vis England also occurred in other spheres – notably the media. Thus, *The Times* described the Welsh language as 'the curse of Wales', arguing that its prevalence and the ignorance of English excluded the Welsh people from the civilisation, the improvement and material prosperity of their English neighbours. It concluded that:

> Their antiquated and semi-barbarous language… shrouds them in darkness. If Wales and the Welsh are… to share the material prosperity and… we will add the culture and morality of England, they must forget their isolated language and learn to speak English and nothing else. For all purposes Welsh is a dead language (*The Times* editorial, 1866, quoted in Morris, 1998).

From this very brief historical overview, it is evident that the Welsh have clearly been constructed as 'Other' by the English state and by its cultural institutions – as their very antithesis (Adams, 1996, p. 31). Significantly for the contemporary construction and representation of Wales as a tourism place, these negative discourses are by no means absent today, although punitive state control has been replaced by civilian sanction in the form of social and cultural ridicule.

### 3.2. Contemporary constructions of Wales

Whilst it is clearly not the case that such views are universal, there is a persistent stream within contemporary representations and descriptions of Wales which is highly derogatory. Columnists in national newspapers can characterise Wales as 'a cowed country', whose people speak a curious language and whose national anthem can, with impunity, be described as 'gibberish' (Matthew Engel of *The Guardian* quoted in Heath, 1996, p. 15). Above all, the continued existence of the Welsh language is seen to exclude and thus challenge the domi-

nance of English – hence it is often the focal point of derision. As Thomas (1992, p. 22) points out – to this day – England is bemused and disturbed that "there is another literature still surviving in her midst…". Thus, prominent English-based newspaper columnists still argue that Wales should become 'properly' part of England to share in the benefits of civilised society and relinquish their separate Welsh identity and language (Heffer, 1997). Such columnists continue to describe the Welsh as 'dingy, untalented and sly' and vilify Wales for having never made "any significant contribution to any branch of knowledge, culture or entertainment" (Wilson, 1993, p. 4). As Pitchford (1994, p. 38) notes, such has been the power of the negative discourses which have defined Wales that the stereotypes continue to be difficult to destroy:

> attitudes towards the Welsh language and culture range from ignorance and indifference to outright hostility; school children are taught little about Wales, and the media continue to portray the Welsh in derogatory ways.

Similar processes can be seen within the economic as well as the socio-cultural sphere. Thus, whilst Wales has continued to attract a higher proportion of overseas investment than any other part of the UK, it is "less well known… that the Welsh economy 'underperforms' relative to other economic regions of the United Kingdom in attracting British investment" (Smith, 1998, p. 4). A major research study, commissioned by a consortium of public-sector bodies in Wales to explore why Wales enjoys so much success in attracting overseas investment and so little in attracting UK investment, focused on interviews with managing directors, chief executives, investment managers and other business opinion-formers in London, the Southeast of England and the M4 corridor. Its findings were illuminating:

> Wales continues to have an image problem. There is a negative perception among those outside the region with little experience of the area… and this is compounded by perceptions of the 'Welshness' of the people, language and culture – essentially racial stereotyping and prejudice (PA Consulting, 1991 quoted in Smith, 1998).

As Osmond and Balsom (1998, p. 1) note, there is increasing concern over the distorted impressions of Wales which continue to be held in England – "compounded by widespread prejudices held by the English about the Welsh people themselves". Likewise, Smith (1998, p. 5) comments: "the image problem for Wales as a place to invest is that it is perceived to be remote, something of a dump and (unfortunately) inhabited by Welsh people". Such negative views of Welshness closely echo historical stereotypes of the Welsh people and character. The

Welsh are perceived to be "…clannish and ultranationalistic, unfriendly and hostile", and the Welsh language as "unintelligible, irrelevant and a barrier to economic progress and integration" (Smith, 1998, p. 5). As Smith continues, "It is symptomatic of the problems that foreign investors often quote the language as one of the key lifestyle attractions of Wales and yet the English see it as an obstacle." Thus, in the rest of the UK the country continues to be constructed as a backwater with an inadequate infrastructure and lacking the attributes of a cosmopolitan lifestyle – such as high-quality performing arts venues, retailing and restaurants.

## 4. Tourism marketing representations of Wales

The second part of this article investigates the nature and use of the images employed in the marketing of Wales. In the first instance, it uses content and discourse analysis to identify the images used to construct Wales as a tourism space in its domestic and overseas markets. Secondly, it reviews the consumer research which has been undertaken by the WTB and other agencies in Wales' key tourism-generating markets. The article then explores the extent to which the marketing images adopted by Wales' marketers are simply the result of effective promotional strategies or whether they parallel and reflect the wider discursive framework grounded in historical, cultural, social and systems discussed above. A key basis for this discussion is an in-depth interview with Elwyn Owen, the former Director of Research and Corporate Planning at the WTB and a person with over 25 years' experience of researching images and perceptions of Wales.[1] Since the WTB is a small organisation with relatively few people with important decision-making functions, one interview can provide insightful information from a social science point of view – especially when the research objective is to understand the world from an insider's viewpoint (Hornig Priest, 1996, p. 107).

Given the budgetary constraints facing the WTB and Welsh local authorities, the tourism brochure is the key marketing tool for constructing and representing Wales as a tourism space and for targeting potential visitors. The following section centres on a content analysis of the main WTB overseas and domestic brochures and 27 local authority brochures aimed mainly at the UK market. Utilising a methodology previously developed for brochure imagery evaluation, the analysis identified and quantified the illustrations used on the brochure covers and within the body of the brochures – excluding any

advertisements (Pritchard & Morgan, 1995). Almost 3000 images were coded, each according to the dominant image conveyed, including a classification of 'Welsh' symbols – which the WTB has adopted "to brand Wales… as a signature in all brochures and publications" (WTB, 1994a, p. 143).

Content analysis (together with semiotics and discourse analysis) is a technique which has been used to provide a consistent interpretation of cultural objects. Slater (1998, p. 234), in a discussion of content analysis and semiotics, highlights how:

> Both are forms of textual analysis, aiming to provide convincing readings of cultural texts, and to draw various conclusions from them, by looking at the texts themselves rather than at the ways in which people actually consume the texts.

Content analysis attempts to apply a rigorous and structured analysis to what are difficult, contentious and usually subjective cultural objects. The technique has a long history of use in communication studies and as a research technique in tourism it has been frequently used in destination image studies and rather less frequently in examinations of gendered and racialised representations (Pritchard & Morgan, 2000). It involves taking a sample which is both representative but small enough to allow for substantive analysis. The sample itself, however, is rarely random because of the nature of the investigation and the materials involved (Slater, 1998, p. 235). Critical to successful content analyses are the development of appropriate classifications which are independently verifiable and reliable: this is usually resolved by using more than one coder (as was the case in this study). Although content analysis has its roots in positivism, when it is utilised in conjunction with other forms of textual investigation – such as discourse analysis – it creates more critical, richer and complex interpretations of representations.

Discourse analysis involves investigating cultural texts to understand how they help to create and reproduce meanings which in turn shape our knowledge of the social world. These texts are viewed not as neutral vehicles for communication (precisely because language involves classifying and stereotyping), instead they are sites in which social meanings are created and reproduced and social identities are formed (Tonkiss, 1998, p. 246). Discourse refers to any text or language which "draws on a particular terminology and encodes specific forms of knowledge" (Tonkiss, 1998, p. 248). Particularly relevant to discourse analysis, is its tendency to not discuss cultural texts in isolation but rather to locate them within an analysis which refers to external social relations. Commonalities do exist in the sense that within the analysis, the researcher looks for key themes and patterns of emphasis. Significantly, of equal interest within discourse analyses are the silences and omissions

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[1] The authors are grateful to Elwyn Owen for this interview and wish to stress that the views expressed are his own and do not represent the opinions of the Wales Tourist Board.

Table 1
Comparing Wales' branding representations in the USA and UK[a]

| Image categories | % of USA images (WTB) | % of UK images (WTB) | % of UK images (local government) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Welsh branding symbols | 31 | 7 | 3 |
| Heritage | 29 | 11 | 10 |
| Scenery | 17 | 25 | 32 |
| People | 10 | 23 | 20 |
| Activities | 7 | 11 | 23 |
| Urban/consumer activities | 3 | 10 | 6 |
| Rural life/farmlife/wildlife | 2 | 14 | 5 |

[a] Figures to nearest per cent. Source: WTB USA and UK brochures and 27 Welsh local authority brochures.

which become apparent when the researcher reads against the text (e.g. here, the lack of references to Welsh culture and language).

In the analysis of the WTB brochure aimed at the USA – Wales' largest and most valuable overseas market (WTB, 1994a,b) – the range and the depth of the 'Welsh' branding exercise overseas is clearly seen. In this brochure the WTB is using branding symbols to communicate the distinguishing characteristics of Wales and the content analysis reveals that such branding symbols account for almost a third of all the images in the brochure. Thus the branding strategy emphasises Wales' Celtic heritage, the Welsh language, myths and legends and Welsh emblems – such as the daffodil, the leek, the Welsh dragon, and the Welsh national flag. Also heavily featured are images of Wales' vocal and musical tradition – which research indicates sets Wales apart from competitor destinations in the UK. The second most commonly occurring images – accounting for just under 30 per cent – are 'heritage' images (principally castles), themselves a secondary brand signature for Wales (Table 1).

The extent of the WTB's attempt to construct Wales as a distinctive Welsh space is also evident not just in the frequency of the use of Welsh brand-symbols, but also from their prominence. A Celtic-style typeface dominates the brochure whilst images of the Welsh flag and the Welsh language are central to each brochure page layout. Welsh proverbs and their translations are heavily featured and readers are told that "Welsh (Cymraeg) is one of the oldest living languages in Europe" (WTB, 1997c, p. 63). The use and centrality of the Welsh language is perhaps the most significant brand signature in the attempt to craft an unique tourism space within the UK. As the brochure text says: "We are a nation which is distinctive, with its own Celtic language and culture, which is as proud of its past as its present and future". (WTB, 1997c, p. 1).

Linked to the brochure's emphasis on the attraction of a living, 'foreign' language in the UK is the appeal of the culture of Wales – a culture which is not merely based on Welsh myths and legends but which also focuses heavily on the thriving contemporary Welsh performing arts,

crafts and entertainment (Waters, 1998, p. 11). This performance culture includes the annual National Eisteddfod and the International Llangollen Festival (Europe's largest peripatetic and international festivals, respectively) – thus the brochure points out: "We are fortunate to have so much heritage, so much history and one of the longest unbroken literary traditions in Europe" (WTB, 1997c, p. 5). This strategy – promoting Wales as a culturally distinct country in the UK – has also underpinned the advertising which the WTB carries out both independently and in partnership with other organisations (WTB, 1995a). Thus, when the WTB launched its first advertising campaign in partnership with American Airlines in 1995 the Welsh language featured prominently in a campaign emphasising that Wales has its own language, culture and history (Pritchard & Morgan, 1998).

In an identical analysis to that of the WTB's USA brochure, the imagery of the main WTB domestic brochure was also classified. Unlike the overseas brochure, that for the UK is a magazine-style collection of articles by celebrities with connections to Wales, including: actor Sir Anthony Hopkins, broadcaster John Humphrys and botanist David Bellamy. In contrast to that aimed at the USA, however, in the UK brochure scenic images dominate the image content and there are few Welsh brand signatures (Table 1). Moreover, although the brochure provides a brief guide to the Welsh language, its treatment is different from that in the overseas brochure. Domestic visitors are told that they 'may hear Welsh spoken as an everyday language' (WTB, 1995b, p. 133), whilst the US visitors are told: "The Welsh language has been in daily use in Wales for centuries, but don't worry about encountering any language difficulties – Everybody in Wales speaks English, the road signs are bilingual…" (WTB, 1997c, p. 63).

To further explore how Wales is being constructed as a tourist space within the UK, 27 local authority brochures were also examined by the same content analysis techniques. In addition to the WTB, a number of local government organisations are also significant in producing brochures aimed at the UK tourist – either in partnership or individually. The major finding of an analysis

of their brochures is that distinctively 'Welsh' imagery hardly features. In fact, uniquely Welsh images were very insignificant – accounting for only three per cent of all images – and brand signatures such as the Welsh flag, the Welsh dragon and the Welsh language (so prominent in the WTB USA brochure) were rarely evident. Instead the promotional material was dominated by generic UK holiday attributes such as scenery and activities. The lack of uniquely Welsh cultural descriptors in the brand architecture which has been developed to support Wales' brand proposition in the UK market is striking by comparision with the brand which is being developed internationally (Table 1).

# 5. Construing the imagined tourism space 'Wales'

The following discussion contextualises why the various socio-political, historical processes described above as 'the Othering of Wales' are reflected in the content analysis of the international and domestic imaging of Wales. Indeed, McCrone et al's (1995, p. 203) comment on Scotland that "it is clear that its iconography relates closely to historical, economic and political events" applies equally well to Wales. A celebration of Wales' language and culture is certainly finding expression in the overseas marketing activities of the WTB. Interestingly, this national tourism organisation is charged with protecting and enhancing the Welsh culture in all its activities - a commitment which is exclusive to Wales and not part of the remit of any other UK national tourist board. As its mission statement suggests, the WTB seeks 'To sustain and promote the culture of Wales and the Welsh language' (WTB, 1994a). Indeed, it recognises that 'The Welsh language and cultural traditions of Wales are vital to the future of Wales as a country… [and] in a tourism context' (WTB, 1994a, p. 91). Thus, the WTB has committed itself to "… draw together all kinds of activities, cultural as well as historical, to create a strong image, especially abroad…. It is our aim to show the visitor that Wales is a bilingual country" (WTB, 1991).

In many areas of Welsh life there is thus a recognition that tourism can be used to "promote and protect Welsh culture, to consciously and deliberately craft its messages about Wales that are sent through the medium of tourism" (Pitchford, 1994, p. 44). The significant factor in this re-identification of Wales with Welshness, however, is that the WTB's communication of Wales' unique culture is almost exclusively aimed at an international audience. Although the content analysis focused on the marketing of Wales in the USA, an identical branding campaign is also being pursued in its other key overseas markets – with the same promotion of Wales' unique cultural and linguistic tradition. By contrast, a very different branding campaign is being pursued in Wales' domestic market – with very different representations of

Wales and the Welsh. Wales is not unique in this separation – McCrone et al. (1995, p. 82) have highlighted how Scotland's projected tourism imagery makes subdued use of its culture in England, although – unlike in the case of Wales – 'the perceived cultural difference between Scotland and England is judged to work in the Scottish Tourist Board's favour.'

## 5.1. Overseas and UK consumer perceptions of Wales

The construction of '"Wales" the Brand' (and thus its representations) in its overseas markets is founded on a recognition that these visitors are more interested than UK tourists in 'experiencing Welsh culture' (WTB, 1994a, p. 92). Whilst recognising that each individual market is heterogeneous (e.g. Foster (1999) discusses perceptions of Wales amongst differing US segments), this assertion is based on consumer research in the key overseas markets (which include the USA, Germany, the Netherlands and Australia) which suggests that (amongst those familiar with Wales) the country is regarded as having an unique identity – "it is its own country… [and] has its own language" (WTB, 1994c). Wales is also seen by overseas travel consumers as being differentiated from the rest of the UK by its music, castles and countryside – but also, importantly, by its culture and the friendliness of its people who have been described by American consumers in focus groups as "very gentle and friendly" – a people with "a fascinating history" (WTB, 1994c). Other recent research parallels such findings, indicating that Americans who are familiar with Wales regard the Welsh as "more romantic… more emotional… than the British claim to be" and "more outgoing [with] a better sense of humour" (Morris, 1998, p. 115). It thus emerges that in building this brand overseas, the WTB does not have to contend with any negative discourses about Wales and, as a result, is trying to construct an image of a Celtic, Welsh-speaking and therefore culturally-unique destination within the UK.

The representation and construction of Wales as a tourist space in the UK domestic market – largely focusing on Wales' natural environment – is a campaign grounded in research which suggests that whilst overseas markets feel attracted to the notion of another cultural and linguistic tradition existing within the UK, in the UK itself the reaction is somewhat different. In particular, qualitative research undertaken by the WTB amongst prospective English holidaymakers reveals a much more ambivalent view of the Welsh language and whilst frequent UK visitors to Wales tend to be very positive about the destination, there is substantial resistance amongst others (WTB, 1994d). Not unexpectedly, given the processes discussed above, for these consumers, the Welsh language encapsulates Welsh patriotism and nationalism and WTB research confirms that some English people are uncomfortable with the existence of a different

(and thriving) language and heritage in their midst. For them another language excludes and engenders uncomfortable notions of foreignness – one participant in the WTB research commented: 'some of them [i.e. the Welsh] deliberately speak Welsh when you go into a shop', whilst another observed: "I did notice they didn't speak English in Marks and Spencer" (WTB, 1994d, p. 22). Such comments are representative of the lack of recognition that Welsh is a living, everyday language. Indeed, the report commented that "only a minority fully understood that Welsh was a living language and speaking it was therefore normal" (WTB, 1994d, p. 22). Instead, participants commented, "I know it's their language but… they are speaking English and then they deliberately start speaking Welsh" (WTB, 1994d, p. 22). These negative views of Wales are more commonly found amongst those UK tourists who have never visited Wales – indeed studies have repeatedly shown that for many of those who have visited, the Welsh language and culture are significant attractions (ECTARC, 1988; Light, 1992; WTB, 1996, 1997a; Morris, 1998). However, amongst some UK holidaymakers who have never been to Wales, "there is evidence to suggest that the idea of an ethnically distinct, bilingual region within the United Kingdom sometimes arouses hostility" (Pitchford, 1994, p. 40).

This consumer research conducted in the mid-nineties affirmed the WTB's awareness that "the culture of Wales is more of an asset in overseas markets… than it is in the domestic market…" (WTB, 1994a, p. 55). Certainly, there is a recognition within the WTB that "Welshness won't work at home…" (WTB, 1997b) and, at the moment, Wales' uniquely Welsh characteristics remain largely hidden from view in the representations used to brand Wales in the domestic market. Further research commissioned by the WTB to inform the creation of a brand identity for Wales in the UK did, however, indicate a way forward for the marketers of Wales – although not one which focuses on Wales' unique culture (WTB, 1997b). In qualitative research investigating UK tourists' perceptions of Wales, it was felt to be unspoilt, traditional, safe and community-oriented with down-to-earth people – a destination offering a genuine, beautiful, green and accessible experience. Key associations used by UK tourists to describe Wales were emotional and evocative, and many conveyed a sense of freedom. As Table 2 illustrates, these associations with freedom and escape, combined with an ambivalence to the Welsh language, have proved decisive in defining the construction of '"Wales" The Brand', and more significantly, Wales the tourist space, in the UK.

### 5.2. Marketing Cymru, marketing Wales

Since 1996 the WTB has been developing a new domestic branding strategy in conjunction with the overseas brand – a development which suggests that the

Table 2
Key associations of Wales amongst UK travel consumers[a]

| |
| --- |
| Going back to childhood |
| Freedom from claustrophobia |
| Breezes through your hair |
| Paddling in cool water |
| Being yourself as a family |
| Snow mists on lakes and waterfalls |
| Screaming at the sea on a beach at Christmas |
| Dolphins |
| Seals swimming next to boats |

[a]Source: WTB (1997b).

parallel promotion of two distinct Welsh identities and constructed spaces is likely to continue for the foreseeable future. Costing more than £5 million over three years and largely targeting the upscale short-break market, the WTB's current UK branding and marketing strategy focuses on how Wales' landscape and environment can revive an alienated urban population. In essence, the destination is marketed as putting "back into your life what life takes out" (WTB, 1997b). The branding concept centres around 'natural revival', conveying that Wales' unspoilt and beautiful landscape – which for many remains 'hidden on England's doorstep' – offers tourists the physical and spiritual renewal so needed in today's hectic society. This is encapsulated in the strapline 'Wales: Two Hours and a Million Miles Away' – and even the background music in the current WTB television advertisement – the Welsh band Manic Street Preachers' 'A Design for Life' – echoes this revival theme (WTB, 1997b). This particular construction of Wales as a 'natural' tourist space largely builds on previous UK marketing campaigns which have been dominated by images of Wales' scenery and environment. These images which are used by the WTB to market Wales in the UK are those which its image-makers feel to be:

> meaningful and relevant to the market segment. For instance, you'll see an emphasis on the notion of being able to get to Wales easily. That is particularly important for second and third holidays. So there has to be this element of getting there quickly and also the element of when you are there you are in a place which must be different to where you were before – the notion of activities and so on (Owen, 1999).

It is not simply that representations of Welsh culture work solely in the USA and not in the domestic market (indeed, research demonstrates that upmarket short-break-takers *are* attracted by cultural activities), but that Wales' easily accessible natural attractions are its key marketing edge in the UK. Thus, whilst the cultural and natural attractions are not mutually exclusive, it is clearly the case that in the overseas branding effort culture and language tend to dominate the representations. In the domestic imaging of Wales the marketing strategy has

had to take account of the wider relationship between Wales and England and also the prevailing powerful socio-political contexts:

> Historically a key difference has been that the WTB is far more comfortable emphasising culture, heritage and language within an overseas publication. It has tended in the past not to focus on those issues in a domestic marketplace because there was a fear that the potential customer could be alienated... culture and language – these were sensitive issues, so there would tend to be no mention of those issues – certainly of language within brochures (Owen, 1999).

This was in complete contrast to the language's reception abroad where "There are no negative associations with the Welsh language – it is just another language" (Owen, 1999). In essence, the WTB in its domestic marketing and branding strategies has had to largely ignore much of what makes Wales unique within the UK. Thus:

> One of the difficulties Wales has had in domestic terms is that elusive USP, but the strengths that Wales is seen as having are strengths which other places have – Wales is beautiful, but so is the Lake District, so is Scotland, so is Ireland. Activities well yes, but so have many other places. To find something that it is a strength and can be used very positively and can distinguish Wales has been difficult. That's why the card that was waiting to be played – its culture – was the card that the player was afraid of playing for so long, because its strength was that it was discriminating but it could also be negative – its weakness (Owen, 1999).

Paradoxically, therefore, whilst consumer research revealed that music and culture were seen as important to Wales:

> there was some fear that the culture of Wales was not as accessible as the culture of Scotland because of the language. Aspects of Scots culture were highly visible – the kilt – and highly audible – the bagpipes – whether you liked them or not, they weren't particularly threatening to people. Some of the aspects of Welsh cultural identity tended to exclude or were seen to exclude (Owen, 1999).

### 5.3. Signs of change: Cymru – a culture in resurgence?

At the start of the 2000s there are a number of external and internal factors which are combining to facilitate a re-identification of Wales as a distinctively Welsh entity and space – factors which are the product of counter or alternative political and cultural discourses. Perhaps the most obvious of these are moves towards political devolution and the rise of the European Union – also identified as significant in reconstruing the identities of Ireland

and Scotland (O'Connor, 1993, p. 68; McCrone et al., 1995, p. 25). The emergence of Europe as a significant force in Welsh political and economic life is a shift which, in many ways has been accompanied by the decline of the UK Parliament in both reputation and significance in Wales (Hanson, 1993). As Jenkins (1997, p. 34) points out: "The legitimacy of the... constitutional arrangements for the government of Wales has been called into question over the last decade" and 1999 saw the establishment of a National Assembly for Wales – its first independent political institution to be elected for almost six hundred years, seen by Smith (1998, p. 16) as "...the single greatest and irreversible shift in the locus and distribution of political power in Wales".

In addition to political devolution which is designed to 'reinforce Wales' distinctive place in the United Kingdom, and provide leadership to reinvigorate all aspects of Welsh life and culture' (Welsh Office, 1997, p. 31), significant change has occurred in the cultural relationships between Wales and the centre. The clearest reflection of this re-emergence and renegotiation of a Welsh identity is the status of the Welsh language. In the mid-nineties Welsh achieved legal parity with English in Wales – confirming that Wales is legally, visibly and audibly a bilingual country (Welsh Language Board, 1996). As a result, the language is visible on road and shop signs, whilst in the educational sphere the demand for Welsh language schools is at its highest level, most notably in the more Anglicised Southeast Wales. The language's revival has also been felt in the cultural sphere and *Sianel Pedwar Cymru* (S4C) – Wales' own Welsh language television channel "... is applauded on all sides and generally recognised as an enormous cultural advance" (Flyn, 1995, p. 3). As a focus for the cultural industries, S4C has been significantly, but by no means exclusively, responsible for the development of a vibrant media sector (Williams, 1985, p. 292) and today Wales has thriving design, craft, media and entertainment industries (Waters, 1998, p. 11).

Whereas the WTB has not been able or prepared to promote Wales' cultural and linguistic heritage for much of its lifetime, it is possible that at the start of this new century we are seeing a fusion of socio-cultural processes which may facilitate its greater representation in domestic as well as overseas markets. In the media, "Catatonia, the Manic Street Preachers and Cool Cymru is important because these are all images that young people have themselves espoused. They are not the images of their parents or an older generation" (Owen, 1999). In addition, attitudes towards the language do appear to be changing: "there seems to be acceptance within the marketplace that Welsh is a living language and roadsigns are not just silly curiosities and that there is a pride in the language" (Owen, 1999).

This is in direct contrast to previous research conducted in the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s which found that many English people "felt it strange to see a different

language being used in what they felt was their own backyard" (Owen, 1999). It may well be that this change has in part been provoked by seeing the language not just on roadsigns but also in well respected, major retailers such as Marks and Spencers: "maybe that is giving it endorsement, giving it legitimacy, giving it authority… although it is possible that perhaps I'm seeing a trend here I want to see" (Owen, 1999). Given these changes, it may now be possible for the WTB to utilise the Welsh language and culture in marketing Wales in the UK:

> so WTB has felt, particularly with the move towards devolution that it should be more proud of its Welshness and be more broad in its use of Welshness. So now you will see a bilingual logo appearing, the word Cymru appearing far more than it used to. The word Cymru would have been used very frequently in something destined for the American market, or the French or Dutch market, but it is a relatively recent thing for that word to appear prominently in something for the domestic market (Owen, 1999).

It is possible in the future that Wales will be able to be more 'Welsh' in England perhaps because of changes in England itself and as a result of pan-UK political devolution. As Owen commented:

> There is a greater sense of identity within England now – it's fairly new, St George's cross is seen more visibly at rugby internationals – so maybe in a sense discovering English identity is making for greater tolerance of another identity. I'm not sure which came first. I guess it is reacting to a greater sense of Irish and Scottish identities. It may simply be that people are more familiar with seeing it, and once you start seeing and hearing something you become more tempered to it… maybe it's part of the general devolutionary trend throughout the world because Europeanisation is… about the re-emergence of the local state… Maybe again it is part of globalisation generally so that you become aware of what is happening outside your little patch (Owen, 1999).

## 6. Conclusion

Throughout this article it has been argued that the representations used in destination marketing are not value-free expressions of a place's identity – instead, they are the culmination of historical, social, economic and political processes and reveal much about the social construction of space, cultural change, identity and discourse. The nature of the representations used in marketing campaigns do not simply reflect destination marketers' (and advertising agencies') responses to a dynamic external environment – they are also constructed expressions of destinations' cultural and political identi-

ties. Significantly, we can see how the representations of place can change depending on those who are constructing and construing a particular tourism space intersubjectively. If we fail to understand the complexities of tourism marketing and the power relationships which underpin these then we 'fail to recognise the reinforcement and construction of new power relations that are emerging out of the tourism process'. As Kinnaird and Hall (1994, p. 27) continue, since tourism constitutes one of the largest sectors in global trade, "it is essential that we reformulate our focus to identify associated societal change and what it means…". The cultural significance of language and imagery is far wider than merely the impact of seeing a photograph in a brochure since tourism images do not merely depict destinations and peoples – like all images, they "… are not objective nor transparent but are produced within sites of struggle" (Mellinger, 1994, p. 776).

Wales at the begining of the twenty first century could still be described in terms of the UK tourism consumer as one of Shields' (1991, p. 3) "marginal places placed on the periphery of cultural systems of space… [which] all carry the image, and stigma, of their marginality which becomes indistinguishable from any basic identity they might once have had". As he goes on to point out (1991, p. 5) "The politics of this process of symbolic exclusion depends on a strategy… which puts the High in a whole series of possible relationships with the Low without ever losing the upper hand". Crucially, however, "the construction of marginality, the classification of the Low, and the exclusion of the Other are not final points of achieved status." (Shields, 1991, p. 5). Thus, despite the continuing influences of the negative discourses discussed above, there are signs that Wales is witnessing a melding of processes which have prompted a review of its relationship with the dominant culture. Space, place and landscape are in constant flux as a result of continuous struggles of power and resistance. Thus the meaning and representation of Wales as a tourism space is shifting and its identity is contested as a consequence of changing socio-cultural discourses and of struggles among and between its marketers (the mediators) and its consumers.

As outlined in the discussion on the discourses which have and continue to define Wales, the country is subject to a fusion of processes which have facilitated the implementation of an overtly Welsh identity overseas. By contrast, within the UK the power of the current discourses which construct Wales as Other – especially those of the media – is such that a campaign portraying a distinctive Welsh identity still remains problematic in the domestic market. Its emotional geography is thus constructed by its marketers as a natural space of escape and freedom from urban alienation – not as a landscape which is culturally and linguistically distinct. The interview with the former Director at the WTB would appear to suggest that this situation may be beginning to change

– although at present the extent and speed of this shift remains unquantifiable. Whether cultural and political trends such as the redefinition of notions of 'Britishness' and the redrawing of the UK's political landscape – with power devolved to Wales, Scotland, London and Northern Ireland – produces a similar shift in the tourism representation of Wales in the UK in the next century remains to be seen. These processes certainly offer opportunities for the UK's competing national heritages to redefine not only their constitutional, but also their socio-cultural relationships and the analysis in this article creates a base from which to re-examine touristic representations in the context of further political and cultural change.

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