

Designing sustainable pathways: the Highlands and Islands of Scotland in transition. The case of the Western Isles



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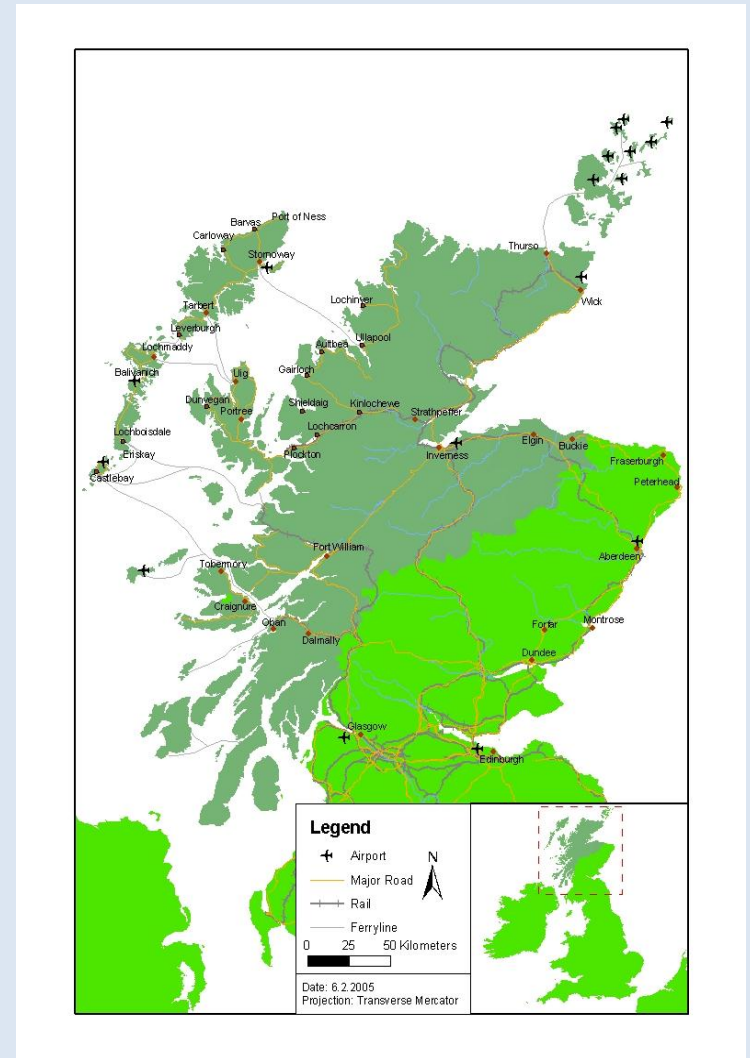


Introduction

- Rural peripheries in Europe for long have been regarded backward, underdeveloped, thus „losing areas“
- However, at present significant processes of change
- More diverse picture of rural peripheries emerging
- Highlands and Islands of Scotland (H & I) provide out-standing example of recent restructuring, yet not fully recognized outside Britain
- Fundamental debate over future pathways
- Case of Western Isles of particular interest
- Presentation based on data gained from own empirical studies funded by DFG since 2002

The Scottish Highlands and Islands: a classic periphery of Europe?

- For long H & I have been regarded a classic periphery
- No distinct definition of the area
 - So called crofting counties of 1886
 - Highland Council created in 1975
 - Working area of H & I Enterprise since 1991



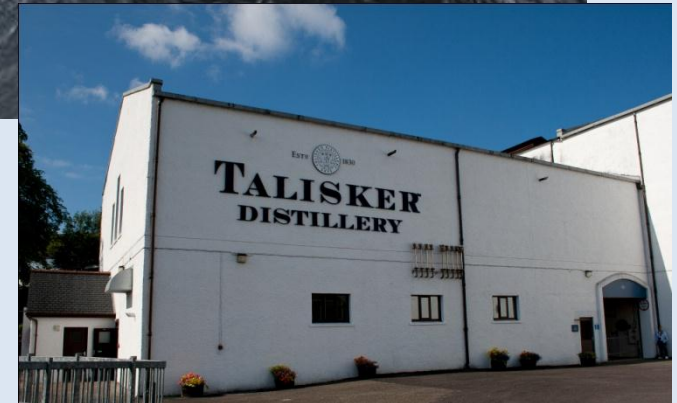
- Accumulation of distinct characteristics:
 - Vulnerable mountain-seascape
 - Limited accessibility
 - Socio-economic disparities
 - Marginalized Celtic culture: experience of „internal colonialism“ (*Hechter 1980*)
- Great deal of neglect until 1950s

- Image of a „problem region“ (*Turnock 1974*)



The regional policy debate: conceptual dispute over future pathways

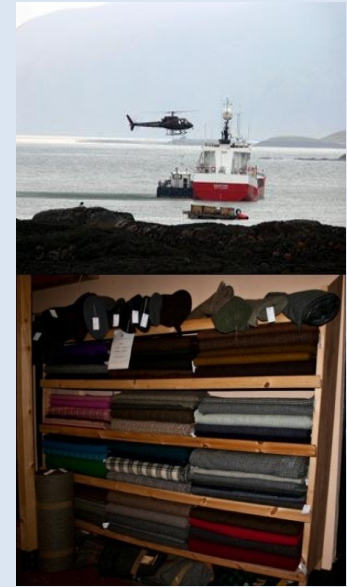
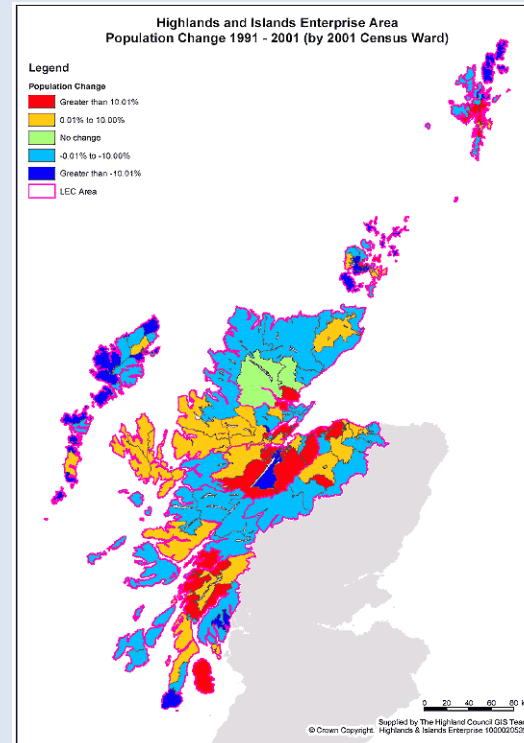
- Since 1965 installation of systematic regional policy: *Highlands and Islands Development Board (HIDB)*
- Strategic approach with focus on industrial growth and employment: e.g. hydro-power, oil, whisky, tourism



- Significant adjustments of regional policies since 1990s:
 - *Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE)* as a regional development agency 1991
 - Election of Scottish Parliament 1999: new incentives for „Scottish perspective“
 - Land Reform Bill 2001: enabling communities to buy-out private land for communal use



- Substantial effects, not least due to European co-financing
- Obvious reversal of population decline since 1980s
- Measurable economic takeoff in terms of employment and income
- However, distinct regional exceptions, esp. Western Isles

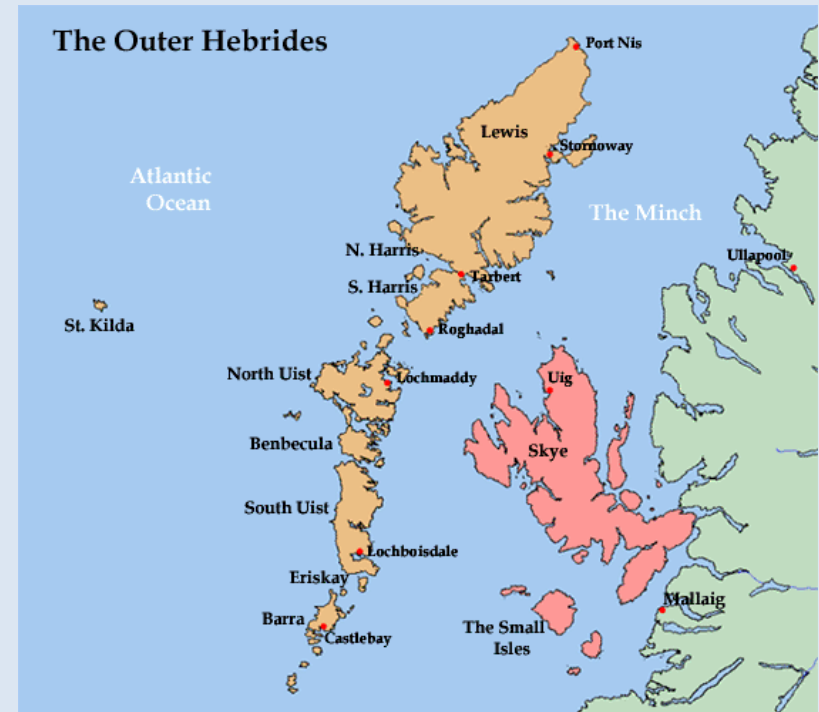


- Recent culmination of regional policy debate
- Competing interpretations of „community“ and „sustainability“ (*Mackenzie 2002*)
- Example: dispute over Lingerbay Quarry project (1991/2004)
- Growing awareness of vulnerability of both environment and society



Designing sustainable pathways: the case of the Western Isles

- Enormous challenges particularly reflected by case of the Western Isles
- Visible lack of socio-economic regeneration and population recovery
- Targeted Scottish government intervention, including EU resources (e.g. LEADER)



- Recent development driven by bottom-up and multi-sectoral initiatives run by community groups (networks)
- Common vision of initiatives:
 - Use of endogenous potentials
 - Participatory planning
 - Focus on sustainability
- Special importance of community buy-outs (according to Land Reform Bill of 2001)

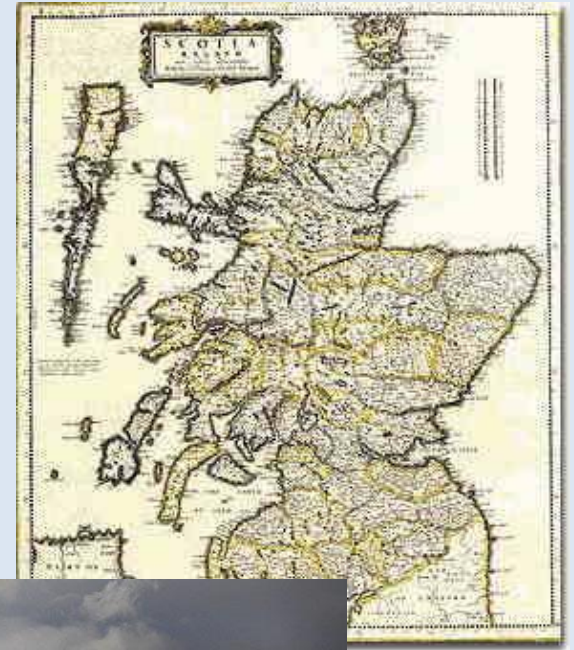


- North Harris Trust supplies various examples for illustration:
 - Creating new housing opportunities
 - Use of renewable energies
 - Developing nature oriented tourism
- Thus Trust activities help to create new jobs and income
- Accordingly, high acceptance in the area



Synthesis

- H & I of Scotland provide outstanding example of rural periphery in transition
- Surprising recovery of a once „lost place“ in terms of employment, population and self-confidence
- Controversial debate over pros and cons of large scale industrial development



- Accordingly, rising awareness for sustainable pathways: natural assets and cultural traditions
- Development of new forms of rural governance, involving strong community initiatives resp. networks
- Exciting case for further scientific observation and analysis





Thank you very much!
If you are interested, make contact via
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