



## OpenAIR@RGU

### The Open Access Institutional Repository at Robert Gordon University

<http://openair.rgu.ac.uk>

This is an author produced version of a paper published in

Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal (ISSN 1352-2752)

This version may not include final proof corrections and does not include published layout or pagination.

#### Citation Details

##### Citation for the version of the work held in 'OpenAIR@RGU':

ANDERSON, A. R. and MCAULEY, A., 1999. Marketing landscapes: the social context. Available from *OpenAIR@RGU*. [online]. Available from: <http://openair.rgu.ac.uk>

##### Citation for the publisher's version:

ANDERSON, A. R. and MCAULEY, A., 1999. Marketing landscapes: the social context. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 2 (3), pp. 176-188.

#### Copyright

Items in 'OpenAIR@RGU', Robert Gordon University Open Access Institutional Repository, are protected by copyright and intellectual property law. If you believe that any material held in 'OpenAIR@RGU' infringes copyright, please contact [openair-help@rgu.ac.uk](mailto:openair-help@rgu.ac.uk) with details. The item will be removed from the repository while the claim is investigated.

"This article is (c) Emerald Group Publishing and permission has been granted for this version to appear here (<https://openair.rgu.ac.uk/>). Emerald does not grant permission for this article to be further copied/distributed or hosted elsewhere without the express permission from Emerald Group Publishing Limited."

Anderson, A. R., & McAuley, A. (1999). Marketing landscapes: the social context. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 2(3), 176-188.

## **Marketing Landscapes: The Social Context**

## **Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal**

Corresponding author,

Alistair R Anderson  
Department of Management Studies  
Edward Wright Building  
University of Aberdeen  
AB 24 3QY  
email a.r.anderson@abdn.ac.uk

Andrew McAuley  
Department of Marketing  
The School of Management  
University of Stirling  
Stirling  
FK9 4LA  
e-mail n.a.mcauley@stir.ac.uk

## Marketing Landscapes: The Social Context

### Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that marketing theory cannot be used as a universal. The paper briefly outlines the development of theory, highlighting how even the most recent developments and improvements of theory cannot be applied without careful consideration of the context within which they are applied. *The devil is in the detail* summarizes the findings from a qualitative study of the marketing practices of a number of rural small businesses. The application of marketing in these small firms is demonstrated to be contingent upon the idiosyncratic circumstances of the firm and the perspectives of the business owner.

The study focuses upon the issue of communication, in particular the practice of communication. Whilst communication is confirmed as central to good marketing practice, the detail of this study illustrates that communication is complex. Marketing communication is not broadcasting, indeed the metaphor of language seems crucial to understanding the marketing process in the small firms in the study. It appears that different languages are used in different contexts, and that different customers understand different languages. Hence marketing in the wrong language means poor marketing. Suppliers and customers must understand the symbolic productions, the representations of reality, which rural businesses use to communicate the value exchanges offered. Although the study deals with one specific context, rurality, so that the communication considered is context bound, there are lessons to be learned which may be generic, with broader application.

The paper describes the use of qualitative research techniques to develop an understanding of small firm's marketing strategies and practices within the rural environment. The objective of the study was to reach an understanding of marketing activities, to tap into the variety and diversity and to reach below the surface to establish what was going on and why. In other words to try to conceptualise the behaviour and marketing actions of rural entrepreneurs. Superficially rural SME marketing strategies appeared idiosyncratic; only rarely do they seem to conform to classical marketing theory. For example, from a transactional marketing perspective the "P" as choice of "place" seems contrary, even illogical given the low rural population numbers. Whilst relationship marketing appears to "fit" many of close knit exchanges of small rural communities it seems inappropriate for the transitory exchanges of tourist purchases. Although many of such businesses have an obvious product orientation, this seems a poor basis for the marketing concept of identifying custom's needs, wants and desires. Yet conversely, at a more general level of abstraction, marketing theory proposes that some exchange of value must occur. However the nature of what values and how these are exchanged is unclear. These points indicated that a qualitative approach was needed to develop *verstehen*, an interpretative understanding of the marketing activities of the entrepreneurs. Such methodologies offer a means of relating the subjective meanings of the respondents to their actions, (Silverman, 1998). In turn inductive analysis would provide a conceptual framework to develop a theoretical underpinning of these data.

## **Towards a new Marketing**

Most marketing academics trace the development of marketing theory from Borden's (1964) seminal work on the marketing mix. This identified 12 elements of importance - product, pricing, branding, distribution, personal selling, advertising, promotions, packaging, display, servicing, physical handling, fact finding and analysis. However, as if to prove it is not best to be first in the field, most people remember McCarthy's (1964) simplification of this model to the 4Ps - product, price, place and promotion. In time alterations to this model have been proposed by adding various functions to the set (Christopher, Payne and Ballantyne 1991, Mindak and Fine 1981, Rafiq and Ahmed, 1995, Shapiro 1985). Whilst it seems important to recognise that these additions have been made to extend the applicability of the mix to real situations, our argument is that these prescriptive lists cannot become more than a descriptive check list of possibilities. The variety of contexts within which marketing works determines that the mix is necessarily contingent upon context. One obvious outcome of contingency is that the mix must remain as descriptive and cannot function as an analytic category, nor can it be used as a determinant of success. In the case of small business, we would expect this contingency to take on an over-riding importance. Small businesses rarely have the resources to allow them the freedom of choice to maximise the marketing mix, by necessity they optimise.

Gronroos (1997) would argue that the concept of the marketing mix and 4P's marketing is gradually becoming obsolete in the view of the growing economic importance of the customer, especially in relation to retention of the customer. As a result alternative marketing concepts are emerging, one of which is relationship building and management or relationship marketing. Currently there is a strong interest in this area but the jury is still out on whether it has the potential to evolve into a general theory of marketing. Nonetheless relationship marketing is highly relevant for the small firm. Typically the SME has close links to a limited number of customers. This is true across sectors; small retailers know their customers and predict their needs and small manufacturers are also close to their customers. The marketing concept, itself predicated upon close relationships, is characteristic of many small firms by necessity.

However, in general the increasing recognition by businesses of the need to manage relationship building has brought forth a variety of new generation marketing approaches - customer-focused, market-driven, outside-in, one-to-one marketing, data-driven marketing, integrated marketing and integrated marketing communications (Cross and Smith 1995, Day 1992, Parvatiyar and Sheth 1994, Payne 1995, Reicheld 1996, Stewart 1995, Webster 1992, 1994, Whiteley 1991). As Carson et al (1994) note, marketing is a dynamic discipline which is continuously evolving.

The key point that we recognise about these theoretical developments is not the redirection of the focus, but rather the continuity of the theme of communication. Rather than communication being an aspect of the marketing mix, the focus now places customer supplier communication in the centre of the stage. Duncan and Moriarty

(1998) point out that the key distinguishing factor between these new marketing approaches and the traditional 4P's is a recognition of the increasing importance of communication. Thus a number of these approaches emphasises the two-way communication through better listening to customers and interactively and the idea that communication, before, during and after transactions can build or destroy important brand relationships. Duncan and Moriarty (1998) go further and argue for a communication-based model of relationship marketing.

What is apparent in this brief overview of mainstream marketing thought is the universality of the assumption that there is one marketing which can be spread around to cover all scenarios. Thus while services marketing has emerged from beneath the shadow of manufacturing orientated marketing to become a distinct field within the discipline, the fundamental premises of marketing remain largely unaltered. This is also essentially true of any sectoral division of marketing. Thus, any text book on public sector marketing essentially reflects the same marketing ethos as fashion marketing with only minor alterations. Even international marketing is essentially about applying the same marketing concepts with a different cultural framework and the globalisation argument in *extremis* argues for selling the same thing in the same way everywhere.

It is recognised that rural based businesses operate under a specific and often unique set of conditions. In short, business-creation in rural areas is hampered by inaccessibility, the lack of communications infrastructures and business services, and a shortage of human resources. However, decisions to set up in business and to locate in a rural area often seem to be based on personal considerations, and these constraints only come into the equation later on. Is there a need to reassess our basic approach when it comes to furthering our understanding of marketing in rural areas? What can we understand about the nature of communication in the rural SME context?

## **The Rural Idyll**

In the 1980s rural communities in the UK were in a time of economic depression when jobs were scarce and wages low. This situation was exacerbated by cuts in public spending which tended to affect rural services disproportionately. Paradoxically, however this was also a time when many rural areas in the UK experienced population growth for the first time in many years. This was based on a migration from the cities to the countryside and on a reduced number of people leaving the countryside. A second development which also favoured the rural communities was the recognition that centralised policies were not always the best solution. Small really was beginning to be seen as beautiful. Quality of life was to be measured along side standards of living and a rising awareness that local resources must be used to tackle local problems.

Clearly, the rural idyll has not yet been created as changes in the social structure of villages can bring tension and conflict. Many of the "incomers" are unfamiliar with rural life and only a minority of them live and work in the rural community while most will commute to the towns and cities. Many will be retired and some will own a second home in the countryside while maintaining a main home in the city.

The influx of new population can threaten the stability and harmony of a rural community. It is in a sense a cultural conflict. A classic anecdote is the complaint of rural newcomers about the smell from spreading manure! The idyll is selective, so that we can see that culture must refer to the everyday circumstances of the people - their value systems, attitudes, work., social institutions and all other considerations interacting to create a distinctive way of life. Thus, there is potentially a conflict between the pre-existing rural network and that which the incomers form.

As Newby (1979) observes:

“There are now few villages without their complement of newcomers who work in towns. These new ‘immigrants’ have brought with them an urban, middle-class life-style which is largely alien to the remaining local agricultural population... Their entertainment, their socialising, even their shopping, tend to take place outside the village...A new social division arises in the village... On the one hand there are close-knit locals, who are the rump of the old occupational community, and on the other the ex-urbanite whose arrival in such relatively large numbers over the short space of time cannot help but be disruptive.” For the perspective of this study it is clear that very different value systems operate within the rural idyll. Consequently the language used in the culture of the arcadia differs from group to group.

It seems that the impact of new people moving in to the rural environment and the associated employment and housing concerns are an on-going part of the changing countryside. In a recent study Illouz-Winicki and Paillard (1998) looked at the rural areas within the OECD countries. Rural regions are defined as those where the population is spread between sparsely inhabited communities and small and middle-sized towns. Employment growth is generally below the OECD average. However in most member countries a few of them are among the most dynamic areas especially, it was found, in Lower Bavaria, Germany and in the Western Isles in Scotland. Rural does not necessarily mean a backward area. Complex forces are at work from specific local factors, structures and aspects that are hard to assess precisely, such as cultural traditions, business networks and an attractive natural setting.

Over the last ten years new development trajectories that are specific to rural areas have become apparent. They rely on local 'networks', where firms offset their lack of size through co-ordinated operations (for example, the clusters of firms operating in Northern and Central Italy, [OECD, 1998]). Small and medium-sized towns, where a substantial share of industrial production is concentrated, play a key role. In these towns services are the main source of job-creation; calling for little capital, services also represent the bulk of business-creation.

Rural areas appear to have a number of special features when it comes to business creation. First, indigenous enterprises generated more growth than new entrants. New firms are less common than in urban areas but the survival rate is better. Illouz-Winicki and Paillard (1998) put forward a number of reasons for this including a higher continuation rate (i.e. firms set up to take over existing activities), less competition in local markets, more determination when firms run into difficulties, through a genuine or perceived lack of alternatives, meaning that less money is taken out of the firm or more capital injected.

For very small or micro-firms (those employing 10 or fewer) their contribution to self-employment in rural areas predominates. Research by Keeble (1998) indicates that 'migrants' from towns play a central role in this process. Typically these are skilled people who settle in rural areas and bring their technical knowledge and business connections with them.

These businesses covers a range of activities - crafts, commerce and services - and the multiplier effects are slight for those aimed at the local market (which is narrow) but larger for those directed at outside markets, generating trade and financial flows. In isolated areas, business-creation is usually aimed at local consumer markets (retailing, community services) or new market niches (products with a strong regional identity). In more accessible areas it is aimed more at services or intermediate goods (sub-contracting). It is notable that business services, from office maintenance to consulting, are still under-represented in rural areas because local markets are so small.

Many rural areas, or firms in rural areas, have developed strategies for entering, and sometimes actually creating, these niches. One strategy is to rely on local resources, natural and cultural, on the local setting, knowledge and the general social environment. Preserving and enhancing them may prove a direct and indirect source of business creation. Cheesemaking in hill farms (or similar activities) can thus assist development in these areas, just as much as the mountain environment. In some areas there is a genuine market for rural amenity (striking landscape, cultural heritage, natural resources), for instance, when associated with tourism development. Products linked with amenity can be marketed with local certification (labels, certificates of origin, producer charters and so on). What is critical about these productions is that they are symbols of the idyll, they are couched in a language which is a *lingua franca* for all those who value the qualities associated with rurality.

## **Methodology**

A number of qualitative techniques were used to gather the primary data, including participant observation and unstructured interviews. Several rounds of respondents were purposefully selected as samples of rural entrepreneurs; the first group to provide range and width of entrepreneurial activities; the second group to refine the emerging theory and final respondents were selected as "extreme" examples to test theory after theoretical saturation was reached. The data were analysed using grounded theorising techniques, (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The raw data were first written up as cases; these were then analysed to determine categories and general patterns of activities, [the constant comparison method, (Glaser, 1978)]; the patterns were refined using new respondents to establish theoretical saturation. Finally the emerging explanations were tested against "extreme" samples for validity and reliability. Secondary research, preceding and during the field work, was concerned to establish the background rural context and to investigate appropriate theory. This developed pre-understanding, (Strauss, 1987), and generated the research question, "Are there any discernible patterns in rural SME marketing approaches, and how can they be explained?" Cases in this paper have been selected as illustrations from the original sample of 54 rural entrepreneurs.



## Background

The background of this study is rurality, which is seen as an area undergoing great changes. These changes may offer new opportunities for small business. As Summers et al 1988 suggests rural areas can no longer be seen as agrarian-based but are in varying degrees of transition towards a serviced based economy. Whilst the shift from production to services is typical of all advanced economies, the social construction of rurality appears to be creating a unique Highland situation. One where rather than simply the provision of general services, it is a situation where these services are singularly directed towards the consumption of the countryside itself. It might therefore be described as "re-creation for recreation."

The Highlands, perhaps because of their residual economic role, have always been a pleasure place. The "Balmoralization" of Victorian times lent an aesthetic grandeur to the hills and glens. The glamour of mythical "old ways" encouraged the construction of fairy tale castles as hunting lodges where the rich could indulge their fantasies. Their present use, as up-market country hotels, (for example, Glenborrodale, Inverloch and Stonefield Castle) is symbolic of one aspect of rural restructuring, the widening popularisation, and availability of rural prestige. These castles, once pleasure palaces restricted to the very rich, they are now available to the privileged public to borrow the prestigious associations of rurality. Indeed the famous Gleneagles Hotel at Auchterarder, a grandly simulated ancient pile, was built specifically to cater for new wealthy train-borne Highland tourists. So this trend is not new, but is a widening gyre. More commonly, of course, the tourist appreciates rurality from much more modest accommodation, but nonetheless the tourist process is the same. Specifically, the enjoyment associated with being in a special place.

This process is most apparent in the promotion of rural tourism. Brochures particularise places, they show the special and unique qualities of the advertised place; scenery, rural calm and rustic fisher folk, all fall victim to the symbolic presentation of tourist places. The efforts of the Tourist Boards can therefore be seen as "branding the merchandise" as typifications worthy of experiencing. Indeed Urry (1990), describes modern tourism as the consumption of such signs. Highland tourism has become a culture industry. Lash and Urry (1994:112) describe post modern production in the culture industries as a flow of aesthetic symbols. They point out that structural conditions of aesthetic reflexivity are symbol flows, cultural capital creation and aesthetically cast expert systems. This is precisely how Highland tourist promotion operates. Places are shown to be significant, their value is authenticated, so that cultural income or value flows to the tourist who can only communicate and collect these signs by a personal visit and experience.

The enjoyment of these strategic symbols varies, as Bourdieu (1986) demonstrates, across class boundaries. It also varies in physical intensity as the ways of being a tourist mirrors class and affluence distinctions. It may be enjoyed in the enhanced prestige of castles, in folksy bed and breakfasts with real log fires, the barrack-like austerity of bus tour party hotels or even in the naturalism of camping. Each is simply a variation of the Highland "experience" and consequently communicated as such.

## Data and Analysis

Analytic induction, using grounded theorising techniques, Glaser and Strauss (1967), revealed that the sample could be dichotomised into two readily distinguishable groups, the Locals and the Cosmopolitans. The fundamental distinctive characteristic of these groups was that the Locals had always lived locally in a rural area; in contrast, the Cosmopolitans had moved into rurality from a more urban area. Given this division within the data a number of other features of the businesses were found to be associated with these categories. In particular the ways of drawing value, the way of marketing this value and significantly the way of perceiving the value were all clustered around this dichotomy.

The analysis is that the background, the experiences of the different groups, provided the value frames which were the essences of their businesses. The cosmopolitans saw values in "rural" things, so that working with these aesthetic qualities provided the *raison d'être* of their businesses. The core of their businesses was the commodification of the countryside, the extraction of aesthetic value from the cultural; the social construction of rurality. The Locals perceived things differently and used a quite different framework of evaluation. Consequently their business forms were much more prosaic, dealing with mundane, though essential, material commodities.

Value is of course not limited to commercial profit. In small firms value extends backwards and forwards. Profit can be achieved from satisfaction, from the delight of doing what one aspires to do. So that this form of value played an important part in the actions of the rural entrepreneurs. So unsurprisingly the very nature of both the marketing and the entrepreneurial process reflect the accumulation of these different forms of value.

An example may clarify this procedure of comparative analysis. Joe runs, with his brother, a small craft workshop which includes a shop, where they sell their production to tourists. They have a wide variety of products, but specialise in attractive wooden items, including such things as miniature Orkney chairs for children, wooden toys and reproduction targets. In an industrial classification they would be "manufacturers", but if we describe what they actually do, we would see that they are actually making and selling souvenirs, "tokens of the natural order". None of the products are painted, instead they are all varnished to display the natural beauty of the wood. None of the items have a practical application, all are ornamental, yet in spite of being fairly expensive they sell well. I asked a tourist who had just spent over twenty-five pounds what she liked about them. She replied, *"It's wonderful to see such old fashioned craftsmanship in this day and age, you can't buy nice things like this in the shops, they all come from Hong Kong nowadays."*

So it seems justified to claim that these products were icons of rurality, symbolising old ways and old crafts. It was irrelevant that Joe is English, and had lived in Birmingham. The customer was clearly delighted with her symbols. Significantly the images are supported by the location of his workshop, which is set in an attractive village, complete with an old church and ancient gravestones. It helps that the workshop used to be an old stone byre, which now smells of wood shavings, turpentine and varnish, with racks

of hand tools and disordered partly completed items, an antithesis of assembly line production. Joe himself, who has a slow and careful measured way of speaking helps too. His bushy beard and work-worn overalls combine to emphasise his earnestness, as he explains precisely what type of wood this is and even where it came from. He doesn't try to sell these items, he just relates their provenance, touching features almost tenderly. But the customers sagely nod agreement and run their own fingers over the piece. Consequently Joe is communicating and selling rural culture.

If we consider Mary, a local who had a small filling station in the same village, we can see that her business was profoundly different. She sold petrol, oils, newspapers and some groceries. She has now sold the business to retire, but previously the shop was a local information centre. Although her stock was comparatively expensive, petrol was a few pence dearer and the grocery prices made supermarkets look cheap, there were always customers around. The cluttered little wooden shed, which served as shop and office, was often crowded by two, or even three, customers sitting drinking tea. If you happened to drop by during one of these sessions, and Mary knew you, you'd be asked, "*have you time for a cup?*", and welcomed in. You would also be gently interrogated, "*what are you doing now? what are the boys up to?*", but this guileless inquisition was kindly meant, simply updating the information bank. It would be rounded off by the return of local information, "*Have you heard about Jimmy Stewart's new job ?*"

It would be exaggerating to claim that Mary sold information, this aspect was only peripheral to the sale of petrol. It was differentiated service, but in the same way as we can chose either low priced groceries at a discount retailer, or prefer the choice and presentation of a more expensive store. Mary's customers also found the shop convenient, the alternative was a ten mile drive, and Mary's helpfulness was legendary. Once I was sent to buy some paper cake cases, my wife was baking something for a local coffee morning and had run out. Mary didn't have any left either, but said, "*Just hang on a tic, I think that there is some in the house.*" So the argument is that Mary, and others like her, sell an undifferentiated and standard product, but in a special rural context and in a specific way. She too communicates culture, but a local community culture.

### Local-Cosmopolitan Differences In Product

Cosmopolitan products are very different from those of locals. Cosmopolitan production is a "rural" product, one which captures some essence of the social construction of rurality. With limited exceptions, the cosmopolitans have each found a way of commodifying rurality, or of making some part of the rural available for sale. In other words their market niche was to convert and exploit the special features associated with the rural idyll.

In contrast the locals, on the whole, dealt in standard products, which were little different from an urban equivalents. Their style of trading may have been somewhat different, reflecting the local markets and social context, as we saw in Mary's case. Nonetheless the products themselves are undifferentiated and consequently must be in competition with all such similar products.

### Markets

In terms of markets the dichotomy is striking; locals sell to local markets, whilst the cosmopolitans sell to a national market. This is related to the products, residents do not need tokens or experiences of rurality, they do however, need baked beans and their motor cars repaired. It is possible to dismiss this distinction as trivial, tourists are *ipso facto* not local, and consequently have different requirements. Nonetheless these different markets for cosmopolitan and local trade may indicate a different process of opportunity recognition. Given that the cosmopolitans by definition, had wider experiences, this may have broadened their perceptions to the wider markets, allowing them to recognise what non-locals might also value about the countryside. Thus we can explain these differences in terms of the language metaphor, locals and cosmopolitans speak to different markets; they communicate different values and use different languages to form the communication.

### Entrepreneurial Strategies

Abstracting from these differences, two quite different marketing processes can be traced. It is unlikely that these are conscious intentional strategies by the entrepreneurs, but they are an outcome of the different products and markets. They add up to the *raison d'être* of these rural firms and explain how they achieve the most basic business requirement of being able to sell their product at a price which is higher than their costs. These strategies explain how they extract value from their environment. Both groups use rural space and symbolism to market their products but in remarkably different ways.

### Cosmopolitans

Cosmopolitans commodify rurality, they make available for consumption the qualities which were described earlier within the social construction of rurality. They do this by building into their production a close association with these tangible and intangible qualities. As we saw in the literature review these notions are often held in great esteem, so that the consumers of these products draw extra values from them. So cosmopolitans produce palpably "rural" products which contain these higher values. In consequence these rurally enhanced products are not in competition with non-rural supplies. Joe's manufacture of rural symbols is a transparent example of the use of rural space. His operation simply would not be viable within an urban industrial estate. But often the infusion of the idyll is much more subtle.

Country house hotels for instance are, as we saw earlier, manifestations of the past. They depend on representing, even recreating, old aristocratic and exclusive images of the privileges of the idyll. Graham runs a luxurious hotel which emphasises the quality of its first class seafood, "*all local produce*". It has a magnificent position commanding outstanding views, which helps to justify its high-priced tariff. These are the unsubtle pageants of rurality which can only be enjoyed in situ. Graham has additional, if curious, ways of adding to the sensations of rural privilege. His trick is a masterpiece of pseudo-elitism, he treats his customers badly. They do not want for creature comforts, the rooms are luxurious, the food is delicious if pretentious, and the staff are properly deferential. But Graham is uncompromisingly rude to customers, and by being abusive, he creates an atmosphere of privilege, of belonging to an elite club where he is ringmaster. At New Year, for example, when he had a full house, he demanded that guests could only drink champagne. When the first bottle was finished he insisted that they had another. A guest laughingly explained to me, "*I didn't want another, we don't like it that much. But Graham accused me of being a cheap-skate and spoiling his New Year. Mind you, I was*

*amazed when I got the bill, the bugger had charged me nearly a hundred quid a bottle for Moet and Chandon, its only thirty even at Inverlochy Castle. When I complained about the price, he told me I wouldn't be here if I couldn't afford it. Cheeky blighter offered to let me have it free if I was short."* The hotel deliberately excludes locals, an ex-barman told me, *"The bar prices are so high we never got many, anyhow he worries that they might spoil the image of his place,"* The tactic is actually more artful, to be a member of this group, you have to know the game, to understand what it is you are enjoying. After the fashion of say, more unusual modern art, or even the countryside, appreciating it, is by itself, is a rank of superiority. Whilst the mode of communication in this vignette is highly idiosyncratic, and probably limited as a successful technique, it clearly demonstrates how the language of marketing is tailored to specific circumstances.

Of course even country pubs are often rural pastiches; horse brasses, old wood, open fires and antique prints all foster the rural environ. They are rarely as selective as Graham's place, tourists brush shoulders with locals. In Tarbert a tourist explained why he enjoyed the busy smoky bar, which had noisily erupted with fishermen at the end of the fish auction sale, *"It's great, the place is full of atmosphere."* Interestingly I know of no pubs or hotels which are run by a "Local". However this stressful part of the field work continues!

Although cosmopolitans use the enhanced values of rurality in their products, they do so in different ways and with varying intensity. At the lowest end of the scale of rural associations two brief examples show how this happens. Ted makes tents which he sells by mail order. In fact, he subcontracts all the manufacturing to English firms, but sells the tents from his highland address. Ted's advertisements suggest that if the tent is fit for Highland weather, its fit for anything. Sarah, who used to be a social worker before she became disenchanted with bureaucracy, runs a private home for mentally handicapped adults in a large old house in a rather remote village. She accounted for the unusual location, *"we needed to get away from the politics of local government and saw this place for sale, it's perfect, so peaceful and calm. So we thought that if it made us feel so good, it ought to work for others."*

Higher up this scale of implemented rurality are Robert and his wife, who are opening a museum. It is planned to display items of local archaeological importance and to "interpret" them. The surrounding area is rich in ancient artefacts which attract some tourists. Robert has been actively encouraged by grant awarding bodies, since the project is seen as very "appropriate" for the new rurality because they too, share the language of the new rural.

It seems reasonable therefore to argue that these cosmopolitans, in general, do commodify the countryside. The unique rural qualities incorporated in their production add a specific value which differentiates the production. In consequence their products are somewhat removed from general competition, thus the "inefficiencies" of their operations, hand crafting and remoteness, are actually turned to business advantage, but within the recognition frame, the language of rurality.

## Locals

Where cosmopolitans use the cultural differentiation of rural space, locals use space quite differently. They passively utilise space and the friction of distance to protect

their business from competition. This insulation of isolation means that the viability of their businesses depend on spatial monopoly. The sparsity of customers in remote rurality severely restricts demand, so that in many instances there is room for only one supplier. Furthermore the cost for outside suppliers to overcome distance reduces competition.

It is significant that almost all the locals cater for a local market. Stanley's contracting business is a good example. He specialises in road re-surfacing so most of his work has to be tendered. He pointed out that every job had to have three prices quoted, so he was acutely aware of costs, but he added that he got most of the jobs he tendered for, *"Hardly anyone can beat my prices, I think most of them go over the top with prices, few of the jobs are big enough to justify the hassle of them setting up. Then by the time they add in subsistence costs and travelling they don't have a chance."* He added that supervision was a also big problem. *"Somehow when a squad arrives here they all want to go on the batter, even if they send a foreman he gets stuck in too. it's as if they are on holiday. Don't you remember the yellow lines?"* This was a classic tale of a road lining team who had arrived to replace double yellow lines. They visited the pub at lunch time and the consequences were hilarious. The lines snaked and wove all along the side of the road and were just the thing for a drunk to follow. It took weeks of work to burn off the offending lines, to the delight of all.

Dick's small car repair business is another good example of spatial monopoly. He works alone because he considers that *"too much bother employing staff for the extra return."* When he is very busy and customers become impatient, he works late into the evenings and at week-ends. His is the only garage in the immediate area so he caters conveniently for local needs. *"I think I have a good reputation since most people keep bringing me their cars. My prices are fair too, so its only the ones who buy new cars in the city who don't come here. I even get the ones who fix their own cars because I've got lots of spares, or get them quickly."*

Looking at the business careers of other respondents highlights the precariousness of this spatial dependency. Donald had inherited a small coach hire business from his father. It was a neat business consisting mainly of contracts to transport children back and forth to school. It was also easily run, because of his rural location he was able to cheaply employ mothers on a part time basis, overcoming the problem of peak work loads at two separate times of day. Although the work was subject to biennial tenders the firm had held the contract for many years. However Donald decided to expand, *"I was getting a bit fed up really, and fancied doing a bit more. I knew this other contract was coming up and had a go at it."* The other contract was similar to his existing work but some fifteen miles away. This extra distance created major problems: the empty running was expensive, but drivers were the main difficulty. The additional distances and time meant that the job was no longer convenient for mothers, so eventually he had to employ nearly full time drivers at a much higher rate. This meant that the business lost money and eventually failed.

## **Theory**

What is immediately evident is that areas of value have been recognised and marketed by the small business owners. Importantly these areas of value are discrete,

cosmopolitan values are different from local; their customers are different and also seem to recognise quite different values. The outcomes are that the products and services are also different, albeit because of different orientations. However the key point appears to be that these different orientations, of both producer and customer alike, require that communication is conducted within a recognisable language and that these languages, and symbols are very different. The evidence is that communication is contingent, and that satisfactory marketing communication must be tailored to fit both customer and supplier.

## **Conclusion**

In the past rural areas could be viewed backwaters caught up in an eternal cycle of decline at the mercy of the relentless urban domination. Evidence reviewed here points to a new vitality and inherent advantages which the rural areas can point to as a basis for growth. The creation of rural businesses and their survival is an important part of the future success of the communities in which they have been created. In our attempt to understand the dynamics of these marketing landscapes the qualitative approach has enabled the full richness of meaning to be revealed.

Clearly two broad types of businesses have been identified the locals and the cosmopolitans who from the evidence presented operate in two different rural landscapes. This raises an important question, namely, what is the relationship between marketing theory and the patterns of marketing activity observed in this research? If the two categories of business types are accepted then this questions the utility of a universal approach to marketing since such an approach does not fit the reality of what has been observed.

Clearly, as ideas of relationship marketing evolve together with network theory they will have a relevance for what is happening in the rural economy. It may be as was suggested at the outset of this paper that 4P's marketing is too superficial for rural businesses. Given the social context of rural communities is there then a geography of marketing which distinguishes the rural economy and which is only partially removed by the adoption of new technology since the players occupy different stages (locals and cosmopolitans) in the rural community? It is possible that with a greater understanding of the communication flows within rural communities it may be possible to map the emergent relationships onto a two-tier marketing theory for the rural economy. If this is to be achieved then clearly a qualitative orientation would be central to the methodological approach. This is only the beginning.

refs

- Bartlett HF 1988 "Profile of an Entrepreneur or Machiavellian Management" Ashford Press and Publishing Southampton
- Bourdieu P 1986 "Distinction" tr. R Nice Routledge London
- Carson D Cromie S McGowan P Hill J 1995 "Marketing and Entrepreneurship in SMEs: An Innovative Approach" Prentice Hall London
- Chia R 1994 "From Modern to Postmodern Organisational Analysis" Department Of Management Learning University of Lancaster Lancaster LA1 4YX
- Drucker P 1973 "Management; Tasks, Responsibilities, Practices Harper and Row London
- Glaser BG Strauss AL 1967 "The Discovery of Grounded Theory" Adeline Publishing New York
- Kotler P 1984 "Marketing Management: Analysis, Planning and Control" Prentice-Hall London
- Lash S Urry J 1994 "Economies of Signs and Space" Sage London
- Lowe P Marsden T Munton R 1990 "The Social and Economic Restructuring of Rural Britain: a position statement" ESRC Countryside Initiative Working Paper No. 2 University of Newcastle upon Tyne
- Mitton D 1989 "The Compleat Entrepreneur" *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice* vol 13 no 3 pp 9-19
- Storey D 1994 "Understanding the Small Firm Sector" Routledge London
- Summer GF Bryden J Deavers K Newby H Schler S "'Agriculture and Beyond: Rural Economic development" quoted in Owe et al 1990
- Urry J 1990 "The Tourist Gaze" Sage London