

Heritage Assets and Policy Tensions: Managing for Tourism and Social Inclusion

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Abstract: In recent years the UK Government has advocated changes in the way that heritage assets are managed, in particular the extension of free access to museums and other heritage resources, with the purpose of encouraging socially excluded citizens to make greater use of these assets. This paper will draw on empirical evidence from Scotland and argue that it is far from clear whether the imposition / lack of entry charges plays a significant role in encouraging or discouraging the use of such assets and, may in fact amount to a subsidy to wealthy tourists, in an area where there is evidence to suggest that they themselves seem willing to pay. In the conclusions to the paper it will be noted that given the lack of clarity as to whether policy is having its desired effect, it may in fact be desirable that monies currently spent on *integrating* social inclusion and the management of heritage assets might better be disaggregated, re-allocated and spent on more focused policy activities in the following three fields: social inclusion; the conservation of the heritage resource base; and, the development of the tourism product.

Keywords: Public policy, tourism, heritage, social inclusion.

Background: Recent Policy Reforms

This paper seeks to examine the unplanned effects that changes in the British Government's social policies since 1997 have had on the management of heritage attractions and tourism in Scotland and the UK. Specifically, it will focus on recent changes in policy and administration and will refer directly to examples of the management of those heritage resources that underpin the British tourism product and which are crucial in understanding visitor motivations.

Following election in 1997, Tony Blair's 'New Labour' Government has sought to pursue the so-called 'third way' in its management of public affairs (see Giddens, 1998; Horton & Farnham, 1999; Greenwood et al, 2001). Since 1995, the language of the 'third way' has been used by Tony Blair to describe his political philosophy, one that is characterized as being beyond neo-liberalism and social democracy. Simply stated, the 'third way', as offered by its adherents, represents something of a renewal of social democracy for a political world in which the 'old left' lacks relevance and the utility of the 'new right' is negated by contradictions and inadequacies. As defined by Anthony Giddens (1999: 25).

"The Third Way seeks to go beyond the two hitherto dominant political philosophies of the postwar period . . . Each of these positions . . . still has its adherents. Yet it is plain that each is out of touch with the demands of the

moment. Few people – certainly not the bulk of the electorate in the developed countries – want to go back to top-down, bureaucratic government. But it has become equally obvious that society cannot be run as if it were a gigantic marketplace . . . People want something different . . . The Third Way is that something.”

In the early years of the Blair Government the ‘third way’ programme (together with the similar approach of Bill Clinton in the US and Gerhard Schroeder in Germany), was admired, courted and copied throughout the developed world. The clarion call of the ‘third way’ is pragmatism, growing out of its avowed aim not to be driven by the dogma of free-marketeters or democratic socialists. Even within the UK, a state lacking a codified constitution, with a gradualist political culture and tendencies in public policy towards incrementalism and contingency, the extent of the pragmatism underpinning the ‘third way’ is unusual.

The pursuit of the ‘third way’ has led to reforms in most areas of public policy. Some of these reforms have been specific to given areas of operation e.g. the modernisation of tourism structures (such as the 2003 merger of the British Tourist Authority and the English Tourism Council, see Department for Culture, Media & Sport, 2004) but many have been more general in their application. It can be argued that, as a result of the pragmatism incorporated within the ‘third way’ approach, recent policy reforms in the UK have less of a clearly identifiable ‘ideological stamp’ than those associated with previous British Governments such as those led by Lloyd George, Attlee or Thatcher. The pragmatism of the ‘third way’ allows for the continuation of Conservative programmes of privatisation in the public services to be combined with more traditional social democratic measures such as increased regulation of labour markets. Indeed, if anything can be identified as forming the core of Blair’s ‘third way’ it is a focus on trying to get the public sector (and industry) to think and act in a ‘joined-up’ way to tackle long-standing (and some may say intractable) issues that cut-across Departmental boundaries e.g. social injustice and sustainable development. As the Deputy Prime Minister noted (1999: 96), “it is essential that we find better ways of involving all sectors, and the public at large, in decisions. The government has sought to adopt an inclusive strategy . . .” Moreover, this quote also makes reference to the second clearly identifiable feature of the ‘third way’ in the UK, that is, partnership working between public, private and voluntary sectors.

The pressure for ‘joined-up thinking’ and ‘joined-up government’ has been partly driven by the European Union, which, since the Treaty of Amsterdam in 1997 has required all Member States to consider issues relating to equal opportunities and sustainable development when formulating, implementing or evaluating *any* policy (see European Union, 2004). However, in the UK in particular, the incrementalist nature of policy-making has meant that it has

not been unknown in the past for actions by the Government to result in giving with the right hand and taking away with the left. For example, maintaining low levels of personal income tax whilst pursuing redistributive social inclusion policies has led in part to considerable increases in the cost to payers of less progressive local property-based taxes, which are less effective as a redistributive mechanism than personal income tax (Press Association, 2003).

Thus, the third and final piece of the 'third way' jigsaw is the focus on social inclusion. This is supposed to permeate the work of all Government Departments and public bodies, including those for whom social concerns have not previously been of high priority. In the context of this paper examples of such Government Departments and public bodies would include those with responsibility for conserving the nation's heritage. Included here would be the Departments and public bodies that manage cultural assets (e.g. museums and galleries) and the nation's environmental assets (e.g. landscape and wildlife). In years gone by, such Departments and public bodies may well have paid attention to and indeed devoted resources from their budgets towards the pursuit of social goals. The difference today however under the 'third way' programme is that they are now all *required* to pay attention to and divert resources towards objectives of social inclusion, as part and parcel of 'joining up government', and to work in partnership with others to achieve this as necessary.

The authors of this paper do not wish to question the noble nature of the Government's aims. Joining-up efforts to tackle poverty and other forms of social exclusion is to be applauded, as is ensuring that actions are focused on problem-solving, through the adoption of organizational forms and managerial techniques that are based on notions of efficacy rather than dogma. However, the conclusions to this paper will also note that the pursuit of the 'third way' and its focus on joined-up government, partnership and social inclusion is also having unintended side effects, not entirely positive, for the management of the heritage and indeed for the wider tourism industry.

In summarising this introductory section to the paper it is important to note that the discussion will now proceed to give an overview of tourism policy (in this case focusing especially on Scotland as the organisational structures found in the constituent nations of the UK differ, as do the strategies which they pursue). Thereafter consideration will be given to the unintended effects of social policy objectives on the management of the nation's heritage attractions and conclusions will be drawn.

Tourism in the UK & Scotland: Overview

The UK's decline from its dominant global position as the first industrialised nation can be traced back further than may be imagined. Indeed, the last quarter of the Nineteenth Century, often referred to as the 'Great Depression' (see

Bédarida, 1976) saw the UK lose industrial leadership of the world to others such as Germany and the United States. The decline in British manufacturing industry has been more or less continual since that time (although the rate of decline has varied greatly over the period) and today the UK's economy is heavily dependent upon the service sector. In today's service-sector economy, "Tourism is one of the largest industries in the UK, worth approximately £75.9 billion in 2002" (VisitBritain, 2004: 1). Indeed, according to Liz Forgan, Chair of the UK's Heritage Lottery Fund (2003), tourism is now the UK's sixth largest industry. The industry today accounts for about 4% of the UK's Gross Domestic Product and is even more significant in terms of employment, accounting for 7% of the workforce or some 1.9 million people (British Tourism Development Committee, 2001: 4). Its role in the Scottish economy is especially significant, employing as it does some 9% of the workforce here (VisitScotland, 2004: 1).

Britain is not known for its outstanding accommodation or cuisine, so why does it have a considerable tourism sector? The British Tourism Development Committee (2001: 4) notes that the UK's tourism product is based on "the rich diversity that Britain and its constituent countries have to offer – the unique environments, landscapes and heritages." If this assertion is correct, it can be assumed that most tourists choose a holiday or short break in the UK because of the cultural and environmental assets that the country and its constituent nations have to boast. This is especially relevant in the Northern parts of the UK. With beach resorts and weather patterns more similar to those of Northern France along the South coast of England, it is possible there to attract visitors seeking a beach holiday. This is not the case in Scotland, where it is, on the face of it, more likely that the tourism sector will be dominated by visitors seeking to explore the nation's cultural and environmental heritage. The Scottish Executive confirms this, noting that (2000: 4), "Scotland has the assets to be a world class tourism destination. It has magnificent scenery; a pristine natural environment; cultural and historic richness . . ." Data show that over two-thirds of the UK-domiciled tourists and over half of the overseas tourists who come to Scotland for holidays do so to experience this rich heritage (the balance come for reasons such as business and visiting friends and family). Moreover, these tourists are a wealthier and better-educated group than one finds in the population at large (for source of data and further information see VisitScotland, 2004).

When on holiday, the top ten activities undertaken by these wealthy and well-educated tourists to Scotland are as reproduced in Table I.

With the exception of swimming by UK-domiciled tourists, those activities that are less dependent on the cultural and natural heritage of the nation (swimming, golf and theme parks) are not rivalling in importance those activities that do depend upon Scotland's cultural and natural heritage (in

Table I: Key Characteristics of Tourists in Scotland (2003)

Activity Undertaken on Holiday	By UK-domiciled tourists	By tourists from overseas
Visiting castles, monuments, churches etc.	39 %	83 %
Hiking / hill-walking / rambling / other walking	33 %	39 %
Visiting museums, galleries, heritage centres etc.	29 %	58 %
Swimming	21 %	5 %
Field / nature study	17 %	9 %
Watching performing arts	16 %	16 %
Golf	8 %	2 %
Visiting theme parks / activity parks	8 %	6 %
Traditional regional music events	7 %	n/a
Fishing	6 %	3 %

Data extracted from VisitScotland (2004: 5)

particular castles etc., walking and museums etc.). As a consequence of these data, it is no surprise that VisitScotland has recently engaged in a branding activity that promotes Scotland around the following four themes: 'Culture and Cities'; 'Active Scotland' (outdoor recreation); 'Freedom of Scotland' (short breaks); and, 'Business Tourism' (VisitScotland, 2003).

To summarise, from the data in Table I it would not be inappropriate to conclude that a very large proportion of holiday activity in Scotland involves tourists engaging with the cultural and natural heritage. Furthermore, it is reasonable to assume that any policy which has an effect upon the management of these assets will also impinge upon the tourism industry. The inter-relationship between the cultural and natural heritage and tourism is crucial and it is of course for reasons including the improvement of performance when dealing with such inter-related issues that the focus on 'joined-up government' has been central to Tony Blair's 'third way' approach. Indeed, at both Scottish and UK levels there are now single 'joined-up' Ministries with responsibilities both for cultural heritage and tourism, but of course, 'joined-up government' is not the whole 'third way' story. Issues of social inclusion are also absolutely central to the UK Government's approach and this has led in turn to extending free access to cultural and natural heritage assets where restrictions (financial

and/or legal) were previously in place. It is to consideration of this issue to which this paper will now turn.

Social Policy Objectives & Access to the Heritage

As part and parcel of its drive to pursue social inclusion policies the UK Government and the Scottish Executive have focused on *extending access to the heritage*. This has been the case in relation to both natural and cultural heritage and, as noted above, has involved a mixture of policy mechanisms including legislation, financial incentives, the provision of information to socially excluded groups etc. One example of the legislative approach is the extension of the right of access to open land with a number of restrictions provided by the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003. This extends the ability of people without significant wealth to enjoy the natural heritage for which Scotland is so famed without fear of persecution by landowners, provided that they exercise their new rights with responsibility. An example of the financial approach has been an increase in grant to National Museums and Galleries in order to remove admission charges, which were seen by the Government as posing a barrier to members of socially excluded groups who wished to gain access to the cultural heritage. As noted by Falconer and Blair (2003: 71, emphasis in original),

“In December 2001, the ‘New Labour’ Government completed an incremental policy shift across the devolved polity of the UK that saw a significant increase in public investment committed to national museums and galleries that levied charges for general admission acted to remove these charges. The removal of general admission charges had been an important Labour Party policy in Opposition, and senior Labour politicians pointed to the 2001 removal of charges as a major achievement in relation to the Labour Government’s public policy agenda.”

Thus, in relation to both natural and cultural assets, there is evidence that the current UK Government is acting in pursuit of its policy objective to extend access to the heritage in an attempt to close the gap in the opportunities available to socially excluded groups vis-à-vis non-excluded groups. This however begs the question, ‘Have the Government’s policy actions (legislation, subsidy, education etc.) actually achieved that which they set out to achieve?’

Research by Falconer and Blair (2003) on changes in visitor numbers to the UK’s National Museums and Galleries led to the conclusion that there has indeed been an undeniable increase in the number of visitors since the removal of admission charges. However, from their findings they also concluded that, *“it is less clear that this increase in visitor numbers can be explained simply in terms of the removal of charges . . . the link between the removal of charges and increased visitor numbers is more complex.”* Are the conclusions drawn by Falconer and Blair restricted to the UK’s National Museums and Galleries, which are but a small sample of the entire population of heritage attractions in the UK? In order to explore this question, further research has been undertaken by the

present authors, based on analysis of previously published data, gathered in the Scottish context.

The authors have sought to construct a picture of the effects of charges on visitors across a range of heritage / tourist attractions in Scotland. A comparative approach has been adopted, using data on visitor numbers to attractions with paid admission and to attractions with free admission. In undertaking this work the categories previously outlined in Table I were taken as a starting point for analysis. Those categories of activities that are less dependent on the cultural and natural heritage of the nation (swimming, golf and theme parks) were excluded from the analysis as the focus of this paper is on heritage attractions. Some other activities such as walking, fishing and traditional music events proved difficult to analyse as far fewer people pay an admission fee to partake in such activities. The converse is the case for the performing arts, to which free admission is offered only very rarely, and this activity has also been excluded from the analysis as a result. Despite these exclusions from the current analysis, the authors were able to find valid, reliable and representative data for one activity associated with the natural heritage (visiting nature reserves) and for five activities associated with the cultural heritage (visiting monuments; Churches; castles; heritage centres; and, museums and galleries). These data were extracted from *The 2002 Visitor Attraction Monitor* commissioned by VisitScotland and are presented in Table II (although 2003 data are available, the 2002 figures have been used here for the purpose of ensuring consistency with the period of time studied by Falconer and Blair, 2003).

Table II: Changes in Visitor Numbers at Key Scottish Attractions 2001/2002

Attraction Type	Change in visitor nos 01/02	Attractions with paid admission	Attractions with free admission
Nature Reserves	+ 18.7 %	44 %	56 %
Monuments	+ 12.7 %	96 %	4 %
Churches	+ 11.0 %	0 %	100 %
Castles	+ 9.2 %	95 %	5 %
Heritage Centres	+ 4.6 %	42 %	58 %
Museums & Galleries	- 3.2 %	37 %	63 %

Data extracted from Moffat Centre (2003)

Two main findings have become apparent from analysis of Table II:

- The first, immediately striking finding, is that the number of visits to Scotland's museums and galleries actually decreased in 2002 when compared with 2001. This is contrary to the findings of Falconer and Blair (who, as noted above, took the same two-year period for their analysis). However, it is worth noting that Falconer and Blair had adopted a whole-UK rather than a Scottish focus and that their work addressed the National Museums and Galleries only, which as previously noted, are a small sample of the entire population of museums and galleries and an even smaller sample of the population of heritage attractions. It is believed that these differences in sampling are alone sufficient to account for the differences between the two sets of findings.
- The second (startling and stark) finding adds quantitative weight to the qualitatively-derived conclusions of Falconer and Blair (2003), i.e. that the link between charging admission fees and visitor numbers is complex and cannot be reduced to a simple equation where the lack of an admission charge automatically gives rise to an increase in visitor numbers. There is undoubtedly a need here for further research into the complex causal mechanisms that may be at play here. From a cursory glance at Table II it can be seen that the number of visitors to Churches (100% free admission) increased by a greater percentage than the number of visitors to Castles (95% paid admission) but by a lesser percentage than the number of visitors to Monuments (96% paid admission). The category of heritage attraction with the second highest level of free admission (museums and galleries) was the only one to record a fall in visitor numbers from 2001 to 2002. The categories of heritage attraction with the third and fourth highest levels of free admission (heritage centres and nature reserves) recorded distinct differences in the rise in levels of visitor numbers despite very similar proportions of charging being applied in each category of attraction. If any conclusion can be drawn from Table II it is *that there is no clear pattern evident in terms of the relationship between charging and visitor numbers*. Although it is not clear precisely what this means for the efficiency and effectiveness of the Government's policy, it is certainly worthy of further investigation, either by the Government itself or by academic commentators and this theme will be re-visited in the overall conclusion to this paper.

Moreover, following further research two more findings of interest have become evident and are presented here:

- It had been thought by the authors that it was possible that the general increase in visitor numbers to heritage attractions seen in Table II may have been a consequence of a real-term decrease in the price of admissions over the period in question. Upon further examination however this hypothesis appears to be untenable. In the period examined the annual rate of inflation was between 1.7% and 1.8% (Office for National Statistics,

2003) yet the level of adult charges to heritage attractions over this same period increased by 7.5% on average (Moffat Centre, 2003), over four times the rate of inflation. The same measure when applied to child charges showed an increase of 5.7% on average (Moffat Centre, 2003), over three times the rate of inflation.

- Scotland's singular most popular heritage attraction, in 2003, 2002, 2001 and indeed for many years prior has been Edinburgh Castle. The Castle is not only a paid admission attraction, but one which charges (at time of writing in 2004) £9.50 for adult entry (Historic Scotland, 2004). This compares to average admission charges to heritage attractions in Scotland in 2003 of £3.78 for adult entry (Moffat Centre, 2004). The Castle saw an increase in visitor numbers of 2% in 2002 when compared with 2001 and a further similar rise of 2% again in 2003 (Moffat Centre 2003, 2004). In comparison, Scotland's second most popular heritage attraction is the Kelvingrove Art Gallery & Museum in Glasgow which has free entry and which saw a decrease in visitor numbers of 7% in 2002 when compared with 2001 (Moffat Centre, 2003). Unfortunately more recent figures are not available for Kelvingrove as it is currently closed for works, but the data which are available suggest that demand for visits to heritage attractions is somewhat price inelastic and that willingness-to-visit is not necessarily dependent on willingness-to-pay. If this is indeed the case then it may well be of great significance as regards the likelihood of success for the Government's policy to widen access to the heritage.

Overall then, by analysing the data presented in Table II it can be seen that there are a number of questions that can be posed in relation to the validity of the Government's policy assumption that charges act as a significant barrier to access to the heritage for socially excluded groups and that the removal of charges will result in greater social inclusion. Of special relevance to this paper is the question of whether the Government's moves to increase social justice have done anything other than subsidise that great proportion of visitors to heritage attractions who are tourists. As identified earlier, they are in fact a wealthier than average and better-educated than average grouping. It is possible that the Government's well-intentioned policy of removing barriers to access has simply resulted in taxpayers' money being used to subsidise wealthy tourists, diverting resources away from both social justice programmes that may be of greater value to those in poverty and indeed from heritage conservation and tourism development budgets too.

Admission Charges, the Heritage & Government Policy

Research demonstrates that the actual level of expenditure on admission charges by tourists is very low when compared to expenditure on other services and products. Please see Table III for an overview of tourist expenditure by service

/ product category in 2002 (the 2002 data have been used as, although more recent figures exist for UK-domiciled tourists, they do not exist for overseas visitors).

Table III: Tourist Expenditure by Service/Product in Scotland in 2002-03

Service / Product	UK Tourist Spend		Overseas Tourist Spend (2002 only)
	2002	2003	
Accommodation	24 %	28 %	33 %
Eating & drinking	21 %	20 %	21 %
Travel (internal)	23 %	18 %	9 %
General shopping	6 %	7 %	13 %
Package holidays	5 %	6 %	n/a
Entertainment	7 %	7 %	3 %
Clothes	9 %	8 %	13 %
Other	5 %	5 %	8 %

2002 Data extracted from VisitScotland (2003: 5)

2003 Data extracted from VisitScotland (2004: 5)

From Table III it can be seen that admission charges paid by tourists fall within the ‘Other’ category of expenditure. Thus, it can be concluded that UK tourists spend no more than 5% of their budget on admission charges and that tourists from overseas spend no more than 8% of their budget on admission charges. Moreover, in relation to data gathered by the Moffat Centre (2004) on issues that have a negative influence on tourism in Scotland, admission charges were reported by only 1% of a survey sample of 419 tourism professionals as a “Negative Factor Receiving any Mention”. Thus, it is safe to assume that the level of admission charges to heritage attractions is not a major factor that needs to be addressed from the perspective of Scottish tourism policy. Indeed, The Scottish Executive (2000) states boldly that the central thrust of tourism policy must be informed by the fact that, “If Scotland’s tourism industry is to grow much will depend on the quality of service we provide to visitors,” with this reference to service quality applying in the main to food and accommodation.

Given that demand for access to heritage attractions would appear to be unrelated in any clear sense to charging policies and that demand where charges do exist appears to be relatively inelastic, might the Government be better off reverting to a situation where all heritage attractions are able to charge entry

fees? Edinburgh Castle does not seem to have suffered from its charges yet visitor numbers to the (predominantly free) museums and galleries in Scotland appear to be dropping. It costs the public purse dear to subsidise the National Museums & Galleries for income which they have foregone as a result of social policy objectives that have promoted the provision of universal free access to these cultural assets. What are the opportunity costs associated with the current policy direction? In the tourism field one opportunity cost of providing wealthy tourists with free access to heritage attractions (which they seem to be perfectly happy to pay for themselves) is the lack of sufficient monies to improve “the quality of service we provide to visitors”, which the Scottish Executive has identified as being the top priority. Every pound spent subsidising a wealthy tourist’s visit to a heritage attraction on social policy grounds is a pound less spent on infrastructure and training to improve the quality of service offered to tourists, which are well-established needs. This pound has instead, as a result of the universalist approach adopted, been used to subsidise everyone visiting heritage attractions, including wealthy and well-educated tourists, whom it would appear do not need this subsidy. Moreover, whilst on the one hand the universal subsidy of public services does ensure that all have an equal chance to walk in the door of one of the nation’s great cultural institutions for no money, this does not necessarily provide equal opportunities *per se* as these are equally dependent on education, transport and many other variables. Finally, universal provision tends to be regressive and the use of the public pound in this manner is contrary to the broad aims of the Government’s social justice policy, namely, to manage a redistribution of funds in favour of the have-nots in society. The regressive nature of universalist State provision has been well-known for decades (e.g. see Le Grand, 1982) and the general policy direction in the UK has in fact been more towards targeted provision of services in recent years.

Conclusions

To conclude this paper, the authors wish to re-state that they believe the UK Government’s aims in seeking to extend access to the cultural and natural heritage to be noble, however, the questions that they pose are these:

- Is the Government’s current strategy the best way to achieve its stated aims of social justice and what are the opportunity costs of its regressive, universalist approach?
- What are the opportunity costs for tourism development associated with using public money to provide free access to heritage attractions rather than for training and infrastructure development pursuant to service quality improvement?

Bearing these questions in mind, the conclusions to this paper are as follows:

1. Tourists represent a generally wealthier and non-excluded social group. Allowing them free access to heritage attractions is expensive, unnecessary and regressive. If willingness-to-visit and willingness-to-pay are, as suggested here, at best indirectly related and if tourists have no concerns about paying to visit heritage attractions it may be better to allow them to do so and to use public monies to help improve service quality, an area where tourists and the Government alike have shown concern for many years.
2. Although some recompense has been given to the National Museums & Galleries in exchange for their dropping admission charges, if the Government's aim of dramatically increasing the numbers of socially excluded persons visiting these heritage attractions were to be achieved it will become a double-edged sword. Large increases in visitor numbers bring with them additional management costs and if these costs are to be covered without further State subsidy or recourse to charging, the institutions may have to make savings on other areas. These may include the 'core' of the operations themselves i.e. conservation of the heritage. Success in social justice terms may, in the long run, threaten the well-being of the heritage resources that the heritage sector exists to sustain.
3. There are, in the UK and elsewhere, many examples of non-universalist policies being used to enrich the lives of the socially excluded. For example, in the leisure sector many schemes abound where such socially excluded citizens can be provided with access to services through targeted redistributive provision e.g. the *Access to Leisure Scheme* (Aberdeen City Council, 2004) at lower cost and with greater effect than through universalism.

Finally, as a result of issues highlighted in this paper, there is undoubtedly a need for further research into the complex causal mechanisms that underlie the inter-play between admission charges and motivation to visit heritage attractions. Without a full and proper understanding of such mechanisms any policy decisions in this area are being made on the basis of flawed information, therefore, if the New Labour 'third way' project in the UK is to achieve its central aims, there may be a need to re-think policy in relation to admissions to heritage attractions.

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