

THE SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF A TOURISM DESTINATION IN IRELAND: A FOCUS ON COUNTY CLARE

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ABSTRACT

Tourism destination management has significant importance in controlling many impacts of tourism, thus insuring its sustainability. Destination management requires the integration of different planning tools, approaches and concepts that help shape the management and daily operation of tourism related activities. This study examines the sustainable management of a tourism destination, focusing on County Clare, Ireland. Qualitative interviews were conducted with tourism stakeholders. Additionally a theoretical framework incorporating the various elements that emerged from the theory was also utilised to examine existing tourism strategies and plans. Stakeholders all agreed it would be an advantage to have a Destination Management Office (DMO) lead that would co-ordinate destination management. However, it was found many tourism visions lack consistency and a timeframe with only a few addressing sustainability itself. Also the multiple regulations and guidelines identified by the framework were not communicated effectively to both stakeholders and policy makers when managing tourism in County Clare.

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism destinations need to adapt to changes in management. Tourism destinations cannot afford to ignore the issue of change in the pattern of demand and the type of tourism they offer (Tourism Sustainability Group, 2007). In most cases all destination management functions are carried out by local authorities. However, there exists in some instances a more complex set of arrangements in which the role of local authorities is complemented by the work of Regional Tourist Organisations, Local Enterprise Organisations and various community marketing alliances. Fáilte Ireland, the national tourism development authority in Ireland explains that the sustainable management of tourism is paramount considering Ireland is chosen as a holiday destination mainly due to its scenery, unspoilt environment and hospitable people (Fáilte Ireland, 2010). Also central to Ireland's image is its rich cultural heritage (Fáilte Ireland, 2006). Thus Ireland's environment is the key consideration for EU citizens when deciding on it as a holiday destination. Ireland's desired features along with the industries economic significance stress the need for the tourism industry of Ireland to co-ordinate the sustainable management of tourism. Considering that the tourism sector in Ireland interacts closely with other management areas such as transport, infrastructure, planning and enterprise. Yet with these numerous management areas, the challenge lies in moving the sustainable management of tourism into practical implementation (Dodds & Butler, 2009; Graci, 2007; Graci & Dodds, 2010; Hanrahan, 2008; Miller & Twining-Ward, 2005) at the destination scale. The aim of this study is to investigate the sustainable management of a well-known tourism destination in Ireland (County Clare). The analysis is discussed in context of relevant theory and findings from qualitative in-depth interviews with tourism stakeholders. Additionally, there was a quantitative content textual analysis conducted on all of County Clare's tourism strategies and plans. This use of multi-methods results in a wide range of findings on the sustainable management of a tourism destination in Ireland.

DESTINATION MANAGEMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY

There is growing concern internationally about how best to direct the sustainable management of tourism destinations. Sustainable management of destinations looks beyond the individual performance of a business, company, local authority and other organisations. Sustainable management looks toward a holistic and integrated level where the

individual performance contributes to the greater goal of the destination as a whole. Yet many tourism academics have attempted to clarify the nature of the tourism destination (Presenza, 2006; Presenza, Sheehan, & Ritchie, 2005) which is widely used and defined differently (Framke, 2002; Longjit, 2010). According to Leiper (1990) a tourism destination is a geographical area to which the tourist goes. However, a destination can be perceived at diverse geographical scales (Carter & Fabricius, 2006; Cho, 2000; Dredge, Jenkins, & Taplin, 2011; Laws, 1995; Longjit, 2010; Papatheodorou, 2006; Pearce, 1989; Ritchie & Crouch, 2003). While tourists perceive the destination as a unit, offering an integrated experience or a destination product (Buhalis, 2000; Murphy, Pritchard, & Smith, 2000); the experience or product is still produced and composed by the individual actors (Haugland, Ness, Grønseth, & Aarstad, 2011). The success of individual actors, as well as the success of the entire destination, is dependent on efficient co-ordination and integration of individual companies' resources, products, and services (Beritelli, Bieger, & Laesser, 2007; Haugland et al., 2011; Rodríguez-Díaz & Espino-Rodríguez, 2008). As such, this concept of sustainable management as it is applied to a tourism destination is being increasingly discussed in theory.

One of the first terms related to the sustainable management of tourism was sustainable tourism destinations. This term emerged from the need to develop tourism destinations in a sustainable manner (Lee, 2001). The impact of a well-managed tourism destination can provide important benefits. Poor management can have a serious impact on ecosystems and contribute to the loss of cultural integrity and identity of the destination (Charters & Saxon, 2007; Rio & Nunes, 2012). Welford and Ytterhus (2004) indicated that to move towards a type of tourism consistent with sustainable tourism, there needs to be an enhanced level of management. Management of a destination consistent with sustainable tourism has been referred to in several ways over the years; e.g. moving destinations towards sustainable tourism (Welford & Ytterhus, 2004), sustainable tourism destination management (Jamieson & Noble, 2000), and sustainable tourism management (Griffin, Flanagan, & Fitzgerald, 2012). The most recent terms are sustainable management at destination level (European Commission [EC], 2013) and sustainable destination management (Dredge & Jamal, 2013). But the point has been reached where the debate over the theory of sustainable tourism is delaying the more important aspect of putting it into practice (Fyall & Garrod, 1998; Torres-Delgado & Palomeque, 2012). This study specifically refers to this

form of management as the sustainable management of a tourism destination.

However, several challenges may be encountered in the sustainable management of a tourism destination. While destination planning is vital, it is however made difficult in some cases by the variety of stakeholders that can affect future of a destination (Jamieson, 2006). For example, both Inskip (1991) and Laws (1995) maintain that product development must be carefully co-ordinated. Tourism product development ideally needs to follow the key principles of sustainable tourism development as outlined by the (UNWTO/ETC, 2011). The importance of product development in Ireland has been continually recognised with the state investing millions of euro into product development over the period of the National Development Plan (NDP) 2007-13 (Fáilte Ireland, 2007). This instrument has been seen to support large tourism developments such as the Wild Atlantic Way's 2500 kms driving route down to small scale tourism products such as the greenway and informational and marketing materials.

Several authors maintain that it is the role of the DMOs to take a leadership role in product development (Pearce, Morrison, & Rutledge, 1998; Spyriadis, Fletcher, Fyall, & Carter, 2009). Supporting the concept of a DMO, several authors highlight the need for a clearly defined organisation and management structure that will afford the individual stakeholders to establish better co-operation and co-ordination of activities (Bramwell & Sharman, 1999; Formica & Kothari, 2008; Haugland et al., 2011; Pansiri, 2008; Wang, 2008; Wang & Xiang, 2007). Thus DMOs have a significant role in the sustainable management of tourism destinations. Establishing it correctly is often crucial to success (Jamieson, 2006). Kruger and Meintjies (2008) claim that the simpler the structure the less likely it is to fail. Furthermore, this clearly defined destination management structure can provide destination managers and stakeholders with a place to negotiate the sustainable management of the destination. A well-structured destination management also provides transparency as to who is responsible for managing the destination and site operations. Jamieson (2006) reveals that there is an evident shift taking place in the standard management of tourism. Management is now focusing on a more integrated and global philosophy. Considering site operations as an example, these are specific to the management of the environment and core resources by including aspects such as disaster planning, heritage resource conservation and security. Subsequently the training of public

and private sector staff is essential for each of the areas for the sustainable management of a tourism destination.

There is an array of tools to promote the sustainable management of tourism at various levels each with different foci. Mowforth and Munt's (2009) tools of sustainability (Table 1) are of significant importance for destination management. The ten major groupings of the tools include lists of techniques to assess or measure various aspects of sustainability. These 'tools' can also be otherwise referred to as 'techniques of sustainability'.

Table 1. *Tools of Sustainability*

<p>1 Area Protection Varying categories of protected area status:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National parks • Wildlife refuges and reserves • Biosphere reserves • Country parks • Biological reserves • Areas of outstanding natural beauty (AONBs) • Sites of special scientific interest (SSSIs) <p>2 Industry regulation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government legislation • Professional association regulations • International regulation and control • Voluntary self-regulation • Corporate social responsibility <p>3 Visitor management techniques</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zoning • Honey pots • Visitor dispersion • Channelled visitor flows • Restricted entry • Vehicle restriction • Differential pricing structures <p>4 Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overlays • Matrices • Mathematical models • Cost-benefit analysis (COBA) • The materials balance model • The planning balance sheet • Pollution • Local production • Access to basic human needs • Access to facilities • Freedom from violence and oppression • Access to the decision-making process • Diversity of natural and cultural life • Rapid rural appraisal • Geographic information system (GIS) • Environmental auditing • Ecolabelling and certification 	<p>5 Carrying capacity calculations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical carrying capacity • Ecological carrying capacity • Social carrying capacity • Environmental carrying capacity • Real carrying capacity • Effective or permissible carrying capacity • Limits of acceptable change (LACs) <p>6 Consultation and participation techniques</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meetings • Public attitude surveys • Stated preference surveys • Contingent valuation method • The Delphi technique <p>7 Codes of conduct</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For the tourist • For the industry • For the hosts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Host governments ○ Host communities • Best practice examples <p>8 Sustainability indicators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resource use • Waste • Pollution • Local production • Access to basic human needs • Access to facilities • Freedom from violence and oppression • Access to the decision-making process • Diversity of natural and cultural life <p>9 Foot printing and carbon budget analysis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holiday foot printing • Carbon emissions trading • Personal carbon budgets • Carbon offsetting <p>10 Fair trade in tourism</p>
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Adapted from Mowforth and Munt (2009)

Various tools possess different strengths and weaknesses depending on the characteristics of the destination. As such, the beneficial outline of the tools of sustainability from Mowforth and Munt (2009) may be built upon. For example, the visitor management techniques section outlines many tools including zoning. Finding appropriate forms of tourism development according to the characteristics of destination areas must not end with policies such as proactive zoning. A combination of different tools is required to allow the best possible decision making. Ramm (2001) and later Tepelus and Cordoba (2005) argue that destination regulations contribute toward a suitable environment even though tourism is regarded to be an industry relatively free from regulation. But to control the impact of tourism, regulations are needed (European Network for Sustainable Tourism Development [ECOTRANS], 2006; Graci & Dodds, 2010; Holden, 2008; Mowforth & Munt, 2009; Page, 2003). These techniques of sustainability can be used to strengthen sustainability (ECOTRANS, 2006).

METHODOLOGY

The destination of County Clare on which this study is based, is located on Irelands Mid-West coast (see Figure 1). The chosen study area, County Clare, an active tourism destination was also chosen in collaboration with Fáilte Ireland with the support of the Fáilte Ireland Research Scholarship Scheme.



Figure 1. Map of Ireland

In order to examine the sustainable management of a tourism destination, a theoretical framework was designed and utilised (Table 2).

Table 2. *Outline of the framework to assess the sustainable management of a tourism destination*

Tourism destination parameter established
DMO to lead and co-ordinate
DMO interaction with stakeholders
Tourism destination manager
Funding a tourism destination manager
Vision of a tourism destination
Timeframe for the vision
Destination policy and planning
Destination policy and planning, destination analysis, policy development, transport planning, land use and physical planning, monitoring and evaluation
Macro environment
Political, economic, sociocultural, technological, natural, climatic, environmental, geographical
Organisation and management structure
Design of organisational structures, development of leadership and management capacities, management of stakeholder participation
Destination operations and core resources
Waste, water quality, air quality, wildlife, forest/plant, habitat, visitor, biodiversity, resident/community, crisis management, commemorative integrity, culture and history
Product marketing and development
Product development, training for product development, location, safety/security, cost/value, awareness/image, visitor management, marketing research, a developed marketing strategy, a developed promotion strategy, quality of service or experience
Destination regulations
Destination management tools
Environmental Management Systems, Local Agenda 21, cleaner production, certification, industry regulation, etc.

Adapted and modified from (Australian Department of the Environment and Heritage, 2004; Cooper, 2002; EC, 2013; Fáilte Ireland, 2012; Global Sustainable Tourism Council [GSTC], 2012; Holden, 2008; Howie, 2003; Jamieson, 2006; Moscardo, 2011; Mowforth & Munt, 2009; Page, 2003; Ritchie & Crouch, 2003; UNWTO, 2007)

This framework is built upon related theory, models and principles from major authors in the area of tourism destination management and the sustainable management of tourism (Australian Department of the Environment and Heritage, 2004; Cooper, 2002; EC, 2013; Fáilte Ireland, 2012; Global Sustainable Tourism Council [GSTC], 2012; Holden, 2008; Howie, 2003; Jamieson, 2006; Moscardo, 2011; Mowforth & Munt, 2009;

Page, 2003; Ritchie & Crouch, 2003; UNWTO, 2007). The above framework initiates by determining the tourism destination parameter, identifying if there is a DMO, destination manager and vision for the destination. Other factors and approaches for the sustainable management of a tourism destination are also incorporated. Comparisons were made regarding the level of sustainable management of tourism addressed and its depth of content to the strategies and plans was incorporated to the analysis.

Based on the outline presented in Table 2, a content analysis of County Clare's tourism management organisations operations, strategies and plans was conducted to examine the sustainable management of tourism in this area. This represents quantification only on a limited scale; however it is still anchored within this research paradigm. Marshall and Rossman (1989) stated that content analysis is a way of asking a fixed set of questions about data in such a manner as to produce countable results or quantitative descriptions. It is a means by which to produce solid descriptive information or to cross-validate other research findings. It has been noted that tourism researchers are increasingly using content and textual analysis as a means of critical investigation, particularly when faced with textual forms of data, i.e. written documents such as tourism policies, strategies and plans or even visual materials. As a result, this approach was considered ideal to examine the sustainable management of tourism within County Clare's strategies and plans. But this methodological approach has been challenged as academia came to recognise that it could not fully address such questions as understanding and meaning (Henderson & Bedini, 1991; Hollinshead, 1996; Riley, 1996; Walle, 1997). As a result, quantitative research is complemented through the qualitative approach taken in this study to examine the sustainable management of County Clare. For this study, the analysis is not just interested in what is within the text of the strategies and plans but significantly what has been left out. The findings from the content analysis are accompanied with those from the qualitative interviews with stakeholders of County Clare destination. The stakeholders were selected through those who co-operate with the Regional Tourism Authorities (RTA) of the study area (see Table 3).

Table 3. *Organisations involved in managing tourism in County Clare*

Organisation	Destination
Fáilte Ireland NTDA	Ireland
Shannon Development	Shannon Region
Shannon Heritage	Shannon Region
Shannon Trails Initiative	Shannon Region
Mid-West Regional Authority (MWRA)	Clare, Limerick, North Tipperary
Clare County Council	County Clare
Clare County Development Board	County Clare
Clare Local Development Company	County Clare
Clare Tourism Forum	County Clare
Clare Tourist Council	County Clare
EU Rural Development Programme (LEADER)	County Clare
Burren Beo	Burren
Burren Connect	Burren

Compiled by authors

Qualitative interviews were completed by the end of April 2011 in order to avoid the summer season. A phone call to each of the stakeholder's organisations identified the most appropriate person at managerial level to speak to. This correspondence was followed by an email if requested. The email explained the aim of the study, outlined the subject of discussion and promised anonymity of responses. Securing interviews with elite members of a tourism organisation is a problem reflected in the work of Marshall and Rossman (1995) as well as Sarantakos (1997). Additional stakeholders were selected using the snowballing technique in that one participant helped recruit another. Not only did this effect help amplify the sample size but to overcome difficulties regarding the willingness of stakeholder participation. Improved measurement validity in the study was achieved via face-to-face interviews. This enabled the authors to instantly verify any comments which otherwise might be misunderstood or misinterpreted if written. The style of interview proved particularly useful to allow further insight of opinion. When conducting the interviews, ample time for the interviewees to respond had to be given. Providing a prolonged silence between questions allowed them to respond further or develop their answer. The qualitative study was completed with thirteen interviews with tourism stakeholders.

FINDINGS

For the sustainable management of a destination, a parameter too large is problematic (Lee, 2001) while a parameter too narrow is not practical (Schianetz, Kavanagh, & Lockington, 2007). The interviews commenced with the tourism stakeholders of County Clare with the question “What is the name of this tourism destination”. What was considered a straight forward question in fact received a wide variation in interpretation as over nineteen destinations were stated. When questioned if they identified with one destination or more, the majority identified with even more destinations and expressed confusion. Similarly, responses to the question on where the stakeholders claim affiliation to were categorised by those most prevalent: the Burren (31%), County Clare (22%), Shannon Region (9%), while others identified with localities and self-contained centres such as tourism attractions. No unified destination parameter was identified by this study.

There are many organisations directly involved in the management of tourism for the study. These range from a national to local level. However, from the content analysis of the tourism strategies and plans, there is no DMO that incorporates the sustainable management of tourism. This is despite the fact that DMOs have been highlighted as having a vital role in managing tourism (Bornhorst, Brent Ritchie, & Sheehan, 2010; Kruger & Meintjies, 2008; Tourism Sustainability Group, 2007; UNWTO, 2007). The content analysis had found however, that organizations of Burren Beo and Burren Connect integrate a focus dedicated toward sustainable management. However this is limited to the parameter of the Burren.

Yet results from the qualitative interviews suggest that all stakeholders agreed it was an advantage to have a DMO to lead and coordinate destination management, but expressed confusion due to the plethora of organisations managing tourism in County Clare:

‘...you have all these groups that have sprung up over the last number of years and to be honest I don’t know what their aim is,’ Respondent A02 (Attraction)

‘...none of the organisations that are run at the moment are fit for purpose... You’d have to create something completely new. And I think all the organisations that exist would have to have a role in that new organisation, so it would end up being, a quango of sorts,’ Respondent A07 (Conservation Project)

The contention of co-ordination is reflective in the latter response. After all, the leadership and co-ordination roles performed by a DMO are the essence of on-going, long term success (Crouch, 2007). It is a matter for concern that the key stakeholders interviewed have not clearly identified one DMO as managing the destination. However, it may be effective if the NTDA (Fáilte Ireland) were to intervene to appoint one specific DMO to lead and co-ordinate the sustainable management of tourism destination.

Destination managers are currently being employed in an increasing number of destinations (Howie, 2003; Kruger & Meintjies, 2008). However, the content analysis of County Clare's tourism management organisations operations, strategies and plans points out that many of the organisations positions appear to be dated, and are focused on destination marketing rather than management. However there is no specific person appointed as destination manager or a position specific to the sustainable management of tourism. This is despite the fact that from the qualitative interviews conducted with the tourism stakeholders in County Clare, all agree the tourism destination needs to be managed. Furthermore, when they were questioned 'who is the tourism destination manager or who is managing the destination?' the responses illustrated a lack of awareness and confusion. Similarly, tourism stakeholders were also questioned on 'would it work to have an appointed tourism destination manager?' The majority (68%) agreed it would, with one respondent believing this position to be in place. Yet, of all the staff in tourism management positions, the tourism officer for Clare was the only person identified.

Challenges are often encountered when attempting to implement sustainable management such as high costs, lack of information, skills, knowledge, expertise and time (Graci & Dodds, 2010; Wilkinson, 1997). But developing a reliable funding base may overcome a challenge. With regards to this, stakeholders were questioned on their opinion with the question of 'who should pay the destination manager?' There was a general consensus that the position should be funded by the government or contributions from the stakeholders:

'Well probably needs regional funding. I don't know if, to be quite honest I'm not sure where the funding could come from...probably a contribution from all interested parties, maybe some from industry, some from state bodies but for everybody to feel like they have vested interest in it', Respondent B02 (College)

'The stakeholders should contribute without a doubt...you won't get involvement unless they have to put their hand in their pocket',
Respondent A03 (Recreational)

The stakeholder's willingness to contribute in paying a destination manager was then examined. Interestingly, the stakeholders had an elongated pause, taking time for reflection. The majority affirmed they would be willing to contribute:

'We have barely any money to stay open ourselves, we would be willing to contribute towards it in terms of info and support but financial supports would not be viable considering we don't have any ourselves',
Respondent A01 (Landscape Charity)

A destination manager position is unrealistic if there is no funding. Therefore, it is pertinent for governmental bodies and other tourism organisations to co-ordinate on initiatives such as the funding of a tourism destination manager. Otherwise without this position it will be difficult to implement the sustainable management of a tourism destination.

The content analysis of the tourism strategies and plans for County Clare identified many tourism visions with large disparity. It must be pointed out that few organisations had addressed sustainability within their vision. The state appointed Shannon Development managing the region has not addressed sustainability. To have no clear vision of sustainability is recognised as a sustainability blunder (Doppelt, 2010). Their goals remain the norm as their bonuses, job promotions and the hiring of new employees are not dependent on sustainability oriented performance.

The qualitative interviews conducted for this study attempted to reveal if the tourism stakeholders of County Clare were aware of a vision for the destination. Half of the stakeholders were doubtful or presumed there was. A third acknowledged there was a vision yet were incapable of stating any of those from Table 4. The stakeholders are clearly unaware of the current visions even though they share the same county council and RTA. The visions that were stated by the tourism stakeholders did not correspond with those evident in Table 4.

Table 4. *Visions associated with County Clare*

Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport	To ensure that the transport, tourism and sport sectors make the greatest possible contribution to economic recovery, fiscal consolidation, job creation and social development.
National Development Plan	This National Development Plan 2007-2013 sets out the economic and social investment priorities needed to realise the vision of a better quality of life for all. This better quality of life will be achieved by supporting the continued development of a dynamic and internationalised economy and society with a high commitment to international competitiveness, social justice and environmental sustainability (Government of Ireland, 2007).
Fáilte Ireland NTDA	The Vision for Irish Tourism is that Ireland will be a destination of choice for international and domestic tourists which: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieves growth in market share with a higher yield; • Has a pristine physical environment; • Offers an accommodation product which is diverse in its character; • Has key attractions which entice visitors to Ireland; • Delivers a range of authentic experiences, in a friendly, engaging environment; • Attracts investors and staff of the highest quality; • Demonstrates and delivers continuous product innovation; • Makes a sustained contribution to the development of the economy—especially from a geographically diverse viewpoint; • Respects and supports Irish culture in all its diversity; and • Provides a positive international profile of Ireland (Fáilte Ireland, 2007).
Shannon Development	Shannon Development’s vision is that the people of the Shannon Region, and its investors and visitors, will live, learn, work and play in one of the most exciting and forward thinking places in the world (Shannon Development, 2011).
Mid-West Regional Authority (MWRA)	To produce an evidence-based statistical report on key sectors in the Mid-West and highlight the challenges that the Region will face over the medium to long term (MWRA, 2011).
Clare County Council	A county where people want to sustainably live, work and visit because of its unique quality of life. An inclusive county of sustainable communities that have respect for their environment, a sense of awareness of place, a sense of shared purpose and a sense of civic pride (Clare County Council, 2010).
Clare County Development Board	To provide a framework that will support and facilitate the development of a cohesive and sustainable tourism sector in County Clare that will continue to make a significant contribution to the local economy (Clare County Development Board, 2011).
Clare Local Development Company	Our vision for Co. Clare is an enterprising county of inclusive and vibrant communities (Clare Local Development Company, 2012).
Clare Tourism Forum	No tourism vision found*
Clare Tourist Council	No tourism vision found*
LEADER	No tourism vision found*
Burren Beo	No tourism vision found*
Burren Connect	To establish the Burren as a premier internationally recognised eco-tourism region ensuring the future economic and social growth and sustainable development of its communities, environment and heritage (Burren Connect, 2008).

* Based on an analysis of the organisations published documents and website however in some cases a mission, aims, objectives and goals may be in place.

Compiled by authors

Some stakeholders supposed there may be numerous visions due to the fragmentation of the destination and the number of organisations managing the area:

'I think it has several visions, not necessarily all joined together, I think there is several elements going on, I think it could possibly be a more joined up approach', Respondent B03 (Transport Operator)

'All of the different agencies have different functions so there's not one for over all, so that's what the charters trying to do to see if we can get one overall vision', Respondent A07 (Governmental Body)

However, there is a general consensus in the stakeholder's willingness to work toward a vision for the sustainable management of a tourism destination. In theory a vision should be on the tips of people's tongues, but usually isn't. It is recognised by the NTDA that the future success of Irish tourism depends on a shared vision (Fáilte Ireland, 2007). Similarly, respondents recognised this is also required for economic benefits and a willingness to work toward it.

Destination policy and planning seeks to improve the competitiveness and sustainability of a destination (Presenza, 2006). This is highly actionable and manageable by individuals and organisations (Dwyer & Forsyth, 2006). Nevertheless collective action is required amongst the stakeholders. Moscardo (2011) identified policy and planning as one of the common steps in the tourism planning process. This aspect is addressed by the County Clare Development Plan 2011 – 2017. The plan outlines an objective to deliver a flagship international scale tourism project. The plan not only focuses on the tourist economy, has an objective to safeguard tourism by protecting environmental quality. Qualitative interviews conducted with tourism stakeholders for this study examined if the tourism stakeholder's organisation (tourism enterprises) manages destination policy and planning components, and/or if they perceive the destination (County Clare's tourism management organisations strategies and plans) to be managing these (Table 5).

Table 5. *The managed components by organizations and destination*

Are the following components managed?	Organisation (%)			Destination (%)		
	Yes	No	DK	Yes	No	DK
Destination policy and planning	48	43	9	57	5	38
Destination Analysis	9	59	32	14	5	81
Policy Development	59	32	9	45	5	50
Transport planning	41	50	9	36	5	59
Land use and physical planning	41	45	14	45	5	50
Monitoring and Evaluation	45	41	14	27	14	59

DK: Don't know

The analysis identified no clear strengths in the findings, only 48% of organizations manage destination policy and planning. Destination analysis was the weakest component managed, which raised concern considering this is required to understand the destination in terms of its management (Wray et al., 2010). Lack of effective management of destination policy and planning ignores the potential it has to improve both the competitiveness and sustainability of a destination.

However, destination policy and planning may be affected by the factors of the macro environment, and these must be monitored. The macro environment is global in its scope, events in one part of the world can produce consequences for tourism destinations in an entirely different one (Crouch, 2007). Yet from the content analysis of the organisation's strategies and plans, it was found that the macro environment was not collectively addressed. The findings are reflective of Crouch (2007) opinion that many destination managers consider the global forces as irrelevant to their responsibilities.

Table 6. *The Macro environmental factors considered by organizations and destination*

Macro-Environmental factors	Organisation (%)			Destination (%)		
	Yes	No	DK	Yes	No	DK
Political	71	24	5	53	14	33
Economic	90	5	5	76	-	24
Sociocultural	76	14	10	67	-	33
Technological	67	29	4	52	10	38
Natural	76	19	5	67	-	33
Climatic	67	29	4	62	5	33
Environmental	86	10	4	67	-	33
Geographical	81	14	5	67	-	33

DK: Don't Know

However, the tourism stakeholders interviewed claim to take the macro environment into consideration in their management (Table 6). Of all the macro environment factors, it is the economic and environmental ones that are mainly taken into consideration with the technological being the weakest. Further results from the qualitative interviews indicated a high compliance by the destination to consider the macro environment however the content analysis was unable to identify such efforts from strategies and plans. This reflects the absence of a destination manager as Ritchie and Crouch (2010) indicate it is the destination manager who needs to regularly monitor the environment.

Yet establishing the right organisational and management structure is often key to success (Jamieson, 2006). Simplicity of structure is desirable (Lennon, Smith, Cockerell, & Trew, 2006). A content analysis of the strategies and plans attempted to identify the organisation and management structure of the tourism management organisations in County Clare.

Out of the thirteen organisations, only two had an outlined organisation and management structure as one of these two being out of date. This indicates that the tourism management organisations possibly lack information about their organisation and management structure or possibly have no specific structure in place. This study assessed the tourism stakeholders' efforts and how they perceived the destination's collective efforts with regards to the organisational and management structure attributes.

Table 7. *Organisation and management structure attributes*

Attributes	Organisation (%)			Destination (%)		
	Yes	No	DK	Yes	No	DK
Design of organisational structures	73	18	9	45	18	37
Development of leadership and management capacities	59	27	14	32	27	41
Management of stakeholder participation	50	41	9	41	41	18

DK: Don't Know

A positive 73% of the tourism stakeholders interviewed expressed that they have designed organisational structures and 59% have developed leadership and management capacities. But by having an organisation and management structure it allows for the identification of who addresses each aspect of destination management. For the progression of the sustainable management of a tourism destination, it

would be beneficial if the DMO or in this case Shannon Development outlined a simple organisation and management structure.

Furthermore, it is vital to communicate this organisation and management structure through strategies and plans, thus enabling it to be effective for the management of the destination operations and core resources. Yet from the analysis it is possible to identify how the management of these vary. The strongest attributes addressed are waste and visitor management.

Table 8. *The attributes managed by organizations and destination*

Are the following attributes of the destination managed by the organisation/destination?	<u>Organisation (%)</u>			<u>Destination (%)</u>		
	Yes	No	DK	Yes	No	DK
The destinations operations, core resources	62	33	5	62	9	29
Waste	73	18	9	55	14	31
Water Quality	50	27	23	45	18	37
Air Quality	23	55	22	32	14	54
Wildlife	41	50	9	36	9	55
Forest/plant	36	50	14	36	9	55
Habitat	41	50	9	41	9	50
Visitor	73	18	9	50	5	45
Biodiversity	50	41	9	50	5	45
Crisis Management	45	45	10	36	45	19
Resident/community	45	41	14	41	9	50
Commemorative integrity	23	45	32	36	5	59
Culture and History	55	36	9	50	9	41

DK: Don't Know

The destinations operations and core resources are vital aspects to a tourism destination. The management of these are essential to protect and maintain the attractiveness of the destination. The core resources are the fundamental reason as to why visitors choose to visit a destination (Ritchie & Crouch, 2007). This requires the management of a DMO and the co-operation of the stakeholders (Jamieson, 2006). However, the management of these alone will not suffice for the sustainable management of a tourism destination. There is little understanding of the destinations management activities even though a large area of the county is a designated Special Protection Area and Special Area of Conservation (Table 8). This needs to be addressed. Also the appropriate management of the destinations operations and core resources will contribute to the product marketing and development.

From the content analysis of the strategies and plans of organisations managing tourism in Clare, this study identified that four organisations have addressed product marketing and development. Clare County Council and the County Clare tourism strategy have an emphasis on product marketing and development however the focuses of these are separate. A weakness identified by Clare County Council is the lack of integration and co-operation between different tourism products and providers. Fáilte Ireland (2009) has identified the operational issues that are key challenges facing the tourism industry. These were innovation in marketing and tourism product development. The NTDA have a focus on product development and a specific product development strategy. The strategy recommends the state invests 280 million in product development over the period of the NDP 2007-13 (Fáilte Ireland, 2007). Shannon Development has four full time positions as part of the product development team for the region. They attend the Tourism Product Development Review Group (TPDRG) consultation meetings. The TPDRG aims to identify the key elements of a strategy for the future sustainable development of tourism in Ireland. Within this strategy the industry and Government sectors aim to work together in an effective and beneficial partnership. Furthermore, the content analysis has identified that the remaining tourism management organisations in Clare were not identified to have attended the TPDRG (Fáilte Ireland, 2007). As tourism management organisations of County Clare, it should be significant to attend these meetings.

Table 9. *The managed issues by organizations and destination*

Are the following managed by the destination/organisation?	Organisation (%)			Destination (%)		
	Yes	No	DK	Yes	No	DK
Product development	81	19		62	5	33
Training for product development	52	38	10	43	14	43
Location	73	18	9	59	5	36
Safety/Security	77	14	9	55	5	40
Cost/Value	82	9	9	50	5	45
Awareness/Image	86	9	5	55	5	40
Visitor Management	73	23	4	55	23	22
Marketing Research	73	23	4	50	23	27
A developed marketing strategy	73	14	13	59	14	27
A developed promotion strategy	73	18	9	59	18	23
Quality of service or experience	82	14	4	55	14	31

DK: Don't Know

Product marketing and development is part of an interlinked process both at the macro and micro level. There were particular strengths identified with regards to the management of the location, safety and security, cost and value as well as awareness and image. Both the results from the qualitative interviews with tourism stakeholders and the content analysis of tourism plans and strategies reveal a strong attribute addressed by both the organisation stakeholders (82%) and the destination (55%) is the quality of the service or experience (Table 9). Further strengths found from analysing the qualitative interviews were visitor management (73%), marketing research (73%), a developed marketing strategy (73%) and a developed promotion strategy (73%). There was some uncertainty about the destination management efforts.

Even though there appears to be a vast range of regulations, the organisations managing tourism in Clare have not communicated these through their strategies and plans. They are also not communicated by Shannon Development, a RTA. As a result of the failure to communicate the destination regulations the management of the destination operations and core resources are harmed. Results from the qualitative interviews have found that stakeholders expressed confusion and a lack of awareness regarding the extent of regulations for the destination. A total of 32% indicated that there are no regulations for their organisation (Table 10), including a respondent that works for the regional development company. Sustainability regulations were acknowledged by 32% of the stakeholders and these appear to be executed in various forms:

'There is the special protected area which is legislation under the EU and Ireland legislation. I mean there's lots, that's the main statutory relationship to the Cliffs overall but there's a host of different regulations when it comes to things like health and safety, general legislative requirements... There wasn't something from the local authority giving us guidelines other than the SPA legislation, that was really all we had,' Respondent A06 (organisation)

Interestingly, this organisation is progressing to self-regulate with tourism certification. If more organisations were to self-regulate there would be less need to enforce regulations.

Finally, there are a variety of tools that may be used for the sustainable management of tourism destinations. Various tools have different strengths and weaknesses depending on the characteristics of the destination. As such a combination of different tools is required to allow the best possible decision making. The research assessed the use of fifteen destination management tools as outlined in Table 10.

Table 10. *The destination management tools used by organizations and destination*

Are any of these management tools used?	Organisation (%)			Destination (%)		
	Yes	No	DK	Yes	No	DK
Environmental Management System	32	59	9	27	9	64
Local Agenda 21	23	68	9	5	18	77
Cleaner Production	9	82	9	5	18	77
Certification (accredited)	32	59	9	18	5	77
Education	59	32	9	23	9	68
Industry Regulation	59	32	9	36	14	50
Visitor Management Techniques	59	32	9	36	5	59
Environmental Impact Assessment	41	50	9	32	5	63
Carrying capacity calculations	36	45	19	14	18	68
Consultation and participation techniques	45	41	14	36	9	55
Codes of conduct	55	27	18	32	9	59
Sustainability Indicators	27	50	23	14	18	68
Fair trade in tourism	45	45	10	14	23	63
Area Protection	50	41	9	14	14	72
Foot printing and carbon budget analysis	18	68	14	14	14	72

DK: Don't Know

The detailed figure of results shows that from the content analysis there are no commonly used tools by the destination but codes of conduct, visitor management techniques, industry regulation and education are used by a small majority. The qualitative interviews reveal that there was a high percentage of uncertainty regarding the management tools implemented by the tourism stakeholders in the destination. However it is important to recall that the stakeholders do not understand who manages tourism in the destination. In addition, there is a lack of organisation and management structures to identify who does what.

CONCLUSION

By examining the sustainable management of tourism in a destination (County Clare), a number of challenges were identified. A lack of

understanding and fundamental differences in the scope of defining the tourism destination parameter of County Clare was found. Given the plethora of organisations managing tourism in Clare, stakeholders' confusion was identified, also stakeholders were found to be unable to identify the RTA as managing the destination. There was no DMO to coordinate the sustainable management of tourism. Yet this study found through a content analysis that many budgets contribute to more than thirty tourism management positions within County Clare. However, these positions appear not to ensure management effectiveness among the destination stakeholders. There is one tourism officer in place; but County Clare lacks a specific position of destination manager to influence the implementation of sustainable management.

Any tourism destination requires a vision to work toward. Yet the content analysis of existing tourism strategies and plans identified many tourism visions lack consistency and timeframes, with few addressing sustainability. Besides, the qualitative interviews found that many stakeholders were unaware of those visions that do exist even though they share the same county council and RTA. Similarly, the existing strategies and plans of tourism management organisations from a national to local level have not collectively addressed the destination policy and planning together with the macro environment. Tourism stakeholders interviewed had no clear strengths in destination policy and planning and were uncertain of the destination's efforts in this area. Strengths were however found in the management of the macro environment. Furthermore it is worth noting that tourism stakeholders need to take independent control in the management of their organisation and management structure. The content analysis revealed that of the thirteen tourism management organisations of County Clare, only two had a communicated organisation and management structure and one of these was out of date.

Vital aspects in the management of a tourism destination are the destinations operations and core resources. Results from the content analysis found that these are disjointedly addressed in the tourism management organisations strategies and plans. Yet qualitative interviews identified significant strengths and visitor management efforts among tourism stakeholders, while there was again little understanding of the destination management activities. However, product marketing and development was the strongest aspect addressed by stakeholders, in particular the management of the location, safety and security, cost, value, awareness and image. It was also clearly identified by the content analysis in four of the tourism management organisations strategies and plans.

Nevertheless, a multilayer of possible regulations and guidelines for County Clare were identified which are not communicated through the strategies and plans, but stakeholders communicated a lack awareness of these. Last of all, of the tools of sustainability applicable for destination management (Mowforth & Munt, 2009), those most popular were education, industry regulation and visitor management techniques.

The gap of issues identified on the level of sustainable management of tourism in County Clare causes implications for the stakeholders. This study is unique as it bridges the gap in knowledge of sustainable management of tourism in County Clare by providing baseline findings in addition to a critical up to date discussion by generating new challenges towards the sustainable management of a tourism destination. In terms of future research, the theoretical framework utilised in this study could be updated and possibly used in the future context of a longitudinal study.

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