



Sustainable Impact Assessment Final Project Report



April 2013





Contents

Introduction - 2 -

Outdoor Tourism in Ireland - 3 -

Outdoor Tourism in Wales..... - 4 -

Outdoor Tourism and Sustainability - 4 -

Business Best Practices - 5 -

Business Shortfalls - 5 -

Recommendations - 6 -

Conclusion..... - 8 -

Appendix A - Sustainability Check List - 9 -



Introduction

The Outdoor Tourism (OT) project is an EU INTERREG 4A funded project over three years (January 2012 - December 2014), with six collaborating project partners in Ireland and Wales. The project partners are; Conwy County Borough Council-Lead Partner (Wales), Kildare County Council (Ireland), Gwynedd Council (Wales), Kilkenny Leader Partnership (Ireland), The Outdoor Partnership (Wales) and Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council (Ireland).

The Outdoor Tourism project aims to boost outdoor tourism in all partner areas by:

- Fostering business development in outdoor tourism by up-skilling local businesses and developing relationships between outdoor tourism professionals.
- Supporting employment opportunities in outdoor tourism by increasing the number of qualified professionals trained to lead in outdoor activities.
- Developing innovative marketing initiatives in outdoor tourism.
- Engaging with communities in outdoor activities by encouraging the creation of a generation of local outdoor activity enthusiasts and promoting social and health wellbeing.

The Sustainable Impact Assessment (SIA) is to identify positive and negative economic, social and environmental impacts of the Outdoor Tourism Project. The project involved the following activities and resulting in recommendations for the Outdoor Tourism Project Partners to undertake to improve the sustainability aspects of the project:

1.) Baseline Study: Kildare, Graiguenamanaugh, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown, Conwy and Gwynedd

- Research of national and local tourism and development policies.
- Review of proposed and planned tourism infrastructure development projects.
- Destination questionnaires and directed interviews with project officers.
- A workshop was conducted to assess the sustainability challenges for each of the project aims.
- Interviews with tourism providers to evaluate their business operations from a sustainability perspective as well their involvement with the Outdoor Tourism Project.

2.) Best practices and shortfalls as it relates to sustainability with participating business

- Structured telephone interviews based on a questionnaire.
- Seventeen out of the 26 businesses provided by the project partners were interviewed, Four were located in Graiguenamanagh, three in Kildare, four in Dún Laoghaire, four in Conwy and two in Gwynedd.



- Interviews sought to evaluate the business operations from a sustainability perspective, and focused on the following aspects: Policies, resource use and reduction, sustainability messaging to clients, and community involvement.

This final report summarises the findings from each of the individual documents.

Outdoor Tourism in Ireland

Irish tourism is a major economic sector of enterprise, and of national and regional wealth creation. National Development Plan has earmarked investment for the tourism sector. There is a national framework for sustainable development to make Ireland an environmental leader, balancing environmental protection and economic development, while also ensuring that approaches are socially sustainable. The Irish Tourism Strategy reflects the national sustainable development framework by highlighting the need for tourism to be sustainable.

- **Kildare** has a specific tourism strategy. The Destination Development Strategy is focused on the development of local infrastructure and a quality tourism product. There is a steering committee to implement the goals set out in the strategy. The County Development Plan supports the destination development plan by having policies in place to facilitate infrastructure development for water based and other outdoor tourism related activities.
- **Graiguenamaugh** does not have a tourism strategy. The Kilkenny County Development Plan highlights tourism as a means for economic growth, rural employment and community development and Graiguenamaugh was one of the towns highlighted in the Development Plan for regeneration.
- **Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown** has no tourism strategy and tourism is not mentioned in the current County Development Plan.

There is no visitor data available for the three project areas in order to allow for a benchmark. A benchmark would enable the project to know what will have been achieved in the fostering of business development and creating employment opportunities in the sector, thus meeting one of the success criteria for the project. This benchmark would also identify if there were an increased participation in outdoor tourism either by locals or visitors over the course of the project.

Outdoor tourism is in its infancy in all the Irish partner areas, comprising of few businesses and many of which are clubs. As the various infrastructure and product development plans identified proceed this would change, as these developments contribute to increasing the local tourism offering, helping to generate entrepreneurial activity and employment in the sector.



Outdoor Tourism in Wales

North Wales accounts for a third of Wales' tourism with the majority of visitors originating from the UK. Tourism is not evenly distributed across the region and is quite seasonal with 70% of trips taking place in the summer 6 months. There is a Tourism Strategy for North Wales which covers both Gwynedd and Conwy counties that includes a sustainability component. To support this regional strategy, there is a sustainable tourism framework that sets the annual work program for sustainable tourism development, partnership working, establishing pilot projects, investing in tourism infrastructure and improving the sustainable tourism product.

In **Gwynedd and Conwy**, the infrastructure for outdoor tourism is typically of a high standard and well established. There is a real opportunity in both counties for business development in outdoor tourism in addition to the project assisting existing businesses to succeed or expand.

While, the Outdoor Tourism project has the potential for long-term positive impacts to the community, the challenge is managing the negative environmental impacts that come from an increase in tourist numbers. The North Wales Environmental Outdoor Charter has been recently formed to give the outdoor tourism sector a cohesive voice to potentially deal with environmental issues. This nascent initiative is critical for the long-term sustainability of outdoor tourism and for the dissemination of information for best practice.

Gwynedd has recent comprehensive visitor data allowing it to understand its potential to expand while Conwy does not have this data.

Outdoor Tourism and Sustainability

- There are tourism infrastructure development projects that would assist the Outdoor Tourism Project with their objectives but they are only in the initial stages. Infrastructure development could have a positive economic impact for outdoor tourism but their completion dates are outside the life of the project. This would affect the Project's ability to achieve its aims, such as fostering business development and supporting employment opportunities in the sector, even possibly the development of apprenticeship schemes. Without new product, the economic sustainability of the project would be minimal.
- **In Ireland**, locals in general are not interested in outdoor tourism, it's not part of their culture. **In Wales** the attitude is changing, locals are starting to see the potential of outdoor tourism as a business especially among the younger generation. This would possibly affect the Outdoor



Tourism Project's ability to support businesses development, entrepreneurial activity or the likelihood for locals to be employed in outdoor tourism.

- The understanding of sustainability in particular environmental sustainability is lacking. Existing businesses do not have a clear understanding of tourism's impact on the environment and community.

Business Best Practices

- It has been shown that being sustainable is beneficial and possible even with small enterprises. Specifically that small, owner run business can undertake activities that improve the environment in which they do business, promote the local area and work with the local community
- Tourism providers promote the local community through the development of events and building institutional capacity within a destination rather than waiting for it to be developed by local and regional governments.
- Small business involve and include local people in outdoor tourism activity by providing their outdoor activities either for free or at a reduced price.

Business Shortfalls

- The knowledge is low about how to access tourism markets for businesses that want to expand beyond the local market.
- There is a lack of collaboration among outdoor tourism businesses in Wales. Collaboration is largely non-existent in Ireland due to the nascent status of the sector, and would be important for Ireland as the sector develops.
- There is no visitor monitoring in all partner areas except Gwynedd.
- Outdoor tourism providers are small in size, limiting their ability to employ local people.
- Environmental awareness among businesses was found to be lacking, sustainability is not well understood and not seen either in terms of potential cost savings from efficient use of resources and/or as a marketing differentiator.



Recommendations

1. Define outdoor tourism

The project partners need to define outdoor tourism activities so that it is possible to delineate the sector from other types of tourism.

2. Create a sustainability policy for the project as whole

A sustainability policy would provide the base to embed sustainability in all aspects of the project, encouraging a more cognisant and holistic approach. A yardstick against which to assess environmental, economic and socio-cultural developments.

3. Use sustainability Impact Checklist¹

The project activities should implement a sustainability impact checklist to serve as a tool to identify the positive and negative sustainability impacts of key project tasks *before* they commence. This checklist will allow the project team to take a course of action to reduce the negative aspects during the planning of a programme. It also demonstrates to participating businesses that sustainability is embedded within the Project, in other words it is “walking the talk”.

4. Hold sustainability awareness training for businesses

Sustainability awareness training will become more critical as the outdoor tourism sector grows. The sector is reliant on a pristine environment as well as a local community that supports tourism and welcomes tourists. Sustainability training needs to be ongoing throughout the life of the Project.

5. Develop a tourism hub in Kildare

Select one or two key areas that have the most potential for outdoor tourism development rather than trying to develop the whole county. By concentrating on one area there is improved likelihood of success and the hubs could be then replicated in other locations in county as other tourism infrastructure projects develop and evolve.

¹ Provided in Appendix A.



6. Monitor Progress

There is a need for sustainability indicators to be identified so the success can be measured and assessed during and at the end of the project life. In order to assess change, baseline tourism data for each partnership area needs to be collected. A database will be needed to track the information and a communication strategy to share the results of monitoring with stakeholders.

7. Facilitate the forming of business networks

Encouraging the formation of business networks could help to overcome barriers amongst businesses and facilitate engagement of the sector with the community. These could take the form of local outdoor tourism associations and act as destination animators to stimulate activity and wider stakeholder participation.

8. Increase stakeholder participation

A key ingredient for the long-term sustainability of the project and outdoor tourism is wider stakeholder participation.

9. A document of understanding between participating businesses and the corresponding partner area.

This document can set the expectations on how the parties will work with each other and what each can expect from the Outdoor Tourism Project. This document can be sent to the individual businesses or it can be available viewing and download on the Outdoor Tourism website.

10. Conduct end of project impact assessment

An end of project SIA will identify the environmental, economic, and socio-cultural successes and/or short falls of the project. It will identify factors that continue to hinder the sustainability of the Outdoor Tourism Project and identify new issues that have developed over the life of the project. The end of the project SIA can also assist with the formation of the exit strategy.

11. Create an exit strategy. An exit strategy is essentially a plan setting out what will happen to a project once the initial funding has ended.



Conclusion

Both in Wales and Ireland, sustainability is highlighted as a key component of national development plans and tourism strategies. The Outdoor Tourism Project would need to be in-line with these larger objectives.

It is acknowledged that there are many factors outside the scope of this project that can have significant impacts on the economic sustainability outcomes of the Outdoor Tourism Project. These include, destination specific tourism strategies which incorporate a sustainability framework and create a mechanism for visitor baseline data and monitoring, and the many tourism infrastructure projects that are proposed of which the benefits would not be realised during the Outdoor Tourism Project period. The latter being particularly pertinent to Ireland.

Implementing sustainability principles on the onset of tourism development is easier than taking corrective action at a later stage. Destinations and tourism businesses that prioritise sustainability can have a market advantage, but the key is getting businesses to understand and see the importance of the environmental, social and economic balance for the long-term.

The SIA recommendations assist in bringing a sustainability approach to the overall project. The recommendations put forward are possible within the scope of the project and would assist in taking a more cognisant and holistic approach.

While agreement on the definition of outdoor tourism or which activities are to be included is challenging it is an important first step as it gives the project focus. This is particularly important in regards to sustainability as different tourism sectors have different impacts. In addition, sustainability training could be tailored to those activities that are included in the definition of the sector ensuring better outcomes. Training in sustainability needs to be ongoing throughout the life of the project.

At the moment the social impacts are limited due to the number of businesses engaged in outdoor tourism. However increasing awareness of sustainable practice to augment social benefit will be critical for areas that might become tourism hubs, as these communities will be impacted due to the concentrated tourism activity. The forming of businesses networks and increasing stakeholder participation can help garner community support for tourism providers and help businesses work with the community.



Appendix A - Sustainability Check List

Sustainability Impact checklist				
Theme (potential impact of the activity)	Positive Impact	Negative Impact	No specific impact	What will the impact be? If the impact is negative, how can it be mitigated? (action)
Use of energy and water				
Waste generation / sustainable waste management				
Contribution of tourism to pollution (air, land and water)				
Factors that contribute to climate change (transport, accommodations, tourism activities)				
Travel choices that do not rely on the car				
Protection of and conservation of the natural environment				
Alternative transport choices to a destination				
A strong, diverse tourism product offering				
Enhances the local economy				
Encourages use of local services and local products				
Opportunities for education and skills development				



Access to cultural and recreation facilities for locals				
Social inclusion / engage and consult communities				
Equal opportunities for the whole community to participate in the tourism economy				
Contribution to pride of place				