

**A model for the transition towards the sustainable management of tourism destinations in Ireland**

## Abstract

Tourism destinations depend upon complex development, planning, management and stakeholder involvement. The sustainable management of tourism requires consideration due to the contribution it makes to environmental, cultural/social and economic issues. However tourism destination management is not a straight forward process. Organisations tasked with developing tourism need to be aware of the sensitive issues which may affect the local community. This paper draws on previous doctoral research into both the demand and supply of sustainable tourism in Ireland. Additional analysis from research into the levels of sustainable management of tourism destinations in Ireland was also used to construct a model to help in the transition towards sustainable management of tourism destinations (SMTD). Future tourism policy making may be enhanced by the implementation of the model for the transition towards the sustainable management of tourism destinations.

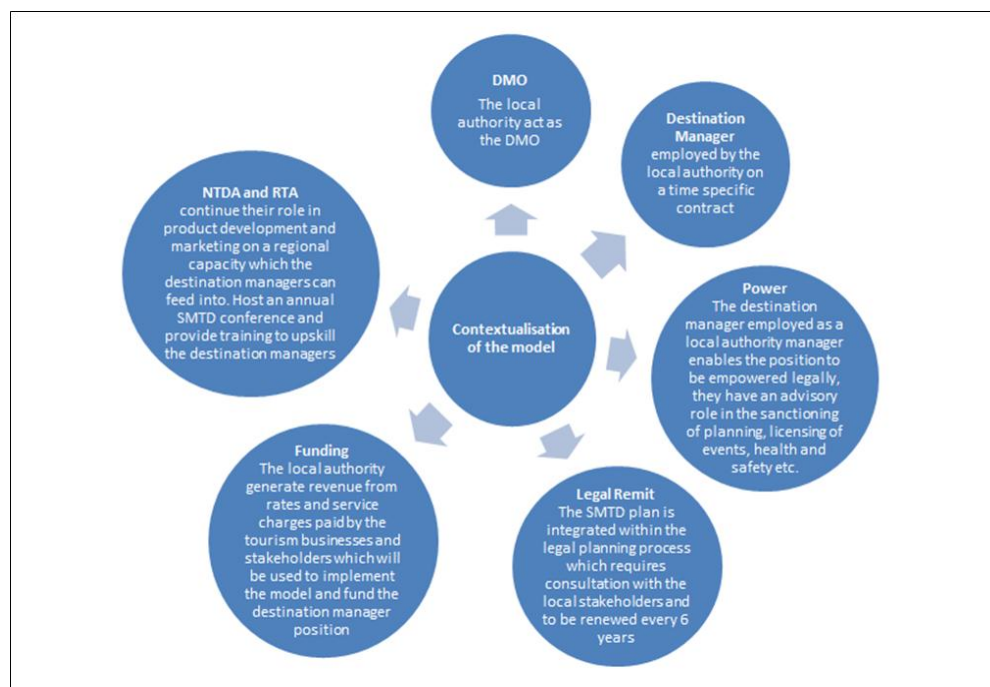
## Introduction

Tourism planning certainly holds the key to the sustainable management of a tourism destination. The tourism literature contains a widespread discussion of sustainability. However there has been little connection to sustainability issues or approaches in tourism planning models (Moscardo, 2011). Planning by the Local Authorities is necessary to consider the interaction between impacts (Schianetz, Kavanagh and Lockington, 2007). Consequently, it was emphasised by Koeman, Worboys, De Lacy, Scott, and Lipman (2002) that: *“travel and tourism destinations are an appropriate scale for considering sustainable tourism management, planning and development”*. For the purpose of this study and the subsequent development of the Sustainable Management of Tourism Destinations (SMTD) model, it is necessary to have a connection to both tourism planning and sustainability issues with an ideological commitment approach conforming to Hall’s (1970) definition that: *“planning is concerned with anticipating and regulating change in a system to promote orderly development so as to increase social, economic and environmental benefits. Planning is an ordered sequence of operations”*. At this early stage in 1970 it was recognised the need to have orderly development of the social, economic and environmental benefits. Gunn spoke of how these could be obtained in 1988 as: *“planning as a concept of viewing the future and dealing with anticipated consequences is the only way that tourism’s advantages can be obtained”*. Therefore, fundamental to strategic planning is a vision of what the future should be in order to define the appropriate steps for action as well as a strategy to enable a destination to achieve the vision (Laws, 1995). To make tourism more sustainable, the impacts and needs of tourism have to be taken into account in its planning (UNEP-UNWTO, 2005). Therefore the development of a model for the transition towards the sustainable management of tourism destinations may be more effective if mapped upon a specific planning process.

The model utilised in this study (Figure 2) was developed with the intent to assist destinations in the transition towards the sustainable management of tourism at destination level. It is a model that has international significance given its strong theoretical basis on which it was built, conforming to (UNEP-UNWTO, 2005; GSTC, 2008, 2012; Fáilte Ireland, 2012; ETIS, 2013) as well as the empirical data it integrated from research conducted in Ireland. Realistic implementation was also taken into consideration so that it may be integrated within the legal binding process under Irish planning guidelines (2007), namely the County Development Plan (CDP). The model will assist in the management of tourism destinations in Ireland and could potentially be adapted for Pan-European use.

However, it is important to recognise that there are restricted resources in Ireland to fuel the SMTD. Taking this into consideration, this critical contextualisation (Figure 1) outlines where the model for the transition towards the SMTD fits within the destination, how the model will be implemented, identifies who does what, where the funding will come from and how tourism stakeholder participation is included within the process. As such it can be gathered that the Local Authority is best placed to act as the Destination Management Organisation (DMO) to lead and co-ordinate the SMTD.

The role of the DMO is to appoint and empower a destination manager to lead the SMTD. A destination manager outside of the Local Authority structure could be criticised as being relatively powerless and reliant on the Local Authority planners and management for many of the SMTD decisions. The destination manager employed as a Local Authority manager will enable the position to be empowered legally. This will be obtained through their senior advisory role working with key decision makers over the Local Authority functions as they sanction the licensing of events, permits, planning permission, and health and safety.



**Fig 1** Contextualisation of the model within Ireland at county level

In order to ensure the model is complied with in Ireland, it could be criticised for not having some form of a statutory obligation. As it is not possible to draw up new legislation for this model, it has been superimposed into a Local Authority legal required county planning process. Therefore, the model is designed to provide an integrated management approach within the legal binding process under Irish planning law (2007), the County Development Plan (CDP). In compliance with the planning law, the destination manager must consult with the local stakeholders throughout the formulation and implementation of the SMTD plan. The SMTD plan is integrated within the legally binding CDP which is renewed every six years. A possible weakness here would be the six year term as a shorter term may be more adaptable to macro changes. However, this is traded off to secure the SMTD within the legal framework.

Funding may be a challenging task to implement the model and to fund the destination manager position with an attractive salary. However, a funding stream already exists from the rates and service charges that the tourism businesses and stakeholders pay to the Local Authority. The use of this funding for the SMTD and a professional position salary will provide the tourism stakeholders with value for money while ensuring they buy into the process as they are literally paying for it.

Similarly, it is important that Fáilte Ireland (NTDA) and Regional Tourism Authorities (RTA) maintain their role and this is supported by the model. The NTDA and RTA continue their role in product marketing and development to ensure seamless management at a national and regional level. As the destination managers are under a performance based review, the NTDA will facilitate annual training and up skilling of the county destination managers. The NTDA will continue to monitor the management and associate plans to align the nationwide management efforts. The stages of the model will be discussed in further detail.

## **Methodology**

Traditionally the tourism domain has adhered to the master paradigm of quantitative research. This was based on the opinion that an economically driven industry requires statistical sophistication as a necessary condition for progress (Reid and Andereck, 1989; Riley and Love, 2000). This paper forms part of a Fáilte Ireland (NTDA) funded doctoral research thesis focusing on the sustainable management of tourism destinations in Ireland. Results here were instrumental in identifying any significant areas needed for consideration when managing tourism sustainably. As a result, the authors developed a model to aid tourism managers in the transition toward the sustainable management of tourism destinations.

Previous research into both the demand and supply of sustainable tourism in County Clare (Hanrahan, Conaghan and McLoughlin, 2014) provided the authors with new material and understanding on sustainable management of tourism in Ireland. Both these studies utilised electronic mail surveys in order to gather the views of both holidaymakers and local tourism businesses. Surveys are a popular research method for investigating attitudes and opinions (Denscombe, 2007; Connolly, 2008). According to Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachinias, (1996) and later Miller (2001) self-administered surveys are inexpensive, quick to administer and provide a good opportunity to obtain the largest possible response from a limited time and financial budget. There were a total of 4740 holidaymakers email addresses collected. This took place over a ten day period in high season of late August through to early September 2013. For the tourism business survey, the businesses email addresses were obtained from the NTDA master database. The survey was emailed to 2360 of the 2847 tourism businesses operating in Ireland that were on the Fáilte Ireland master database. This accounted for approximately 15% of the total tourism businesses in the country.

Also, this research utilised the results of a content analysis performed on County Clare's tourism management organisations operations, strategies and plans. This was done in order to examine the sustainable management of tourism in this area. This particular methodological approach involved a complete population whereby all the current strategies and plans available for the management of tourism in Clare were carefully examined. As such this procedure yielded a high success rate. There was however, some difficulty in obtaining certain strategies and plans. There can be several reasons for this, such as some management reports were not available at the time etc. The content analysis was analysed and discussed in

the context of current international literature. Data was then connected to the results of the responses from the key stakeholder interviews.

The aim of qualitative research here was to gain an understanding into the sustainable management of tourism in County Clare. The interview approach facilitated the depth of inquiry required, for example; it contained open-ended questions, allowing the interviewee to elaborate on their particular point of interest. The advantage of this style of interview is its flexibility. This helps to ensure the interview unfolds in a conversational manner, while offering both participants the chance to explore issues they feel important (Clifford and Valentine, 2003; Skinner, 2006). The initial source of stakeholders was selected through those who co-operate with the RTA of the study area. Some were chosen as a result of their expert knowledge on the subject of tourism management. This was beneficial as there was no need to explain various aspects and concepts although occasionally clarification had to be made.

### **A model for the transition towards the sustainable management of tourism destinations**

Much of the model approach utilised in this study is evolutionary, that is, it was built upon models already present in addition to current theory, criteria and indicators for the sustainable management of tourism (Acerenza, 1985; Inskip, 1991; Pearce, Morrison and Rutledge, 1998; Jamieson, 1999; Swarbrooke, 2000; Ritchie and Crouch, 2003; Australian Government, 2004; UNEP-UNWTO, 2005; Jamieson, 2006; UNWTO, 2006; Tourism Queensland, 2008; Mowforth and Munt, 2009; Ladeiras, Mota and Costa, 2010; Moscardo, 2011; Rieder, 2012; Fáilte Ireland, 2012; GSTC, 2012; EC, 2013). For the functionality of the model, it has been split into two distinguishable stages. Each of these stages and components of this model are connected to the theory and data generated from previous studies focusing on sustainable management in Ireland (Conaghan, Hanrahan and McLoughlin, 2014). Stage one is a process where the transition to the SMTD is considered. Stage two is a cycle for the SMTD. To better appreciate the model, each stage needs to be discussed; however, it is first necessary to discuss the contextualisation of the model within Ireland at county level.

#### **Stage One: Decision to consider the transition to the SMTD (Steps 1-6)**

Stage one of the model is a six step process. The steps will guide the decision whether or not to commence the transition to the SMTD. The steps of each section are labelled on the right hand side of each box in the model (Figure 2). These are discussed in chronological order.

##### *Step 1: Decision to consider the transition to the sustainable management of tourism destinations*

The decision to consider a transition to the SMTD begins by identifying the key stakeholders, establishing a destination development group and partnerships (Fáilte Ireland, 2012a; European Commission, 2013). An initial consultation among the industry and stakeholders is essential to consider the transition to the SMTD. It is outlined that stakeholder inclusion is important for the development of tourism in a sustainable manner (Ap, 1992; Gunn, 1994; Andereck and Vogt, 2000; Gursoy, Jurowski and Uysal, 2002; Andriotis, 2005; Byrd, Cardenas and Dregalla 2009). Ideally, it would be best if this process was initiated, funded and co-ordinated by the NTDA. This would demonstrate a national commitment to the SMTD for all regions and ensure a funding stream to facilitate the process. It is important to

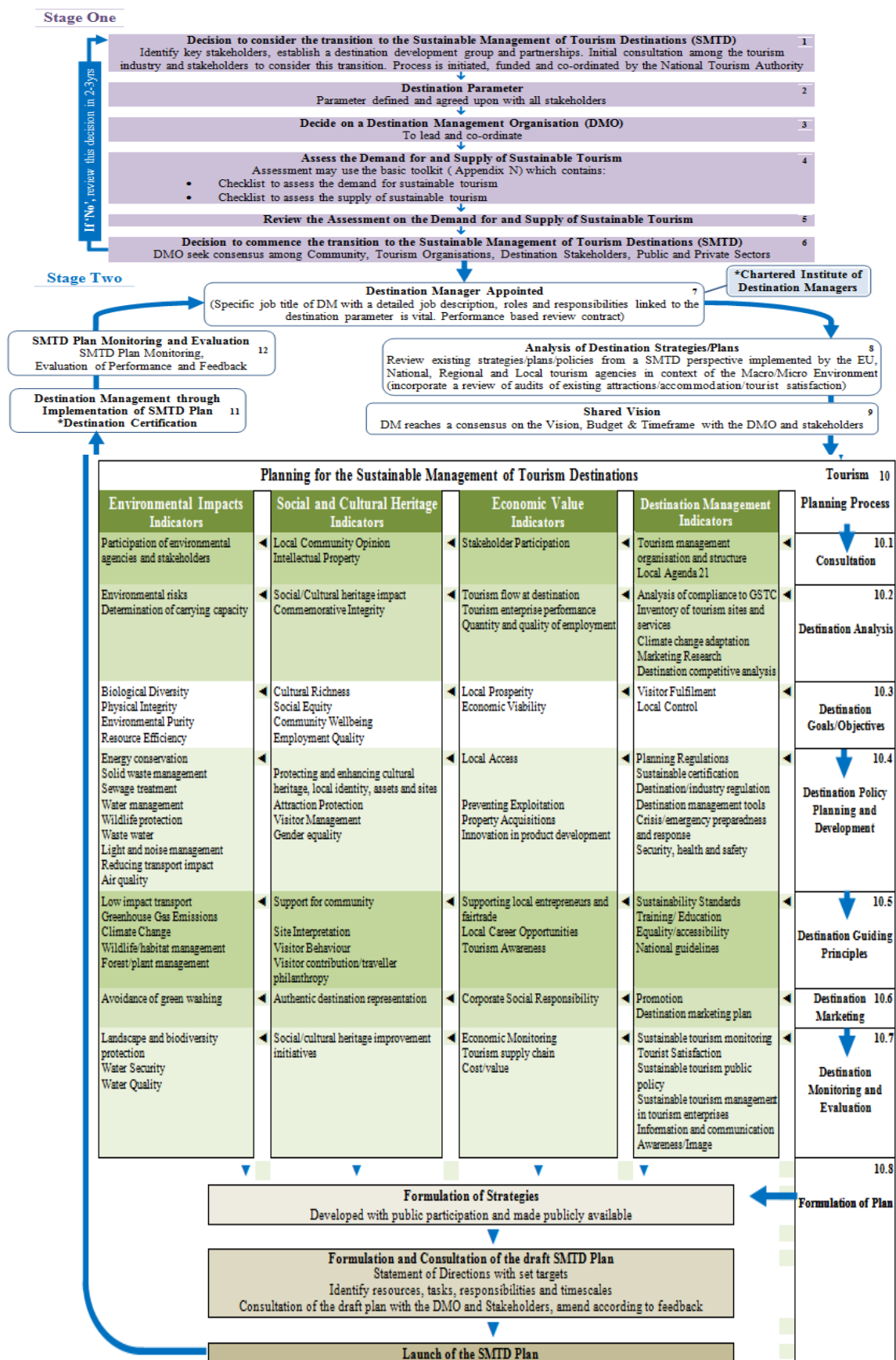
note that some destinations will not want any form of tourism even if sustainable and that this stakeholder opinion must be respected.

### *Step 2: Destination parameter*

A clearly defined tourism destination parameter is vital for the SMTD. The need to define the parameter was highlighted by previous research (Conaghan et al, 2014). A formal definition is critical as all the sustainable management practices that follow relate directly to the destination as it has been defined (Ritchie and Crouch, 2007). 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). A division by county is what Timothy (2001) would classify as a 'third-order' border. A suitable scale so that the management is meaningful and practical. A county parameter would be beneficial as it is recognised as a natural boundary by stakeholders. The parameter needs to be defined and agreed upon with all stakeholders.

### *Step 3: Decide on a Destination Management Organisation*

The presence of a DMO that involves different stakeholders is required for the planning and management of tourism (Heath, 2002; Page, 2003; UNWTO, 2007; TSG, 2007; Kruger and Meintjies, 2008). A proliferation of tourism management organisations causes confusion which may be prevented by having one DMO to lead and co-ordinate the process of the SMTD (Conaghan et al, 2014c). Therefore, it is necessary for the DMO to outline a simple organisation and management structure that is clearly communicated to the stakeholders.



**Fig. 2** a model for the transition towards the sustainable management of tourism destinations (UNEP-UNWTO, 2005; GSTC, 2008, 2012; Fáilte Ireland, 2012; ETIS, 2013)

#### *Step 4: Assess the demand for and supply of sustainable tourism*

As with all forms of travel, sustainable tourism must be viewed by focusing on both the demand and supply (UNEP-UNWTO, 2005; Getz, 2008; UNEP, 2013; Conaghan et al, 2104ab). It is paramount to assess demand and supply perspectives in order to understand and facilitate the sustainable management of tourism. Sound management of tourism requires evidence of changes in impact over time so that adjustments to policies and actions can be made (UNEP and UNWTO, 2005). The baseline assessment conducted by the DMO can be used for future longitudinal analysis.

#### *Step 5: Review the assessment on the demand for and supply of sustainable tourism*

The data from the assessment on the demand for and supply of sustainable tourism must be analysed and compiled into a report. A review of the assessment will enable the DMO to identify the demands of the market. Furthermore, it will assist the DMO in making an informed approach to the SMTD and respond to the demands of the market through the tourism planning process. Tourism planning should strive for a balance between the demands and supply (UNESCAP, 2003). However the decision of whether or not to commence the SMTD must be confirmed.

#### *Step 6: Decision to commence the transition to the sustainable management of tourism destinations*

The decision to commence the transition to the SMTD must be finalised in this step. Decision-making should be transparent and open to the participation of all local people interested (Herremans, 2006; ETE and UNESCO MaB, 2007). The DMO is to seek a consensus in the decision among the community, the tourism organisations, destination stakeholders and the public and private sector. There are two options, if they decide 'no', this may be reviewed in two to three years, otherwise, a decision to commence allows them to continue onwards to stage two.

### **Stage two: Cycle for the SMTD (Steps 7-12)**

Stage two of the model is comprised of six clearly outlined steps (7-12) that play a crucial role for the SMTD. Under Irish planning guidelines (2007) the County Councils are entrusted by law to make a County Development Plan (CDP) every six years. For the realistic implementation of this model, this cycle could be integrated within this legal binding process. As a result, stage two would be a six year process.

#### *Step 7: Destination manager appointed*

A key to the cultural change toward sustainability is leadership (Doppelt, 2010). Destination managers are employed in an increasing number of destinations (Howie, 2003; Kruger and Meintjies, 2008). Previous research identified that a destination would benefit from having one destination manager appointed (Conaghan et al, 2014c). This will also allow for the more effective use of state spending. It is vital to appoint this position with the specific job title of destination manager and a detailed job description. Furthermore, the destination manager roles and responsibilities should be aligned to the destination parameter. A destination manager is typically from within the Local Authority (Enterprise DG Publication, 2003). A performance based review is required coupled with a time specific contract linked to the



timeframe of the CDP. This would be central to ensure the effectiveness of the position. Also theory has outlined that challenges are often encountered when attempting to move toward sustainable tourism development. These challenges include high costs, lack of information, skills, knowledge, expertise and time (Salina Sulaiman, 1996; Wilkinson, 1997; Graci and Dodds, 2010). In order to professionalise and regulate the position of destination managers, it would be ideal if there was a representative body for professionally qualified destination managers, akin to the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators. Through this, the CIDM could maintain a register of destination managers from around the world with the necessary skills, knowledge and expertise.

#### *Step 8: Analysis of destination strategies/plans*

Analysis needs to be completed from a SMTD perspective despite claims that more destinations are adopting sustainable, strategic perspectives towards tourism development (Ritchie and Crouch, 2000; Ruhanen, 2004). The analysis also needs to be carried out in the context of the macro and micro environment. According to Wray et al. (2010) by undertaking this analysis the destination manager can gain an enhanced understanding of the destination. It is suggested that a review is undertaken of existing audits of attractions, accommodation and tourist satisfaction. For example, in Ireland, this would include a review of the National Tourism Development Authority strategies and plans including the visitor attitude survey.

#### *Step 9: Shared vision*

To ensure consistency of the vision, alignment throughout the tourism management organisations namely the UNWTO, EU, to NTDA, Regional Tourism Authority and the Local Authority of the destination will be required. The lack of stakeholder awareness of tourism visions, budget and timeframe indicated the need to reach a consensus on these aspects with the DMO and stakeholders. With such a diversity of tourism stakeholders, it is challenging to find common ground among the various agendas (Bornhorst, Ritchie and Sheehan, 2010). It is suggested that surveys, meetings and votes may be used to create a “common issue of concern” and the conception of a common vision (ETE and UNESCO, 2007). Once a shared vision is agreed upon, it is important for the DMO and destination manager agree on a structured and realistic budget. This will provide an opportunity to review the potential cost savings from green technologies and effective sustainable management. It is recommended that the vision timeframe runs parallel with the County Development Plan which is required by law. The planning for the SMTD must be carefully co-ordinated before the implementation of the SMTD plan.

#### *Step 10: Planning for the sustainable management of tourism destinations (conforming to UNEP-UNWTO, 2005; Fáilte Ireland, 2012; GSTC, 2012; EC, 2013)*

Imperative to the SMTD is the integration of a planning process. For example, Getz (1986) reviewed more than 150 tourism planning models and Hall (2005) suggested that little has changed in practice since then with many tourism plans still embedded in economic approaches. The planning process proposed in this model differentiates as it feeds into four pillars focused upon the sustainable management of a tourism destination. The four pillars (destination management, economic value, social and cultural heritage and environmental impacts) conform to the UNEP-UNWTO (2005) twelve aims of sustainable tourism, GSTC criteria for destinations (2012) and the EC ETIS (2013) for sustainable management at destination level. The tourism planning process is aligned to the four pillars. The process

integrates each pillar at each step of the planning process and onwards to the formulation of strategies. The tourism planning process commences with a consultation on destination management.

#### *Tourism Planning Process (TPP) 10.1: Consultation*

Destination planning is made difficult by the variety of stakeholders (Jamieson, 2006) however it may be co-ordinated through the help of an organisation and management structure. This is the first aspect for consultation. Establishing the organisation and management structure is often fundamental to success (Jamieson, 2006). Local community opinion is incorporated within the social and cultural heritage pillar which can contribute to the protection of intellectual property. Stakeholder participation is essential for the consultation of economic value. Theory outlining the achievement of sustainability initiatives has been hampered at times by a lack of collaboration (Lovelock and Boyd, 2006; Wilson, 2010; Lovelock, 2011). Inter-organisational collaboration is becoming increasingly common in both the public and the private sector (Devine, Boyle and Boyd, 2011). As a result, the participation of environmental agencies and stakeholders has been integrated within the environmental impact pillar. The consultation step follows onward to the destination analysis.

#### *TPP 10.2: Destination analysis*

Previous research focusing on County Clare in Ireland (Conaghan et al, 2014c) identified destination analysis as a weak component despite this being a common step in tourism planning models (Moscardo, 2011). A destination analysis should be undertaken to further understand the destination in terms of its management (Wray, Dredge, Cox, Buultjens, Hollick, Lee, and Pearlman 2010). The analysis will enable the DMO and destination manager to adequately anticipate and respond to the particular aspects identified. The analysis initiates with an examination of the destinations compliance to the GSTC as well as an inventory of tourism sites and services. An analysis of climate change adaptation would be beneficial to identify challenges and opportunities associated with climate change (GSTC, 2012). The market research will help inform the destinations competitive analysis essential to maintain a good position in the market. Positioned within the environmental impact pillar are environmental risks and determination of carrying capacity, tools of sustainability which are required to conduct the analysis (Mowforth and Munt, 2009). The destination's tourism flow, tourism enterprise performance and the quantity and quality of employment is an indicator of the destination's economic value. An analysis of the social cultural heritage impact will interlink to the analysis of commemorative integrity.

#### *TPP 10.3: Destination goals/objectives*

Destination goals and objectives are vital to guide the SMTD. The operational objectives of regional tourism organisations have often been geared towards marketing, with little focus on sustainable tourism (Dredge et al., 2011; Lovelock, 2011). The destination goals and objectives have been mapped upon the UNEP-UNWTO (2005). These should be included for the scope of effective sustainable management of tourism (UNEP-UNWTO, 2005; Flanagan et al., 2007). The aims are segmented and placed within the appropriate pillars.

#### *TPP 10.4: Destination policy, planning and development*

Destination policy, planning and development is required as it seeks to improve the sustainability of a destination (Ritchie and Crouch, 2003; Presenza, 2006). Effective tourism policy and planning should be structured, formulated and implemented (Ritchie and Crouch, 2007). Destination management requires a destination to develop products to meet market demands, cultural, natural or intangible in nature (Jamieson, 2006). Central to good practice in tourism planning is that product development must be carefully co-ordinated (Inskeep, 1993; Laws, 1995). The model has included sustainable tourism certification alongside planning, destination regulations and management tools for the effective management of the destination. The management of security, health and safety will compliment crisis and emergency preparedness and response. Policy and planning specific to the prevention of exploitation, local access and innovation in product development are significant for economic value. As cultural heritage is fragile and may be easily damaged if not taken care of (IFT, UNESCO, 2007), protecting and enhancing cultural heritage, local identity and assets is pivotal. Attraction protection, visitor management and gender equality is also essential for social and cultural heritage. The attributes collectively addressed will contribute towards maintaining the environment. Hudson and Miller (2005) suggested that in the tourism industry managers need to recognise environmental improvement as an economic and competitive opportunity. Policy and planning for light and noise management, energy conservation, sewage treatment, solid waste management as well as water management will not inhibit costs however these will provide an opportunity to reduce spending in the long term. The destination guiding principles will further contribute to the management of the destination.

#### *TPP 10.5: Destination guiding principles*

Destination guiding principles are beneficial in operationalizing the SMTD. This stream of the planning process has been primarily mapped upon the global guiding principles of the GSTC (2012). Sustainability standards are the initial guiding principles to be developed which are followed by accessibility, training and education. The economic value pillar includes local career opportunities, supporting local entrepreneurs and fair-trade. This is a fundamental aspect due to tourism's economic significance (UNWTO, 2000; Cooper et al., 2008; Tourism Research Australia, 2010; Moeller, Dolnicar and Leisch, 2011). Sourcing products and services locally is a means to enhance economic linkages and promote the benefits of tourism to the local economy (Telfer and Wall, 1996; Torres, 2003; Soler, 2008). Furthermore using low impact transport will contribute to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. Tourism awareness aims to generate the consciousness essential to facilitate the stakeholders to participate in the sustainable management of tourism (Thiengkamol, 2009, 2011; Sangsan-anan, Thiengkamol and Thiengkamol, 2012) and make tourism more sustainable (Dolnicar, Crouch and Long, 2008). Guidelines specific to wildlife, forest and plant management will generate awareness of environmental protection. The social and cultural heritage guiding principles will provide site interpretation thus contributing to visitor behaviour and how they may support the community. Much of this information may be communicated through destination marketing.

#### *TPP 10.6: Destination marketing*

Promotional messages are to be accurate with regards to the destination products, services and sustainability claims (GSTC, 2012). In respect to marketing the destinations social and

cultural heritage, authentic destination representation is required. This takes into consideration community values goals and needs, rather than as in previous marketing which concentrated on the potential customers' needs and desires. The marketing of an organisations corporate social responsibility should allow recognition that may enhance economic value. This aspect merits ongoing monitoring.

#### *TPP 10.7: Destination monitoring and evaluation*

Destination monitoring and evaluation is important for the SMTD in order for the planning process to identify changes. Furthermore, sustainable tourism is a continuous process, and it requires constant monitoring of impacts, introducing preventative and corrective measures whenever necessary (Edgell, 2006). To ensure the viability of the destination for tourism, both economic monitoring and monitoring of the tourism supply chain and value are necessary. It is vital to monitor and evaluate social and cultural heritage improvement initiatives to ensure there is no damage inflicted upon the destinations. It is also important to ensure the tourism industry is protecting the quality of the environment. This requires monitoring of the landscape, biodiversity protection, water security and quality. The involvement of the environmental agencies from the consultation stage is vital. This demonstrates how the planning process and sustainable management pillars are integrated throughout from consultation onwards to monitoring. The pillars have been arranged in a way to provide greater understanding, transparency and a functional process feeding onwards to the formulation of the plan.

#### *TPP 10.8: Formulation of plan*

The SMTD plan is initiated by the formulation of strategies which will make up the plan. It is important to establish a multi-year strategy for the destination suited to its scale. A problem with most tourism strategies is that they are still being written from a destination marketing perspective (Local Government New Zealand, 2004; Lovelock, 2011). It is important that the chosen strategy is detailed with a strong sustainability element reflecting the sustainable management pillars. This should be developed with public participation even though public participation has been reiterated as a difficulty in piloting sustainability initiatives (Griffin, Morrissey and Flanagan, 2010; Fitzgerald, Flanagan and Griffin, 2011; EC, 2013). It is imperative for the strategies to be made publicly available and these will feed into the formulation of the draft SMTD plan.

To combat any possible implementation gap between the sustainability rhetoric within the strategies and reality at the destination level, the plan will include a statement of directions with set targets. For the destination plan it is important to identify resources, tasks, responsibilities and timescales (Fáilte Ireland, 2012). Therefore, it is imperative for consultation to be carried out with the DMO and stakeholders on the plan and for this to be amended according to feedback prior to the launch of the SMTD plan. The launch of the plan conforms to the legally bound process of the CDP in compliance with Irelands National Planning and Development Act (2010). The launch is an integral mechanism for outreach to the tourism management organisations and destination stakeholders, necessary to generate awareness of the SMTD plan.

### *Step 11: Destination management through implementation of SMTD plan*

The management of the destination is to be conducted through the implementation of the SMTD plan. The destinations management is a prerequisite for satisfying the tourist's needs and changing demands as well as ensuring the sustainability of the industry. This section of the cycle has the timeframe of the accepted norm, three to five years (Australian Government, 2004). Similarly to good practice in tourism planning, the destinations management must be carefully co-ordinated, this needs to be monitored. With the probability that destinations will be certified in the future, it is at this step that the destination should seek to become certified on their SMTD efforts.

### *Step 12: SMTD plan monitoring and evaluation*

The SMTD plan monitoring and evaluation of performance is pivotal to ensure the achievement of the vision is pursued. It is recommended that a virtual tourism observatory (online) (EC, 2010; Global Partnership for Sustainable Tourism, 2011) is established to enable stakeholders to view the process. This will also be beneficial to disseminate information and feedback to the destination stakeholders. This information will contribute to a transparent system which will be beneficial for the performance based review of the destination manager position which subsequently leads to the renewal of the cycle for the SMTD.

The model provides a coherent picture of how the SMTD may be conducted. However, as tourism destinations evolve in their development, so too, will the natures of their tourism management. In order to facilitate the implementation of the sustainable management of a tourism destination, it is recommended that support mechanisms are put in place.

## **Conclusion and recommendations**

This paper presents a model for the transition towards the sustainable management of tourism destinations that conforms to the criteria and indicators endorsed by the industry internationally and at a European level. The implementation of the model could bring a completely different position for the tourism industry of Ireland. This will, however, need significant support. The following recommendations are designed to support the sustainable management of tourism destinations.

It would be beneficial if a user friendly web tool was funded and developed by the NTDA such as a virtual tourism observatory (EC, 2010; Global Partnership for Sustainable Tourism, 2011) or a data warehouse. This would provide the destination manager with an outlet to communicate developments to the stakeholders. This could be fine-tuned to the destinations needs and be a system to engage and empower the destination stakeholders. This in particular may be beneficial to combat the recognised difficulty in obtaining public participation.

This study also highlights the need for funding to be allocated by the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (DTTS) to create specific budgets for the NTDA to support the sustainable management of tourism destinations at county level. It would also be beneficial if the NTDA support an annual conference specific to the sustainable management of tourism destinations. The conference may be used to showcase destinations efforts in the effective sustainable management of tourism, create opportunities for knowledge transfer and identify industry best practice. For example, in terms of training and education, it is recommended

that agreements are facilitated between the higher education institutes in order to integrate the sustainable management of tourism with current tourism courses. Thus generating graduates with the necessary skills and expertise who as a corollary may integrate the sustainable management of tourism throughout the industry. The capacity of Irish tourism students may be used to represent sustainable tourism so as to focus on the promotion of sustainable management in academic environments and the industry. It is also recommended that systems are put in place to mentor the tourism stakeholders to progress with the transition towards the sustainable management of tourism destinations.

Finally, given there is a demand for sustainable tourism certification, it is recommended that the NTDA facilitate support to encourage the tourism industry to implement certification which conforms to the GSTC. These recommendations will require budgetary supports.

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