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Dingle, Co. Kerry

Abstracts

Room 3:

*Regenerative,
SMEs and
Destinations*

Afternoon Session

Title: Promoting sustainable wellbeing practices in Irish hospitality SMEs

Authors: Patrice Duffy; and Rosemary Dewhirst, Atlantic Technological University

Keywords: Employee wellbeing, Sustainability human resource practices, Hospitality SMEs

Abstract:

The aim of this research is to raise awareness of the importance of employee wellbeing in the Irish hospitality sector, through the lens of the Job Demands Resources Model (JD-R). Hospitality organisations rely on a supply of human resources for the successful operation of their business. The pivotal role played by front-line employees in gaining a competitive advantage for the business cannot be over-emphasised (Kim et al., 2023, Hsu et al., 2019). It is therefore vital that the well-being of hospitality employees is at the forefront of hospitality human resource practices. There are particular characteristics of service industries such as hospitality and tourism that can impact the wellbeing of employees. The working environment can be stressful, highly pressurised, with long, anti-social hours.

Improving employee wellbeing is not only good for employees; the hospitality business also reaps the benefits (Schaufeli, 2017, Ponting, 2020). It also can ensure that hospitality organisations are aligned with the United Nations, Sustainable Development Goal, number three, “Ensuring healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages” (United Nations, 2017).

Edgar et al. (2017) believe that effective human resource management practices are a means of positively impacting employee wellbeing. It has also been postulated that human resource practices need to be flexible, allowing for modification to particular needs (Agarwal, 2021). The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD, 2024) have stated that “an integrated approach to employee health and wellbeing can prompt higher levels of engagement and productivity while fostering good organisational culture and commitment”. Adopting employee wellbeing practices in the hospitality industry is strongly recommended as a means of counteracting the labour challenges the industry is experiencing. Employee well-being in the hospitality sector is a subject that some believe has received limited attention in research (Hayat and Afshari, 2022, Kotera et al., 2021). However, many hotel groups are including employee well-being programmes as part of their suite of Human resource functions (He et al., 2019, Zhang et al., 2014). SME’s can find it challenging to compete with the larger organisation.

Following an extensive review of literature which highlighted the importance of employee wellbeing initiatives, a series of semi-structured interviews were undertaken with hospitality managers. The data was analysed using thematic analysis and the findings have been used to inform the design of a hospitality wellbeing framework.

The research emphasises that there is need for a further in-depth study to be carried out in the hospitality industry to determine the most effective wellbeing practices for employees. Future studies may consider factors such as employee satisfaction, retention rates, productivity, and overall organisational success.

These findings will support hospitality managers to implement wellbeing initiatives in their organisations. This study will contribute to the literature on employee wellbeing in the hospitality industry.

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Title: Transformative tourism experiences: What we know and what we still need to know

Authors: Konstantin Gridnevskiy, NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences; Elena Cavagnaro, NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences; and Catriona Murphy, Technological University of the Shannon TUS.

Keywords: transformative tourism experiences, transformative tourism, systematic literature review

Abstract:

Travel is often viewed as a way for individuals to grow personally, immerse themselves in diverse cultures, and enjoy the beauty of nature. In this context, tourism is identified as a potential catalyst for personal transformation, leading to the development of transformative tourism research over the past twenty years (Nandasena et al., 2021; Rus et al., 2022).

Contemporary research on transformative travel concludes that travel is an opportunity to develop new skills, such as learning a new language or cooking, and fosters cultural exchange and socialization (Moisă, 2010; Stone & Petrick, 2013; Staffieri & Cavagnaro, 2018; Nandasena et al., 2021). It increases travellers' capacity to relate to others open-mindedly, reflecting both intrapersonal and interpersonal changes (Leed, 1991). However, research has largely overlooked how travel transforms travellers' relationships with nature, or transpersonal change (Staffieri, Cavagnaro & Rowson, 2018; Fermani et al., 2017; Staffieri & Cavagnaro, 2018). Additionally, it remains uncertain how tourists are transformed by their experiences and how these transformative experiences should be measured, both qualitatively and quantitatively (Nandasena et al., 2021).

A recent attempt by Souldard et al. (2021) to create a measurement instrument for transformative tourism experiences fell short by focusing only on intrapersonal and interpersonal change, ignoring the natural environment, and not adequately measuring behavioural change. The lack of focus on the natural environment in transformative tourism literature is concerning, especially given the increasing interest in sustainability (UNWTO, 2013). Despite hopes for more sustainable post-pandemic tourism, recent studies indicate a return to pre-pandemic unsustainable practices (CELTH, ETFI & Breda University of Applied Sciences, 2022). Thus, understanding how tourism experiences can change individuals, including their relationship with nature, is essential.

The current study aims to address these gaps in the literature by developing, testing, and implementing a tool to measure transformative experiences and investigate resulting changes in the individual traveller and others, including but not limited to, local culture and nature (Cavagnaro & Staffieri, 2015; Cavagnaro, Staffieri & Postma, 2018). In so doing, it will contribute to the achievement of UNSDG 12 (12b) by explicitly striving to address its declared ambition to "develop and implement tools to monitor sustainable development impacts for sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local

culture and products." This study will help destination managers and policymakers design positively transformative tourism experiences. However, a necessary first step is to highlight omissions in the research by presenting the findings from a systematic literature review conducted on the current debate on transformative tourism experiences and change through travel in the context of sustainable tourism development, which will be the focus of this presentation. The systematic literature search process is based on the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and MetaAnalysis) approach by Moher et al. (2009) and uses Scopus as the source for the literature search.

Title: Explore Regenerative tourism as an approach to tourism destination management

Authors: Yi (Alex) Yu, Technological University of the Shannon.

Keywords: regenerative tourism, destination management, Ireland's Hidden Heartlands, Co. Offaly

Abstract:

Regenerative tourism describes tourism which seeks to renew and reinvest in people, places and nature. It is a contested topic, which has garnered increasing attention from academics (e.g. Bellato, Cheer, Cave, Dredge, et al.), the media (e.g. RTE, BBC, The Guardian) and has been actively discussed by policymakers and industry practitioners (e.g. Fáilte Ireland, Regensis, Pollock, et al.).

Regenerative tourism is situated as having a transformational approach grounded in the ecological worldview, drawing from both Indigenous and Western science perspectives. This approach aims to build the capacity of tourism destinations, creating net positive effects by enhancing the regenerative capabilities of both human societies and ecosystems (Bellato et al., 2023). The approaches proposed are adaptive, evolving over time and varying across regions (Bellato et al., 2023).

Tourism in Ireland faces several challenges, including labour shortages, accommodation deficits, inflation, and social concerns related to increased numbers of refugees and asylum seekers. In particular, Ireland's Hidden Heartlands tourism region—one of four regional brands launched in 2018—faces distinct hurdles. With only 3% of the national tourism base, the region suffers from higher unemployment, lower education levels, and environmental degradation (Fáilte Ireland, 2018). Regenerative tourism offers a potential solution to these challenges by developing practices that can restore landscapes, facilitate a just transition in regions which have suffered ecological trauma, and create jobs and business opportunities which support local communities.

This research aims to explore how regenerative tourism can address these specific regional issues, supporting Fáilte Ireland's strategic objective to position Ireland's Hidden Heartlands as a leading regenerative tourism destination in Europe (Fáilte Ireland, 2023).

This research, forming part of a Doctoral PHD thesis, employs a case study methodology focused on Ireland's Hidden Heartlands, particularly examining County Offaly, a region which has suffered severe ecological damage through intensive peat harvesting. At present the study is at an early stage with the first stage being an analysis of policy documents. The methodology integrates qualitative multi-methods for a comprehensive analysis; a detailed content analysis of regional policy documents, strategic plans, and reports from Fáilte Ireland and local government bodies will be presented.

This analysis will examine how regenerative tourism principles are integrated into policy frameworks and identify gaps between policy objectives and implementation strategies. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with a range of key tourism stakeholders in the Hidden Heartlands region including local authorities and policymakers, tourism

business owners and operators, and community groups. These interviews will explore stakeholders' understanding of regenerative tourism, the perceived challenges, and opportunities for its implementation.

The research aims to develop a regenerative development model and a best practice guide for regenerative tourism, contributing to the knowledge of regional regenerative tourism practices. The findings will offer valuable insights for other regions, serving as a guide for future research and policy development.

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Title: Lifting the Lid on Tourism Networks on the Wild Atlantic Way

Author: Kelly Browne, TUS Midlands Midwest; Margaret Linehan, MTU; and Sophie Price, MTU

Keywords: Tourism Networks, Engagement Enablers, Micro-Firms

Abstract:

Networks are *messy but necessary* (Denning, 2002). The complexity of network relationships, however, bring potential mutual benefits, such as access to resources, and knowledge sharing, essential for the constrained tourism micro-firm (Reinl and Kelliher, 2010; Yachin, 2021). Indeed, the act of networking is considered central to the success of the wider industry (Hall et al., 2006; Baggio, 2011; Elbaz and Abou-Shouk, 2016). Described as a system, the tourism industry is fuelled by symbiosis and inter-connectedness. High levels of inter-firm co-operation, paradoxically, require competitive trading environments to accrue elusive benefits of clusters (Novelli, Schmitz and Spencer, 2006; Lynch and Morrison, 2007; Moric, 2013).

Across the world, networks have been established, with varied levels of success, as conduits of growth in rural and remote places (Halkier and James, 2022). Ireland has followed this trend, with the establishment of a plethora of local networks to stimulate a co-ordinated response to tourism development and harness the benefits of increased demand for authentic visitor experiences. However, benefits are far from guaranteed as networks can suffer from low levels of engagement, due to flailing member participation over time. A key facilitator of participation has been identified as the formation of inter-firm trust, through *bonding, bridging and linking* (Kelliher et al., 2018, p. 10). In addition, internal governance factors are cited as significant in their potential to impede or assist continued engagement (Vanneste and Ryckaert, 2011). Within this backdrop, this research explores the multiple challenges of engagement, identifying key enablers of network success. The research aims to provide a best practice guide based on two distinct perspectives, both the network member and network co-ordinator.

Using a mixed methods approach, tourism networks on the Wild Atlantic Way are explored. Network members are surveyed, and the results analysed using Structural Equation Modelling, to identify relationships between active participation, commitment, knowledge sharing and readiness to collaborate. Network co-ordinators are interviewed to establish the impact of network dynamics, formation, and governance on engagement.

The study contributes to theory advancement through the identification of network legitimacy, transparency, and autonomy as key indicators of network success, thereby impacting micro-firm engagement, commitment, and inter-firm collaboration. The generation of network benefits strengthens the capacity of the network to be effective, further enhancing the perceived legitimacy among members, bolstering their

commitment, and copper-fastening their continued participation. Significantly, the research established the role of governance in network formation as a key predictor of future success, where bottom-up organic processes perpetuate a greater sense of perceived autonomy and legitimacy among members. This study calls for a re-imagining of the potential long term positive impact of networks to sustain tourism development, innovation and resilience, in addition to providing channels for micro-firm knowledge sharing and collaboration.

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Title: Exploring Tourism Policy and Structures at the County Level in Ireland

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Keywords: County Tourism Policy, Tourism Development, Ireland

Abstract:

While much research exists on national policy in the academic literature, less is known about tourism governance and its complexities at the local and regional level. Local government plays an essential role in bringing economic prosperity to regions and whole communities (Moisuc, 2018; McLoughlin and Hanrahan, 2016; Brokaj, 2014), and although its economic contribution is widely recognised, its role is often undervalued (Lucey, 2014).

The development of tourism policy at the county level in Ireland has changed significantly in recent years and a synopsis of the structures and policy in place is limited to date. This qualitative study examines tourism policy and decision making at the sub national level in Ireland, highlighting the funding mechanisms, structures, arrangements and stakeholders involved. It also examines the linkages with national tourism policy, particularly in relation to sustainable tourism development.

The paper presents the key findings from 21 in-depth interviews with County Tourism Officers across the Republic of Ireland carried out over a 6-month period. The results provide a good insight into how tourism 'works' at local level and who the main drivers and influencers are. Variations that exist between the different counties are highlighted and the implications for county tourism development in Ireland are examined.

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