

## **Collaborative sustainable tourism development in Ireland: Local Authorities' use of sustainable tourism indicators.**

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Responsible Tourism development and resort planning guidelines in Ireland hold one of the keys to collaborative sustainable development. Tourism planning permission is granted by Local Authorities. Yet in order to achieve collaborative sustainable tourism development specific tools are increasingly available to Local Authorities to help sustainably plan and develop tourism. The EC developed the European Tourism Indicator System (ETIS) and here in Ireland the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) funded the development of the DIT-ACHIEV Model of Sustainable Tourism Planning (2012), using sustainable tourism indicators.

The aim of this baseline study is to investigate every Local Authority's use of tourism indicator systems in Ireland when planning sustainably for tourism. Both published and draft County Development Plans (CDPs) of the 29 Local Authorities in Ireland were examined using a content analysis approach. This analysis centred on eleven criteria based on existing theory and incorporating various models and guidelines developed by the industry such as the EPA/DIT ACHIEV Model (2012) and the European Tourism Indicator System (2013) to determine if Local Authorities have moved toward implementing sustainable tourism indicator systems in order to achieve collaborative sustainable development of tourism.

This research identified that Local Authorities CDP's did acknowledge the contribution tourism has on the local economy. Similarly, CDP's also valued the natural environments, which is crucial to tourism in Ireland and are developing plans based on this. However, while some CDP's did employ certain resort planning guidelines, this study found that Local Authorities had a very low utilisation of specific planning tools such as indicator systems (ETIS and DIT ACHIEV Model) for achieving collaborative sustainable tourism development in their respective counties.

This paper concludes with the future direction of research into factors impacting on this such as staffing, budget or training and what is the key to addressing this for successful collaborative sustainable development into the future.

**Keywords:** Sustainable Tourism Planning, Sustainable Tourism Indicators, Content Analysis, Local Authorities, Ireland.

### **INTRODUCTION**

There always existed a relationship between tourism and sustainability (Delgado and Palomeque, 2014). This relationship continues to mature within tourism research and management (Page and Connell, 2008; Connell, Page and Bentley, 2009). Furthermore, the growing acceptance of sustainable development as an approach to tourism planning (Weaver, 2006; Hall, 2007; Mowforth and Munt, 2009; Connell et al, 2009; EC, 2013; GSTC, 2013; Conaghan, 2013; McLoughlin and Hanrahan, 2015a) has sparked academic interest in the implications for destinations and the way in which these impacts are managed (Connell et al, 2009). Both Hall and Page (2008) and later Bramwell and Lane (2011) make clear, that the very success of sustainable tourism planning depends

on existing planning and management functions to help guide appropriate development. Yet it has been debated by some that Local Authorities might not be well equipped to assess the effects of tourism within a particular region. For example, Page and Hall (1999) explain that many Local Authorities experience resource issues. Also tourism monitoring is not a major area of focus for a body charged with delivering services to local people, often under severe budgetary constraints. Considering that tourism in Ireland continues to grow significantly after a number of very difficult years (Fáilte Ireland, 2014), this may present a problem for the future development of the industry.

This study focuses on Ireland and in particular the use of sustainable tourism indicator systems by Local Authorities in achieving collaborative sustainable tourism development. The authors utilised a content analysis approach to analyse Local Authorities' County Development Plans (CDP). The content analysis focused on the EPA/DIT-ACHIEV Model for Sustainable Tourism Planning (EPA, 2012) and the European Tourism Indicator System for Sustainable Management at Destination Level (EC, 2013). Experience has shown that tourism, like many other activities, can have both positive and negative impacts (Wall and Mathieson, 2006; Telfer and Sharpley, 2008, Mowforth and Munt, 2009; Stylidis, Biran, Sit and Szivas, 2014; McLoughlin and Hanrahan, 2015c; Kim, Jun, Walker and Drane, 2015). As such, the need to achieve collaborative sustainable tourism development has become in recent years a focus for Local Authority planners. Although the importance of sustainable tourism indicators in achieving collaborative sustainable tourism development is widely acknowledged in scholarly literature, little empirical research pertaining to the use of sustainable tourism indicator systems by Local Authorities in Ireland is conducted. To bridge this gap, the authors attempt to analyse Local Authorities' County Development Plans (CDP) which are legally required, for the presence of sustainable tourism indicator systems to achieve collaborative sustainable tourism development within their respective counties.

## **TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING**

The role of government in tourism development and planning has been the subject of academic interest for decades (Bramwell, 2011; Ruhanen, 2013; Nunkoo, 2015). Yet in order to fully comprehend the link between Local Authorities and collaborative sustainable tourism development in Ireland, it is important to first define the Local Authorities role in developing tourism. For Charlton and Essex, (1996, p.176) "Local Authorities involvement in tourism has become established principally through provision of local tourism infrastructure, and the maintenance of an attractive environment through planning and development control". In line with this perspective, both Pearce (1992) and Kerr et al (2001), caution that this particular responsibility is essential given the dynamic environment in which tourism operates. Nevertheless, Local Authorities face several challenges in achieving sustainability in tourism (Nunkoo, 2015). Local Authorities have the mandate to represent the interests of the local community impartially (Ruhanen, 2013). However, Bramwell (2011) maintains that Local Authorities do not always work in the best interests of the local community or further the objectives of sustainability in tourism. For example, Madrigal (1995) found that many governments have been criticised for implementing short-term tourism policies that lack any direction and only embracing communities passively in regards tourism development (Godfrey, 1998).

Much of the responsibility for managing and developing tourism rests with local government (Elliot, 1997; Ruhanen, 2013; Nunkoo, 2015). But in order to achieve collaborative sustainable tourism development, specific tools are increasingly available to Local Authorities to help sustainably plan and develop tourism. Sustainable tourism indicator systems have been discussed and promoted over the years in this regard (Miller, 2001; Miller and Twining-Ward, 2005; Choi and Sirakaya, 2006;

Flanagan et al, 2007; Griffin et al, 2010; EC, 2013; Torres-Delgado and Palomeque, 2014, McLoughlin and Hanrahan, 2015c) and are therefore the focus of this study. Sustainable tourism indicator systems are defined as “the set of measures that provide the necessary information to better understand the links between the impact of tourism on the cultural and natural setting in which this takes place and on which it is strongly dependent” (WTO, 1996). Both Roberts and Tribe (2008) and later Conaghan (2013) explain that the importance of sustainable tourism indicators to Local Authorities in Ireland is down to their ability to, firstly be amenable to management, and secondly their capability to quantify, assess, monitor, measure and most importantly communicate the relevant information. Aside from measuring progress, sustainable tourism indicator systems help in identifying sustainable development goals and suitable management strategies (Miller and Twinning-Ward, 2005; Reed, Fraser, and Dougill, 2006; Conaghan, 2013). As such they are crucial in achieving collaborative sustainable tourism development in any destination.

The European Union (EU) has long committed itself to promoting the sustainable development of tourism in Europe and, so far, has introduced a number of tools to facilitate sound environmental management. For example, in 2013 the EU launched The European Tourism Indicator System (ETIS). The ETIS is designed to aid in the sustainable planning and management of tourism at destination level. It has been developed as a result of lessons learned from previously existing Indicator Systems. In recent years there has indeed been significant progress in the definition of indicators for the sustainable management of tourism destinations (Dwyer, Forsyth, and Rao, 2000; Liu, 2003; Dwyer, Forsyth, and Spurr, 2004; Cernat and Gourdon, 2012; Miller, Simpson and Twinning-Ward, 2012). However the application to real cases is only partial, being and restricted to specific cases. The ETIS however, has benefited from feedback collected from field testing in a number of different destinations throughout Europe. Several well-known European destinations were piloted in the first phase such as the Valencia region in Spain, the Municipality of Rhodes in Greece and the Burren Geopark in Ireland (EC, 2013). The quality characteristics of tourism destinations (e.g. infrastructure, human resource, and service) for instance, are at the heart of the tourism competitiveness model by Crouch and Ritchie (1999). This piloting helps to improve the overall quality of the indicator system. The importance of quality in tourism demand and competitiveness has well documented in tourism literature (Ross, 1993; Pizam, 1994; Mangion, Durbarry, and Sinclair, 2005; Barros and Dieke, 2008; Assaf and Tsionas, 2015). Further to this, research was conducted on 35 different indicator systems from across the world (Miller, Simpson and Twining-Ward, 2012). This was then refined to 20 systems, with those most relevant to the EU analysed in depth. The ETIS aims to contribute to improving the sustainable management of destinations by providing tourism stakeholders with an easy and useful toolkit (EC, 2013). It will help stakeholders to measure and monitor their sustainability management processes, and enable them to share and benchmark their progress and performance in the future. This benchmarking of tourism destinations according to Luque-Martínez and Munoz-Leiva (2005) comprises the identification, learning and implementation of the most effective practices and capacities from other destinations, in order to improve the performance of the destination that introduces these practices. However, research has revealed that the task of applying and monitoring these indicators does raise important issues.

Furthermore, the UNWTO (2004), Irish Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) (Flanagan et al, 2007) and the OECD (2008) have all promoted indicators as useful, reliable and easily comprehensible assessment and communication tools for decision makers. In Ireland the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) funded the development of the DIT-ACHIEV Model for Sustainable Tourism Planning, using sustainable tourism indicators. The indicators represent six fields of interest; administration, community, heritage, infrastructure, enterprise and visitor (Griffin, 2007; Flanagan et al., 2007). However according to Conaghan (2013) the models main difficulty was engagement with the public. According to Goodey (1995) this may be due to the fact that a system of interested groups is

required to achieve sustainable planning for tourism; this was later acknowledged by Denman (2006) who advocates the importance of stakeholders and public consultation. Furthermore, the organisational structure of a destination is perceived as a network of interdependent and multiple stakeholders (Cooper, Scott, and Baggio, 2009; d'Angella and Go, 2009). It is on this network which the quality of the experience and hospitality offered by the destination depends (Hawkins and Bohdanowicz, 2011; March and Wilkinson, 2009; Waligo, Clarke and Hawkins, 2013). This collaborative approach offers better prospects for delivering effective and sustainable tourism development (APEC Tourism Working Group and STCRC, 2010; Stronza, 2008; Tolkach and King, 2015). Also, dissimilar the ETIS (2013) which is aimed specifically at a DMO (EC, 2013) it is unclear who should be responsible on a practical level for the implementation and use of the model. Following a review of the EPA-DIT-ACHIEV model, it may be beneficial to outline its implementation process. For example, this process could indicate how the EPA-DIT ACHIEV model could be applied together with identifying the lead body and timeframe for implementation.

Local Authorities in Ireland can benefit from utilising sustainable tourism indicator systems in identifying any potential impacts tourism activity can have not only on the environment, but the economy and social fabric of the community. There is broad agreement among many authors that indicators are suitable tools for orienting tourism activity based on sustainability (Blancas, Gonzalez, Lozano-Oyola and Perez, 2010; Torres-Delgado and Palomeque, 2014). Many studies have illustrated their application in the context of tourism management by helping to initiate improved planning and management strategies (Fitzgerald et al, 2012). However, it was acknowledged by the UNWTO (2004) in their guidebook for the establishment of sustainable indicators for tourism destinations that a good indicator for one destination is not necessarily appropriate for another. Also, Meadows (1998) argued that sustainable indicators are often poorly chosen. This is further explained by Manning (1999: 179), who reports that the task force commissioned by the UNWTO to develop sustainable indicators for tourism development 'was immediately faced with the tension between different perceptions of what a "good" set of indicators really was'. However, previous research has found that despite all the progress on indicators and their implementation over the past twenty years, they are still being enacted so poorly by Local Authorities in Ireland (McLoughlin and Hanrahan, 2015abc). The aim of this study is to determine if current published and draft CDP's developed in 2015 are acknowledging the importance of sustainable tourism indicator systems for achieving collaborative sustainable tourism development in Ireland.

## **METHODOLOGY**

In order to determine if sustainable tourism indicator systems are being acknowledged by Local Authorities to help in the collaborative sustainable development of tourism in Ireland, both the draft and published CDP's been the focus of this study.

Local government functions in Ireland are mostly exercised by thirty-one Local Authorities, termed County, City or City and County Councils. The area under the jurisdiction of each of these Local Authorities corresponds to the twenty-six of the traditional counties of the Republic of Ireland. It should be noted, however, that in 1994 Dublin County Council and the Corporation of Dún Laoghaire where merged to form three new Local Authorities to serve County Dublin (Dún Laoghaire–Rathdown, Fingal and South Dublin). This brings the total number of Local Authorities (County Councils) in Ireland to twenty nine, covering twenty six different counties and including the three administrative counties (in Dublin) which were all assessed for this study. This represented a complete sample for this baseline study. By incorporating a content analysis approach, the authors

were able to determine if the twenty nine Local Authorities utilised sustainable tourism indicator systems in achieving collaborative sustainable tourism development within their respective counties.

Content analysis was the primary quantitative analysis tool utilised in this paper, and while this represents quantification on a limited scale it still is anchored in the quantitative research paradigm. According to Zipf's law (1949) the assumption is that words and phrases mentioned most often are those reflecting important concerns in every communication. Therefore, quantitative content analysis can involve; frequencies, direction, intensity and space measurements (Sarantakos, 2005; Neuman, 2006; Jennings, 2010). However, a content analysis can extend far beyond plain word counts, for example keywords can be assessed in the context of their specific meaning in the text (Krippendorf, 2004). Further to this, it is important to note that quantitative research takes an analytic approach to understanding a number of controlled variables. Increasingly, tourism researchers as early as Molloy and Fennell (1998) and more recently Vitouladiti (2014) and Mohammed, Guillet and Law (2015) are using content and textual analysis as a means of critical investigation when faced with textual forms of data, for example written documents such as tourism policies, tourism plans or even visual materials such as photographs and brochures. Muehlenhaus (2011) suggest that the content analysis approach was originally designed to help researchers discern patterns, themes, and repetition within and across numerous text documents.

### **Method**

Local Authorities has a legal remit under the Planning and Development Acts (2000, 2010 and 2013) to plan for infrastructure, society, environment and economic development. Within these plans the CDPs have provided a section on tourism development for within their specific counties. This is the focus of this study. The authors identified and analysed both draft and published CDP's in order to determine if sustainable tourism indicators are being utilised in achieving collaborative sustainable tourism development. This analysis centred on the EPA/DIT-ACHIEV Model for Sustainable Tourism Planning (2012) and the European Tourism Indicator System for Sustainable Destinations (EC, 2013).

**Table 1.** Criteria for assessing Collaborative Sustainable Tourism Development in Ireland

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Year of CDP

Collaboration with tourism stakeholders on Draft CDP

Collaboration with community on Draft CDP

Resort Planning Guidelines

CDP's SEA Compliant

ETIS Tourism Indicator System

Sustainable Tourism Public Policy

Sustainable Tourism Management in Tourism Enterprises

Customer Satisfaction

Information and Communication

EPA/DIT ACHIEV Model

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Source: adapted from (Boyd and Hanrahan, 2007, 2008, 2012 Mowforth and Munt, 2009; Griffin et al, 2012; EC, 2013)

### ***Sampling and Selection***

Given that the aim of the study was to assess the level of planning for the socio-cultural impacts of tourism at a Local Authority level throughout the Republic of Ireland, the research involved a complete population of all 29 Local Authorities' CDP's.

### ***Data Analysis***

To facilitate constant comparison throughout the research process and to highlight any variations between the Local Authorities, the data was inputted into a content analysis tool for each development plan. The data from each category was then analysed and discussed in the context of current international literature and their connection with other Local Authority plans. The data generated was then inputted into a planning matrix (Table 2).

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The Planning and Development Acts (2000, 2010 and 2013) legally require all Local Authorities in Ireland to prepare a draft County Development Plan (CDP) every five years. This act requires the CDP's publication and implementation every six years. It is in these CDP's where the particular counties tourism policies/objectives and strategies are found. Also, government involvement with regards to tourism planning in destinations such as regulation, mobilising and guidance is an important research theme in the tourism literature (Pastras and Bramwell, 2013). For example, Tosun and Timothy (2003) explain tourism policy and planning aims to maximise tourism contribution to the quality of the environment and the welfare of the community. Results show that all Local Authorities in Ireland are producing CDP's within the required time frame.

The Planning and Development Acts legally require Local Authorities to take whatever steps it considers necessary to consult the public before preparing, amending or revoking a local area plan including consultations with any local residents, public sector agencies, non-governmental agencies, local community groups and commercial and business interests within the area (DEHLG, 2007). As tourism is a complex industry constantly changing, a great diversity of public and private parties is continually involved in its development. The view put forward by Van der Zee and Vanneste (2015:47) is that tourism is the temporary interaction between guests and a hosting destination which is made up of an amalgam of stakeholders, partially or fully, and directly or indirectly involved in tourism. This emphasises the need for collaborative sustainable tourism development.

**Table 2. Matrix for Assessing CDP's**

Criteria assessed within analysis of CDP	Local authorities in Ireland (abbreviated by first and last letter DL = Donegal)																												
	CW	CN	CE	C	DL	D	sD	FL	GY	KE	KD	KY	LS	LM	LK	LH	LD	MH	MC	MN	OY	RNSC	Ts	Tn	WD	VM	W	ww	
Year of publication of CDP	15	14	11	14	12	10	10	11	5	14	11	15	1	15	10	09	15	13	14	13	14	14	11	09	10	11	14	13	10
Collaboration with tourism stakeholders on draft CDP	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Collaboration with community on draft CDP	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Resort planning guidelines	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1
CDP's SEA Compliant	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
ETIS Tourism Indicator System	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sustainable tourism public policy	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Sustainable tourism management in tourism enterprise	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Customer satisfaction	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Information and communication	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
DIT ACHIEV Model	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

*Note:* Y-Yes, N-No, 0- Not mentioned in CDP, 1- Basic provision made in CDP, 2- Comprehensive provision made in detail of CDP with associated budget and timeframe for implementation

From the early contributions of tourism planners (e.g. Murphy, 1985), the concept of ‘stakeholders’ is becoming more significant in tourism planning and development (Jamal and Getz, 1999; Aas, Ladkin, and Fletcher, 2005; Hall, 2007; Boyd and Hanrahan, 2007; Currie, Seaton, and Wesley, 2009; Mowforth and Munt, 2009; Waligo, Clarke and Hawkins, 2013; Hatipoglu, Alvarez and Bengi, 2014). Ladkin and Martínez Bertramini (2002) and Wray (2011) both agree that a critical aspect of sustainability in tourism is the sharing of information among stakeholders. Similarly, Byrd et al (2008:193) explain that the UNWTO identifies that the “informed participation of all relevant stakeholders” as one of the key factors of sustainability. This participation fosters learning among stakeholders and facilitates the involvement of all interested parties in the decision-making process (Hatipoglu, Alvarez and Bengi, 2014). A content analysis has found that all Local Authorities collaborated with stakeholders on the preparation of their draft CDP’s. However, factors that could hinder this collaboration include, a lack of a shared vision, together with clear a leadership structure and the absence of a long-term strategy (Ladkin and Martinez Bertramini, 2002; Hatipoglu, Alvarez and Bengi, 2014). Despite this, collaboration and the participation of the local community in the development of tourism is deemed desirable (Hatipoglu, Alvarez and Bengi, 2014). Okazaki (2008) explains that collaboration and participation of the local community ensures that the image of the destination matches the local vision. Furthermore, this guarantees the implementation of specific developments, ultimately resulting in a more visitor-friendly destination. Result show that all Local Authorities collaborated with the local community when developing their draft CDP’s. Collaboration with the local community positively, directly and significantly affects the perceived benefits of tourism (Lee, 2013), thus, indirectly affecting the support among local residents for the development of tourism.

In terms of sustainable tourism public policy, the content analysis reveals that that twenty seven (93%) CDP’s were found to contain a tourism policy section within their CDP. Additionally, all Local Authorities had their tourism policies integrated within a specific tourism section. There was also some cross reference and integration of, for example, holiday home provision and transport policies. Furthermore, there were twenty two (76%) Local Authorities found to have recognised basic resort planning guidelines as part of tourism policy. However, the tourism industry is one of the global economic success stories of the last 40 years (Jamal and Robinson, 2012). European member states recorded in excess of 588 million visits in 2014, a 22 million increase compared to 2013 (European Travel Commission, 2014). Similarly Irish tourism too has witnessed significant growth. International arrivals between November 2014 and January 2015 increased by 9.1% compared to the corresponding period for 2013/2014 (Fáilte Ireland, 2015). However, the continued evolution of the

tourism industry, suggests that the favourable economic impacts of tourism need to be monitored and managed, through practical up-to-date policies at both national and local level (McLoughlin and Hanrahan, 2015a). Yet the content analysis of both draft and published CDP's has found that twenty four (83%) Local Authorities supported the economic impacts of tourism as part of their overall tourism policy. Also a substantial number of Local Authority draft and published CDP's were found to have addressed the tourist's interaction with the environment. This highlights the comprehensive compliance with the well-documented and planned joint effort from both the National Parks and Wildlife (NPWS) and heritage council in protecting the natural environment. This also underlines the impact of strong EU directives and Irish environmental legislation on the forward planning process. Yet seven (24%) CDP's had no strategies in place to aid in policy implementation. When you compare this to the four draft CDP's, all but one had tourism strategies in place.

Planning and development for tourism are vital to a sustainable tourism industry future (Henderson, 2001; Ong, Storey, and Minnery, 2011; Maguigad, 2013), especially for a country that has identified tourism as a major engine for development (Wallace, 2007). However, there was no mention or support for customer satisfaction surveys to be administered by the particular Local Authorities to obtain the satisfaction level among visitors. Similarly, there was no exchange of information regarding the destinations sustainability efforts in regards to sustainability efforts. It was however found that six (21%) of both draft and published CDP's were using a voluntary verified certification or labelling scheme. In most cases it was hotels that were implementing energy saving schemes.

Several authors continue to discuss the role the government has in regards to tourism; together with the influence state policy has on tourism development (Bramwell and Lane, 2000; Hall, 2011). Local Authorities are required to utilise the Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2004 to maximise the sustainability of their CDP's. Examination of both draft and published CDP's discovered that all Local Authorities tourism policies confirmed to this regulation. Furthermore, sustainable tourism indicators take into account the many interpretations of sustainable tourism (Choi and Sirakaya, 2005) and are of particular importance in strategic planning and policy making (Rosenström and Kyllonen, 2007; Casser, et al, 2013). However, the content analysis found that one published CDP had sustainable indicators in place to help Local Authorities in relation to the sustainability of new developments. However, further analysis reveals that no CDP (either published or draft) reflected indicator systems of which a few directly apply to Ireland such as the DIT-ACHIEV Model of Sustainable Tourism Planning (2012). This is unfortunate as this model was ahead of its time and designed in Ireland as part of a three year EPA funded project to develop indicators for the mitigation of tourism impacts (Griffin, Morrissey and Flanagan, 2010; Conaghan, 2013). Additionally, as Ireland is a member of the EU, Local Authorities now face greater policy structures. This has resulted in multi levels of governance (Bache and Flinders, 2004) which in turn has effects for successful policy implementation. McLoughlin and Hanrahan (2015c) explain that in some cases this is the nation state making commitments that are inappropriate to those on the ground to implement. Despite this for several years organisations such as the UNEP, together with the UNWTO (Hall, 2007) and more recently the EC are all having a growing influence in tourism governance. Under the Lisbon Treaty, the primary objective of the European tourism policy is the stimulation of sector competitiveness, taking into account at the same time that long-term competitiveness is closely linked to the sustainable nature of this development (Niculaa, Spânu, and Neagua, 2013:531). Yet no CDP, either draft or published implemented the European Tourism Indicator System (2013). This is worrying as the ETIS aims to help destinations measure and monitor their sustainability management processes, while also enabling them to share and benchmark their progress and performance in the future (EU, 2013). Also considering that indicators are a cost effective method that act as an early warning system to initiate improved planning and management



strategies (Griffin, et al, 2012), Local Authorities may find it hard to prevent the irreversible impacts tourism may have on destinations

## **CONCLUSION**

This paper examines the relationship between collaborative sustainable tourism development and the use of sustainable indicator systems in the tourism planning process by Local Authorities in Ireland. In order to achieve this, a content analysis approach was employed. This study focuses on the twenty nine Local Authorities and their most recently developed CDP's along with the five draft CDP's currently in the consultation phase which are legally required under the Planning and Development Acts (2000, 2010 and 2013).

Analysis of both draft and published CDP's has found that all Local Authorities are abiding by current legislation and developing these plans on time and subjecting them to the SEA process. Furthermore, they are all compliant with the Planning and Development Acts and collaborating with stakeholders and the community in the making of CDP's. This was done through oral, written submissions, workshops and private consultation. Resort planning guidelines are one tool to achieve collaborative sustainable tourism development. While the majority of CDP's had basic resort planning guidelines in place, proactive and sustainable policies here should enable Local Authorities to harness their particular counties economic potential in regards to tourism while protecting the local community and natural environment from the adverse impacts tourism development may bring. However, findings from this study illustrate that no Local Authority was found to be implementing the EPA/DIT ACHIEV Model for Sustainable Tourism Planning (2012) or the ETIS (EC, 2013) when developing tourism policies in CDP's. In future CDP's it may be beneficial for Local Authorities to reflect these indicator systems in order to develop time specific well-resourced policies and strategies to achieve collaborative sustainable tourism development.

This study is however, not without limitations and opportunities for future research. This study is limited as it focuses only on Local Authorities and their legally required CDP's. It would have been an advantage to also assess the Regional Tourism Authority (RTA) plans, together with the Leader Companies Rural Development Programme (RDP) plans. It should be noted that these plans are not legal requirements under law in Ireland. Furthermore, these organisations do not have the remit to grant planning permission.

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