Dublin Institute of Technology
ARROW@DIT

Conference papers

School of Hospitality Management and Tourism

2008-01-01

Integrating Sustainability into Tourism Education and Training in Ireland: Current Reality and Future Actions

Kevin Griffin
Dublin Institute of Technology, kevin.griffin@dit.ie

Sheila Flanagan
Dublin Institute of Technology, sheila.flanagan@dit.ie

Jane Stacey
Dublin Institute of Technology, jane.stacey@dit.ie

Anna Tottle
Dublin Institute of Technology

Follow this and additional works at: http://arrow.dit.ie/tfschmtcon

Part of the Business Administration, Management, and Operations Commons

Recommended Citation

Stacey, J., Tottle, A. Griffin, K., & Flanagan, S. (2008) Integrating Sustainability into Tourism Education and Training in Ireland: Current Reality and Future Actions, at Annual BEST Education Network Think Tank VIII, Izmir Turkey, 23-28 June.

This Conference Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Hospitality Management and Tourism at ARROW@DIT. It has been accepted for inclusion in Conference papers by an authorized administrator of ARROW@DIT. For more information, please contact yvonne.desmond@dit.ie, arrow.admin@dit.ie.

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 3.0 License

Integrating Sustainability into Tourism Education and Training in Ireland: Current Reality and Future Actions

Jane Stacey, Sheila Flanagan, Kevin Griffin and Anna Tottle

Introduction

The focus of this paper is to provide an overview of the current sustainability content in Irish tourism programmes and the identification of key trends in this regard. It is based on extensive research of secondary and tertiary education sectors across tourism and hospitality programmes in Ireland, undertaken by the Tourism Research Centre at the Dublin Institute of Technology. The research considers a range of programmes, including tourism, hospitality, culinary arts, event management, leisure and business programmes with a tourism component.

Background

Following two decades of strong and sustained tourism growth, Irish tourism is facing a challenging future. Seen as a clean, green tourism destination, famous for its landscape, environment, natural habitats and biodiversity, a key question for Irish tourism is if this image is still realistic and whether it can be sustained as Ireland develops? In the context of economic, environmental and social developments in post-Celtic Tiger Ireland, it is important that Irish tourism continues to protect the resource on which it so fundamentally relies and ensure sustainable future growth and development. This cannot be achieved unless sustainability principles are embedded into tourism planning, policy and practice. This in turn can only be achieved if sustainability is accepted as an integral part of the education process.

Research Overview

Fáilte Ireland, the Irish National Tourism Development Authority, is charged with guiding and supporting the development of a sustainable tourism sector in Ireland. On behalf of Fáilte Ireland, a team of researchers at the Dublin Institute of Technology undertook a national review of sustainability in tourism education and training in Ireland, detailing curricular guidelines for integrating sustainability issues into tourism related education and training programmes. The review coincides with the preparation of a National Strategy for Education for Sustainable

Development by the Irish Government as part of the UN Decade for Education for Sustainable Development, which runs from 2005 to 2014.

Research Objectives

The objectives of the research were as follows:

- to identify and assess Irish validated tourism and hospitality related programmes in order to identify the shortfall and strengths in relation to sustainability issues within these programmes
- to identify international best practice in relation to sustainability content and issues in tourism education and training programmes
- to identify and develop suitable content in the area of sustainability, for inclusion in education and training programmes.

What is Sustainability?

Over the last twenty years, the concept of sustainable tourism development has become almost universally accepted as a desirable and politically appropriate approach to tourism development (Sharpley, 2003). It is an apparently simple concept, referring to a blending of the environmental, economic and socio-cultural aspects of the industry and ensuring a suitable balance is established between these three dimensions to guarantee long-term sustainability. However, sustainable tourism, like sustainable development, suffers from a plethora of ambiguous definitions. Stabler and Goodall (1996) state that over three hundred definitions exist, thus rendering the meaning of 'sustainable' vague.

Understanding is further complicated by the difficulties encountered in translating theory into practice. In relation to 'sustainable tourism', Butler (1999, p106) notes that there is a 'lack of a generally agreed upon definition of either sustainable tourism or tourism developed on sustainable tourism principles'. While the need to continuously assess the concept of sustainability was a recurrent theme in this research, so too was the need to situate the work within a defined understanding of 'sustainability' and sustainable tourism'.

The central definition used in this analysis is the one employed by Fáilte Ireland, who understand sustainable tourism as follows:

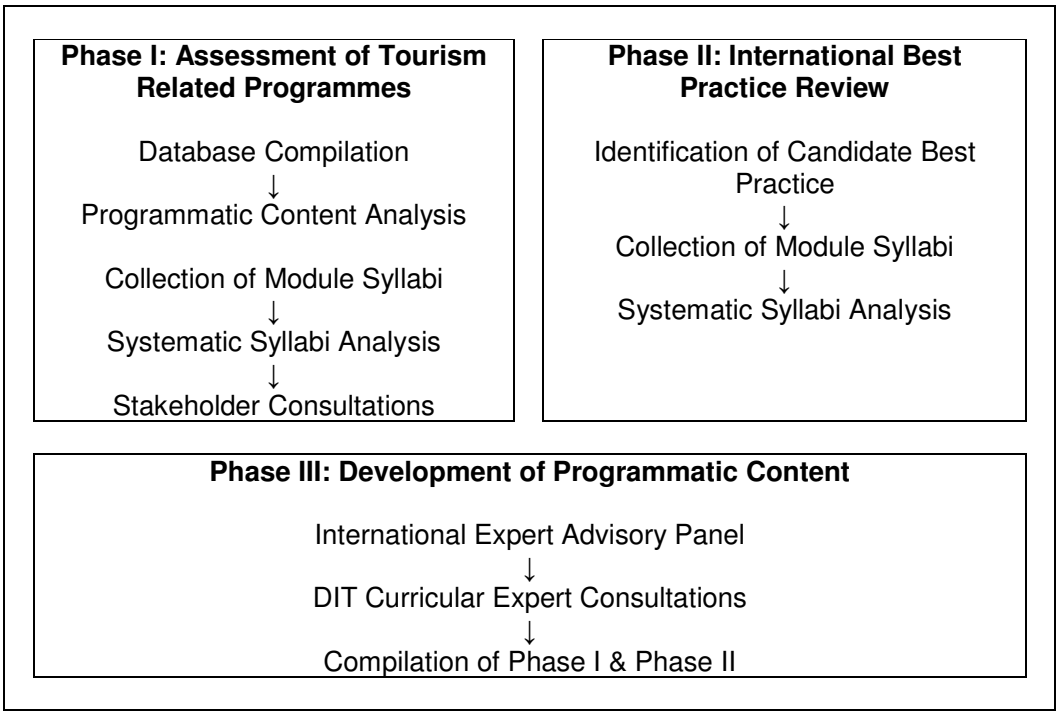
> *'Sustainable tourism provides a high quality product based on, and in harmony with, a high quality natural heritage. It minimises adverse impacts on local communities, our built heritage, landscapes, habitats and species while supporting social and economic prosperity'* (DEHLG, 1997)

To add further depth and also to respond to early findings which indicated interviewees had difficulty grappling with the concept of sustainability and what exactly it entails, the project sought to explicitly situate the research within the wider sustainable tourism debate, consulting a wide variety of academic literature and industry reports[1]. In an attempt to relate to over 200 diverse programmes across a broad range of disciplines, a detailed 'Dimensions of Sustainability' list was developed, to prompt reflection and facilitate data collection and analysis.

Research Methodology

In order to deliver on this review, a three phased approach was adopted, the details of which are outlined below.

Figure 1: Research Methodology



[1] Including: Flanagan et al. (2007) DIT-ACHIEV Model of Sustainable Tourism Management Indicators; UNEP (2005) Guide for 'Making tourism more sustainable: a guide for policy makers'; TMI (2003) 'VICE' model; DCMS (2001) UK National Sustainable Tourism Indicators; and UNWTO sustainable tourism issues and indicators.

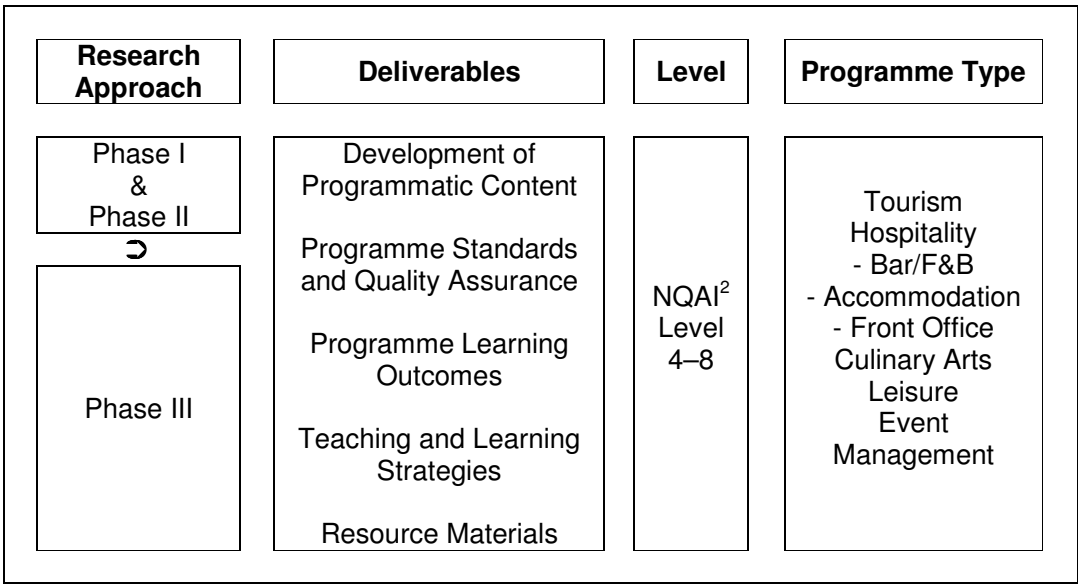
Research Deliverables

The culmination of this three stage process, involving both desk research and extensive national and international consultation, has resulted in the development of the following, to inform the future review of existing and development of new programmes/modules:

- Guidelines for Development of Programmatic Content
- Programme Standards and Quality Assurance
- Programme Learning Outcomes
- Teaching and Learning Strategies
- Guideline Resource Materials

In developing these guidelines, the researchers were cogniscent of the need to cater to a diverse audience, and also to 'future-proof' these guidelines, as the debate and agenda surrounding sustainability issues is one which is constantly evolving.

Figure 2: Research Overview



Paper Summary

Following an outline of the approach adopted by the researchers in conducting this review, this paper provides an overview of the current place of sustainability issues in tourism education and training in Ireland. Current gaps which need to be addressed are detailed, followed by a discussion of the overarching principles for integrating sustainability into tourism education and training. It then

[2] National Qualification Authority of Ireland

presents key recommendations and guidelines for integrating sustainability issues in order to ensure graduates possess the requisite knowledge and skills to ensure a sustainable future for the Irish tourism sector. It is hoped that the material presented will encourage the reader/delegates to reflect on their own training or business practice in a fresh and more challenging light.

References

Butler, R. (1999) Understanding Tourism in Jackson, E.L. and Burton, T.L. (eds) Leisure Studies: Prospects for the Twenty-First Century, State College, PA.: Venture Pub.

DEHLG Dept of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Sustainable Development: A Strategy for Ireland, 1997

Sharpley, R. (2003) 'Rural Tourism and Sustainability–a Critique', in D. Hall, L. Roberts and M. Mitchell (Eds), New Directions in Rural Tourism, Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, pp. 38-53

Stabler, M. and Goodall, B. (1996) Environmental Auditing in Planning for Sustainable Island Tourism, in Briguglio, L. (ed) Sustainable Tourism in Islands and Small States: Issues and Policies, p176-196, London: Pinter