Dublin Institute of Technology
ARROW@DIT

Books / Book chapters

School of Hospitality Management and Tourism

2005-01-01

Co-operative Marketing Structures in Rural Tourism: The Irish Case

Catherine Gorman
Dublin Institute of Technology, catherine.gorman@dit.ie

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

Part of the Human Geography Commons, and the Nature and Society Relations Commons

Recommended Citation
Gorman, C. (2005) Chap. 7. Co-operative Marketing Structures in Rural Tourism: The Irish Case pp. 121-137 in Rural Tourism and Sustainable Business eds. Hall, D, Kirkpatrick and I, Mitchell, M. pub. Channel View Publication

This Book Chapter 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 Books / Book chapters 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

Chapter 7

Co-operative Marketing Structures in Rural Tourism in Ireland

Catherine Gorman

Co-operation as a competitive advantage

People have formed co-operative groupings in both an informal and formal capacity since man has inhabited the earth. Co-operation is also common between many other living organisms and in some cases culminating in symbiosis and partnership such as that between the egret and water buffalo in the animal kingdom and between lichens and algae in the plant kingdom. However, in all cases the benefit of co-operation must provide a value which is recognised by each co-operative member.

Co-operation can be defined as "groups of independent businesses which recognise the advantage of developing markets jointly rather than in isolation but may be unable to directly appropriate the benefits of co-operative activities… they are tied in a loose way" (Palmer *et al.*, 2000 p.274, Palmer, 2002 p.135)). Morrison (1998) identified the importance of co-operation in the tourism sector particularly for those who are located in a peripheral region or area. She defines co-operation as that which is 'between one or more tourist product providers, whereby each partner seeks to add to its marketing competencies by combining some, but not all of their resources with those of its partners for mutual benefit'. Gray (1985) identified five critical characteristics of collaboration necessary to ensure that working together is successful. These include:

- interdependency of the stakeholder whereby an incentive is required to induce participation;
- joint ownership of decisions;
- solutions emerging by dealing constructively with differences;
- collective responsibility for future direction; and
- the recognition that collaboration is a dynamic, emergent process.

Co-operation can lead to networking opportunities such as economies of scale, access to professional marketing expertise, the development of technology and distribution networks, educational and training support and pooled financial resources (Morrison, 1998). Development of cohesiveness over time within a co-operative can be helped by several factors. Palmer *et al.* (2000) found that similarity of work, group size, threats from outside, leadership style and common social factors such as age, race and social structure could contribute to cohesiveness.

The aim of this chapter is to illustrate the different structures through which rural tourism product providers co-operate. Two of the case studies focus on same product provision though the structural approach of the co-operative is different. Case one considers the individual product provider an individual member and in Case two a designated area made up of a number of product providers constitutes a member. Case three focuses on individual provider membership though reflects the diversity of rural tourism provision within a county delineated geographical area. Factors and inhibitors for successful co-operation are explored.

.

Tourism in Ireland

The tourism sector in Ireland (a country with a population four million) has had a substantial impact on the national economy over the past fifteen years. The sector has seen unprecedented growth in both visitor numbers and revenue, with over six million overseas visitors generating revenue of €3.2bn in 2002 (or almost €4bn taking into account carrier receipts) (Table 7.1). In 2002 it supported 140,000 jobs and contributed 4.4 per cent to GNP, making it the most successful-ever 'indigenous' industry (Bord Failte statistics 2002).

INSERT TABLE 7.1 NEAR HERE

However, the publication of *New Horizons for Irish Tourism – An Agenda for Action* (DAST, 2003) published in September 2003 acknowledged that the industry was at a crossroads. Although there was still significant satisfaction with the Irish rural tourism product expressed by visitors, there had been a decline, particularly in relation to their perception of value for money, with Ireland considered by some to be an expensive destination. The *Agenda* document set out a strategy to regain competitiveness and to continue to emphasise the importance of 'People, Place and Pace' – elements that have been identified as the main attractors for the country. On the supply side, both under-utilised capacity and falling margins have been problems, and a number of key drivers, including marketing and promotion, were identified to combat these.

Structural changes in the administration, management and marketing of tourism have been put in place. The Northern Ireland Peace Process has acted as a catalyst for change whereby Ireland is now marketed as an all-Ireland destination incorporating Northern Ireland, which is under the governance of the UK.

Tourism in Ireland grew through the 1960s and 1970s, but it was in the mid 1980s, after the publication of the first White Paper for tourism in 1985, that the industry took a more strategic approach to both its development and marketing. The rural tourism industry in Ireland is dominated by small and medium enterprises as well as by sole traders, with many of them operating as part-time tourism providers. Entering into co-operative networks can enable small- and medium-size firms to pool their resources in order to increase their competitiveness, draw up strategic management and marketing plans, reduce operating

costs and increase know-how (Buhalis & Cooper, 1998, cited in Hall, 2000). With over 80 percent of tourism enterprises in Ireland constituting of small and medium enterprises, and many of these enterprises in isolated areas, the focus moved from individual marketing to the development of same product and destination marketing co-operatives.

Rural tourism in Ireland

Rural tourism is defined in Ireland specifically as 'rural areas/towns with less than 1500 people'. The EU definition of rural tourism is "a holiday that is primarily motivated by the desire to closely experience the countryside, its people, heritage and way of life. The holiday should be primarily based in a rural setting, as opposed to being general touring/sightseeing holiday." (Failte Ireland pers comm.)2004). It is this definition that is used by the National Tourist Board. 'Agritourism', however, is quite specific and in terms of the Irish situation it tends to be linked directly to on-farm activities or accommodation. Grant aid in relation to agritourism was allocated to farmers or in the case of a group application, farmers were required to be part of the applicant group. Due to the fragmented nature of the rural tourism product, it is difficult to ascertain its worth to the economy. Estimates have suggested 30 per cent of the total value of tourism, or about €1bn in 2002 (Henaghan pers comm. 2004). *Teagasc* are the Farm Advisory Body and are involved in providing advice and training to the rural and farming community. They cite four important factors which need to be addressed in order that growth is sustained: quality, uniqueness, the adoption of an innovative approach, and the importance of training. Teagasc provides information on its website for the setting up of alternative enterprises including rural tourism, self-catering, B&B, angling, walking and visitor attractions (www.teagasc.ie).

In the 1960s, due to the decreasing viability of agriculture and the increasing number of tourists to Ireland, farmers were urged to look at developing alternative enterprises to support farm incomes. Tourism bodies encouraged the opening of farm house accommodation. From the early 1970s until the mid-1980s, price supports in agriculture and industry did well. The state did not need to involve itself with land structure or reform within agriculture as it was a reasonably viable sector. Private investment took place and there was no real integration between agriculture and other sectors, as it held its own. From mid-1980s to the early 1990s, reform of the Common Agricultural Policy and the introduction of milk quotas caused a fall in incomes for some farmers. Rural tourism development now looked more attractive. The mid-1980s saw a drive to develop and invest in tourism in Ireland and to increase visitor numbers. Grant aid from different sources, though primarily from the EU, such as the Operational Programme for Tourism, Operational Programme for Agritourism grant and LEADER programme grant aid, encouraged development and marketing in a diverse range of rural tourism products such as equestrian facilities, open visitor farms, golf facilities and accommodation.

The revitalisation of rural areas well complements present tourism objectives, which includes a more equitable regional distribution of visitors throughout the country. Scenic

rural areas in Ireland also tend to be areas of agricultural disadvantage, and hence the farming community now often looks towards rural tourism as a source of supplementing income. Rural tourism has helped to sustain agriculture and boost local related industries. It has also been a catalyst in the creation of jobs through direct and related enterprises.

The development of rural tourism

There are a number of bodies involved in the development and marketing of rural tourism in Ireland. *Teagasc* is the farm advisory board and employs a rural tourism specialist based in County Galway. County council and county tourism committees are involved in the development and marketing of rural tourism at county level and they contribute to the work undertaken by the regional tourism authorities. The six regional tourism authorities develop, service and promote tourism in a regional context. Shannon Development operates in this capacity in the mid-West of the country. There are at present 38 LEADER+ companies in the Republic of Ireland which are involved in development, marketing and training in all sectors of rural development. Under LEADER 2, 22.6% of funds were allocated to rural tourism which was significantly more than any other measure (Kearney 2000). LEADER+ presently allocates funding to projects where there is a proven market demand. In a national capacity, *Failte Ireland*, (the National Tourism Board and Tourism Training Authority) employs a product development officer whose remit it is to help develop, market and give advice to the rural tourism sector.

The marketing of rural tourism

The marketing of rural tourism is undertaken by a number of bodies. County tourism committees and regional tourism authorities focus on destination marketing within a county and regional context. Irish Farmhouse Holidays (IFH) and Irish Country Holidays (ICH) co-operatively market the farm accommodation sector: both offer bed and breakfast, and ICH additionally offers self-catering accommodation. Product marketing groupings (PMGs) have emerged at county, regional and national levels, and many of these contribute to the rural tourism experience. Operating criteria for these groupings are mainly linked to quality standards. The accommodation sector has strict criteria which lead to approval by the national tourist board. In this sector, marketing co-operatives have been in existence for many years and criteria focus on the tangible aspects of accommodation delivery. Within the other activities and attractions sectors, criteria are not as clear. If there is a regulatory body, such as AIRE (Association of Irish Riding Establishments) in the case of the equestrian product, those that participate in the product marketing group have to adhere to the agreed regulations. In the case of other activities, such as gardens/heritage houses, there are no regulatory bodies, criteria are vague and products are diverse. Time in operation, standard of product, capability of attracting visitors and availability of facilities for visitor use are mentioned, although those members that are part of the groups may sometimes not fulfil all the criteria.

At a national level, *Failte Ireland* advocates that co-operative marketing opportunities are the most effective means of accessing overseas markets in a cost-effective manner. With

this in mind, product marketing groups have been developed in many different products, and include Horse Riding Ireland, Health Farms of Ireland, the Great Fishing Houses of Ireland, Rural Tourism, Heritage Island, and Sailing.

In 1999, the Small- and Medium-Sized Accommodation Marketing Initiative was launched to improve the marketing and competitive capabilities of the smaller accommodation enterprises. Administered by the National Tourist Board, this initially focused on the bed and breakfast sector but has since been extended to all sectors of SME accommodation. Its main objectives include the following:

- provision of support for the smaller accommodation sector;
- creation of greater cohesion within the sector;
- creation of awareness and knowledge of individual and co-operative marketing efforts; and
- encouragement of more marketing activity by both associations and groups with industry and the regional tourism authorities.

Tourism Ireland Limited focuses on international marketing and is involved with marketing Ireland abroad as an all Ireland destination. Product quality and cost competitiveness are emphasised as an essential element of the attractiveness of Ireland as a tourism destination.

Barriers and problems in relation to rural tourism in Ireland

One of the main problems of rural tourism in Ireland is the fragmented nature of the product. Many of those involved in providing a rural tourism experience to the visitor are part-time, either in terms of working hours or in terms of the focus of the enterprise. A wide range of different organisations deliver different elements of the product, and at times organisations that are involved within the sector are accused of lacking co-ordination. The need for a common ground to facilitate consensus and implement collaborative results requires a more integrated approach based on regular communication and shared values (Jamal & Getz, 1995). Due to seasonality factors such as climate, lack of daylight hours, traditional holiday taking patterns, irregular profit margins result. This is exacerbated by the fact that employment may only be seasonal and part-time and thus seen as supplemental rather than central to the business or income stream.

The fragmented nature of the business also contributes to the overall lack of vision, direction and image of the sector as perceived by those working in the industry. Changes in perception have been noted over the past fourteen years during periods of close contact while working with product providers in the rural tourism sector. Gradually with the advent of greater co-operation, it is hoped that this will change. Rural tourism has gone through a cycle over the past ten years. During the 1990s a vision had been identified for the product, yet those delivering focused mainly on the accommodation provision element of the experience. Open farms, walking, cycling and other such rural attractions and activities

were developed, although there was a lack of integration between the accommodation element and these activities in many cases.

The tourism strategy document, *Developing Sustainable Tourism 1993-97* (Bord Failte 1993), had identified 25 different rural tourism areas, whose criteria were based on natural and built resources of the area, commitment of the local community organisation, variety and distinctiveness of centres, and geographic balance. The National Tourist Board was aware that unrealistic expectations of rural tourism as an identified product had occurred in other countries, and it therefore identified these areas in order to provide a framework within which to concentrate activity.

There is an identified lack of training. Many of those who are involved in the business do not have business experience or formal training in skills such as management, customer service and marketing. *Teagasc*, LEADER+ companies, *Failte Ireland* and some destination groups have striven to combat this situation and provide advice and courses, encouraging participation through the provision of subsidies and certification.

Infrastructural shortcomings are recognised throughout rural Ireland. Internal transport is limited, impacting on both visitor and rural dweller and contributing to difficulty in gaining access to certain areas and for rural tourism practitioners attending meetings. These constraints need to be considered when both developing and marketing the rural tourism product.

The next section outlines three case studies demonstrating the co-operative marketing approach used within the rural tourism sector in Ireland.

Case Studies of the co-operating marketing approach

Case 1 – Marketing farmhouse accommodation

Irish Farmhouse Holidays

www.irishfarmholidays.com

In the early 1960s, farmhouse accommodation units were encouraged by *Bord Failte* (the National Tourist Board) to form a co-operative whose main objective would be to market the farmhouse accommodation sector. Thus Irish Farmhouse Holidays (IFH) was established, and has been in operation for almost 40 years. The organisation is limited by guarantee and its offices are situated in Limerick in the South West of Ireland. The organisation also depends greatly on voluntary contribution from its members as well as from paid staff. All accommodation is approved and fulfils minimum criteria for visitor accommodation.

Since the regulation involved in the inspection of premises and standards was devolved from *Bord Failte* in the late 1990s, a new body, *Farm and Country Standards*, has undertaken inspections of premises throughout the year. This regulating body is located in the same offices as Irish Farmhouse Holidays, and a link is maintained between both the marketing and the standards element of provision. This is important to ensure the quality of the accommodation offered to the visitor.

The main objectives of Irish Farmhouse Holidays are:

- to expand the tourism base so that the rural economy can enjoy a greater spread of benefits rather than just in the honey-pot areas;
- to increase market share for farm holidays; and
- to attract year-round tourism by promoting off-season and weekend breaks.

The IFH is now viewed more as a network particularly since the organisation's portfolio has been extended from accommodation to all products involved in the delivery of the rural tourism experience. The organisation offers accommodation in both the Republic and Northern Ireland. Other rural tourism providers such as farm hostels and restaurants will be invited to participate in the organisation from 2005.

Irish Farmhouse Holidays consists of a board which is made up of members of the farmhouse accommodation sector. This board meets several times a year. The board of directors tend to make most of the decisions based on contributions from members, and strong leadership is seen as being important. There is a keen sense to retain and increase the membership each year. Group identification is important to the members and they embrace the importance of having a strong brand. Newsletters are circulated five times a year with content being discussed by those members who have developed a social as well as a business bond. There are county groups and a county chairperson that meet independently of the national group. Issues of a local/county nature are discussed and these may be brought to the national forum if applicable. Local groupings have also emerged with geographical proximity creating strong links between members.

The marketing of the organisation and subsequent promotion is strategic. The organisation annually produces a booklet detailing information and prices on bed and breakfasts located on farms throughout Ireland. Each year 3-4,000 brochures/booklets are distributed to potential customers through trade and consumer shows, tourist offices at home and abroad, tour operators and to service enquiries. The organisation also has a website (www. irishfarmholidays.com).

Members attend tradeshows and fairs and are involved with joint advertising. IFH provide a central reservation system for their members and there is representation in Irish Tourist offices worldwide through Tourism Ireland Limited.

Initially farm families became involved in rural tourism due to the decline in income derived from farming. Farms under a certain acreage had to look to alternative enterprises in order to survive. There are a number of issues that are presently being addressed within the organisation. In the past many of the members of the IFH would say that it was the farm tourism business that carried the farm business. However, the fact that the number of farms is decreasing and there is a trend towards part-time farming has impacted on the IFH. In a review of the organisation undertaken in 2000, it was found that 55 per cent of the members were over the age of 70, and fewer younger people were becoming involved. There are also fewer women staying at home with increased numbers entering the workforce outside the home.

The lack of continuous funding is seen as a problem. At present, the organisation is partially funded through LEADER+, although a large percentage of the organisation's funds does come from its membership.

Factors that have contributed to co-operation include the availability of expertise from the Irish Tourist Board particularly in the form of the SMA (Small and Medium Accommodation Marketing Initiative) which has been administered by the Irish Tourist Board since 1999.

The organisation is optimistic about its future. There is a strong bond between members and this is enhanced by county groups who have meetings on a regular basis and contribute ideas to the national co-operative. The main aim of the IFH is to extend its product offering and this in turn will provide the visitor with a one-stop shop in relation to rural tourism holidays in Ireland.

Case 2 – Rural tourism as a national product

Irish Country Holidays

www.country-holidays.ie

Irish Country Holidays (ICH) was founded in 1990 as the national rural tourism society. In 2004, there were 18 groups of self-catering product providers and some bed and breakfast providers, located in both the Republic and part of Northern Ireland (Figure 7.1). They represent a total of 200 different properties. A central reservations office is located in County Tipperary and a reservations officer takes phone calls and enquiries about the properties. Managers/facilitators from each of the groups around the country are involved in co-operative marketing activities. These include attendance at trade and consumer fairs, the operation of familiarisation trips, and the production of a common brochure which is used for both consumer and trade. A new website was developed in 2003 (www.country-holidays.ie), and this became the fastest growing medium used by prospective visitors for both information and reservations. The main aim of the organisation is to offer the visitor 'a

rural experience at a relaxed pace of life and the traditional heritage of rural Ireland'(www.country_holidays.ie pg.1). To be included, the product provider must fulfil specific criteria and agree to incorporate certain practices as part of their delivery of the visitor experience. All accommodation must be approved by the National Tourism Board. A welcome pack which contains information on the area, events, and a welcome letter is provided for visitors on arrival. A voucher is also provided for a guided tour of a working farm with refreshments for all guests. Complimentary Irish coffees with the hosts and personal assistance from the group co-ordinator are all part of the package. The emphasis is on hospitality and the delivery of an experience which will be remembered by the visitor. A customised approach to groups, focuses on tailor-made packages that can incorporate a wide range of rural features.

INSERT FIGURE 7.1 NEAR HERE

As with many rural co-operatives, there is an issue in relation to the retention of personnel. Many of the eighteen membership groups have facilitators or co-ordinators. Because they are dependent upon funding, some may be semi-voluntary in nature. Frequent changes in personnel lead to a lack of continuity and difficulty in strengthening the links and relationships required to maintain an effective co-operative structure.

The co-operative approach undertaken by ICH is portrayed as a group of people with the same interests, marketing their own products in a collective way or financial gain. There is, however, a variable level of members' activity, which leads to an unbalanced sense to the organisation's functioning. Where once tour operators were considered a major source of business, it is the independent traveller, who seeks information and who books online that now constitutes much of the business. In response, the marketing focus has changed.

Increased commitment can lead to a perceived effectiveness of the organisation as has been shown by Coffey (2003). As in most organisations, group identification is important. A willingness to connect (Kelly and Kelly, 1994), will help to develop a common vision leading to specific group objectives. A vision for the product is presently being developed by Irish Country Holidays and it is hoped that this will strengthen both the sense of identity for its members and deliver a recognised brand for the organisation.

Issues in relation to co-operative marketing in rural tourism

Communication and frequency of communication is considered an essential component of co-operative marketing by both Irish Farmhouse Holidays and Irish Country Holidays. The geographical distance between groups can been seen as one of the barriers and can constrain efficient operation of a co-operative. Increased use of the internet and email as communication tools can help ameliorate such situations, although personal face-to-face contact through meetings/seminars is important in helping to strengthen the links that exist between members. Ireland's low population density results in a widespread dispersal of providers, and poor access can lead to problems, particularly in relation to face to face personal communication. Planned and frequent communication is necessary in order to

sustain and strengthen the bonds between members, giving the group a stronger sense of identity.

The size of the group can be an issue: critical mass in membership numbers is required in order that the group is viable. In the case of Irish Country Holidays, each group pays an annual subscription which goes towards the salary of an employee who deals with the reservation system and towards marketing activities. Funding for Irish Country Holidays has come mainly from LEADER+, though similar to Irish Farmhouse Holiday, membership also contributes to both the operational and marketing functions of the organisation.

During the late 1990s rural tourism became better integrated with other tourism provision. However, varying definitions and interpretations of 'rural tourism' do not assist development of a clear and focused image for the sector. Amalgamation between the IFH and ICH due to their product similarity has been considered and may occur in the future. At least closer co-operation between the two bodies, which basically target the same market might, be a more cost efficient approach in such a small country.

Case 3 – County destination marketing

Meath Tourism
www.meathtourism.ie

County Meath is located in a rural hinterland, north-west of Dublin. It has a population of 134,000 and over the past ten years has seen an increase in the number of Dublin City inhabitants moving out of the city and commuting due to the increasing cost of land and accommodation in the capital. Meath is known as the 'Royal County' as its main resource is on its history and heritage which spans 5,000 years and contains some of the most important historic sites in Ireland. These include the internationally recognised site of Newgrange which is a four thousand year old megalithic tomb and attracts over 200,000 visitors each year. Meath is a fertile agricultural county well known for its interest in the equestrian industry.

The tourism industry in Meath is dominated by small, independent business operators. Meath Tourism was set up in 1994 as a collaborative county tourism network. It is operated through the county council and has an appointed board of directors and chairperson. It has at present over 260 members contributing to a diverse product portfolio. Its strategic objective is to develop marketable products based on the strengths and resources of the county and compatible with the goal of environmental protection and enhancement in a sustainable manner (Meath Tourism 2004). It advocates that new product development should be consistent with the marketing objectives of expanding tourism inflows, increasing the average length of stay and revenue yield, extending the season, and

spreading tourism activity throughout the County (Royal County News, 2003). The success and effectiveness of the network in realising these objectives is dependent on the willingness of it members to change from a traditional competitive approach to business to one of networking and collaboration with other co-operative members.

The 2004 Development and Marketing Plan for Meath Tourism focuses on a co-operative approach particularly in the area of promotion. Recent research by the company has indicated that the accommodation sector in the county performs well and that there has been an increase in business in the catering, garden, equestrian, crafts and golf sectors. The county attracts mainly overseas visitors (79 per cent), with the majority opting to use bed and breakfast accommodation. The marketing of these sectors is primarily undertaken through co-operative marketing groups set up by each of the specific sectors. These groups are involved in the includes attendance at trade and consumer shows, the production of a co-operative brochure and organisation of familiarisation trips.

A study focusing on Meath tourism to evaluate the concept of county tourism co-operatives and to explore the effectiveness of such associations (Coffey, 2003), identified four elements were identified as essential to the success of co-operative networks: reciprocity, interdependence, power and loose coupling (Barringer & Harrison, 2000; Grabher, 1993; Hall, 2000).

The vast majority of the members of Meath Tourism claimed a belief in the concept of working together and co-ordinating efforts, as well as in the direct benefits that their company could realise as a result of their membership. The majority of members said they were willing to share information in relation to marketing activities, yet fewer than 50 per cent of the respondents actually participated in joint marketing activities. This clearly reduces the interdependence and potential collective power of the members of the co-operative. Some respondents did stress the need to become allies rather than competitors, echoing the strategy for SMEs advocated by Zineldin 1998) amongst others. Zineldin considers the co-opetive perspective whereby an organisation seeks to be more competitive through co-operation and competing at the same time with similar organisations to itself.

A number of barriers to co-operation were identified. Group identity, communication among members, group size and the distribution of power within the co-operative network were explored. Group identification and communication frequency (Stoel, 2002) are often seen as two elements essential to the development of effective network relationships. Within Meath Tourism, 28 per cent of the respondents replied that the frequency of formal communication with other sector members was rare or non-existent. Frequency of informal communication was more positive with 23 per cent saying that they had regular informal communication with other members of Meath Tourism. It was found that the sub groups who offer similar products, such as gardens and food, maintained much more regular contact particularly on an informal basis. It is on these structures that Meath Tourism's strength of co-operation built. Some 37.5 per cent of the respondents claimed they joined the network in order to benefit from a wider range of resources, and 25 per cent cited access to the internet site as a reason for their membership.

The need to continually motivate interaction and participation once a member becomes part of a network or co-operative group is common throughout all businesses. To maintain an interest and create a recognised value for active participation is essential to the strengthening of the co-operative approach for County Meath.

Conclusion and future

In these three examples of co-operative marketing groups operating within the rural tourism sector in Ireland, the benefits of co-operation have contributed considerably to the industry and can only be considered in a positive light despite the many issues and problems that surround the co-operative structure. The alternative would be for the individual businesses to 'go it alone', but with an identified lack of training and expertise, this would probably result in casualties. Tremblay (2000) recognises that neither networks or partnerships can be imposed on a community particularly if the community is not suitably integrated. The total fabric of the community requires a degree of integration, diversity and agreement particularly with overall tourism development objectives before the network approach to marketing can be undertaken. In all cases outlined above there is agreement of objectives as all members have bought into the process however, degree of involvement and commitment to the long term, are issues that need to be addressed.

As this chapter was being completed, recognition of the need for a vision for rural tourism and an overcoming of the fragmentation of the industry had stimulated a joint initiative between Teagasc and Offaly LEADER+ Company for the development of a Rural Tourism Federation. This aimed to bring together representatives of all of those involved in delivering rural tourism: *Teagasc,* Irish Country Holidays, Irish Farmhouse Holidays, the Blue Book, Hidden Ireland and the providers of activities such as equestrian, angling, golf, walking and cycling. The main aim of the Federation will be to act as an umbrella group and to provide a common voice for the sector. It will act as a lobby group and will not be a marketing entity. It is hoped that this Federation will give greater direction and vision to a promising sector and as Gray (1985) recognises as an essential factor for successful co-operation 'hold a collective responsibility for future direction'.

Addendum

Bord Failte – the National Tourist Board has, since September 29th 2003, been divided into two different organisations. It has been partially amalgamated with CERT the National Tourism Training Authority) to form Failte Ireland. Failte Ireland is responsible for product development, domestic marketing and training within the sector. It has also been partially amalgamated with the Northern Ireland Tourism Board to form Tourism Ireland Limited (TIL). The responsibility of TIL is to market Ireland abroad as an all Ireland destination.

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank Irish Farmhouse Holidays (Kathryn Delany), Irish Country Holidays (Michael Wilkinson), Jennifer Coffey, Alison Condra (Meath Tourism), Orla Woods (*Failte Ireland*) and Maria Henaghan (*Teagasc*).

References

<www.arts-sport-tourism.gov.ie> the website for the Department of Arts Sports and Tourism

Barringer, B.R. and Harrison, J.S. (2000) Walking a tightrope: creating value through interorganisational relationships *Journal of Management* 26 (3).

Bord Failte (2002) *Statistics – Domestic Tourism 2002*. Dublin: Bord Failte, Market Research and Planning.

Buhalis, D. and Cooper, C. (1998) Competition or co-operation: small and medium sized tourism enterprises at the destination in E. Laws, B. Faulkner, G. Moscardo (eds.) *Embracing and Managing Change in Tourism.* Pub/. Routledge, London. Pp 324-346.

Bord Failte (1993) *Developing Sustainable Tourism 1993-9.* Dublin: Bord Failte.

Coffey, J. (2003) A Study of the Effectiveness of County Tourism Co-operatives within Ireland: Case Study: Meath Tourism. Dublin: unpublished M.Sc. Dissertation, Dublin Institute of Technology

<www.country-holidays.ie> the website for Irish Country Holidays.

DAST (Department of Art, Sport and Tourism) (2003) *New Horizons for Irish Tourism – An Agenda for Action.* Dublin: Tourism Policy Review Group.

<www.failteireland.ie> The website for Failte Ireland – the Irish Tourist Board

Failte Ireland (2004) pers. comm. February 2004

Hall, C.M. (2000) *Tourism Planning, Policies and Processes and Relationships.* Harlow: Prentice Hall.

Henaghan, M. (2004), Per.comm.. (February 2004)

Grabher, G. (1993) p. 84 Chapter 5: Networks in: Donaldson, D. and O'Toole, T. 2001 *Strategic Market Relationships: From Strategy to Implementation:* New York: John Wiley and Sons.

Gray, B. (1985), Conditions Facilitating Interorganizational Collaborations. *Human Relations* 38(10), pp.911-936.

< www.irishfarmholidays.com> website for Irish farmhouse Holidays

Jamel, T.B. and Getz, D (1995) Collaborative theory and community tourism planning. *Annals of Tourism Research* 22 (1), pp.186-204

Kearney, B. and Associates (2000) Final ex Post Evaluation report : Leader 11 accessed http://www.leaderii.ie/

Kelly, C. and Kelly, J. (1994) In: Stoel (2002) Retail Co-operatives : group size, identification, communication, frequency and relationship effectiveness. *International Journal of Retail and Distribution Management* 30 (1).pp. 51-60.

Meath Tourism (2004) *Tourism Development and Marketing Plan for County Meath* pub. Meath Tourism.

<www.meathtourism.ie> County Meath Tourism website
Morrison, A. (1998) Small firm co-operative marketing in a peripheral tourism region. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* (10) 5 pp.191-197.
Palmer, A. (2002) Co-operative marketing associations: an investigation into the causes of effectiveness. *Journal of Strategic Marketing* 10, pp135-156.
Palmer, A., Barrett, S. and Ponsonby, S. (2000) Behavioural analysis of co-operative marketing organisations. *Journal of Marketing Management* 16, pp. 273-290.
Royal County News (2003), pub Meath Tourism.
Stoel, L. (2002) Retail co-operatives : group size, identification, communication, frequency and relationship effectiveness. *International Journal of Retail and Distribution Management* 30 (1), pp. 51-60.
<www.teagasc.ie> (Farm Advisory Body)
Tremblay, P. (2000) Chapter 16: An evolutionary interpretation of the role of collaborative partnerships, pp. 314-331 In: B. Bramwell and B. Lane (eds) *Sustainable Tourism in Tourism Collaboration and Partnerships*. Clevedon : Channel View Publications.
Zineldin, M.A. (1998) Towards an ecological collaborative relationship management – a co-opitive perspective. *European Journal of Marketing* 32 (11/2), pp. 1138-1164.

Table 7.1 Overseas Visitors Number and Revenue Generated to the Republic of Ireland 1990 and 2002.

	1990	**2002**
Total Overseas Visitors (Million)	3.096	5.919
Total Foreign Revenue (Billion €)	1.446	3.985

Source: DAST, 2003

Figure 7.1 Location Map of Irish Country Holiday Member Groups 2004

1. Fermanagh Lakeland
2. Clann Lir - Westmeath
3. Una Bhan
4. Shannon Vale - Offaly
5. Carlow Country
6. Slieve Felim - Tipperary
7. North Leitrim Glens
8. Moy Valley
9. Inishowen
10. Erris
11. Ballyhoura
12. Kerry Country
13. Joyce Country - N Connemara
14. Mask/Corrib - Galway
15. Kerry Skellig
16. Clare West
17. Tipperary Lakeside
18. Galway South East

Source: www.country-holidays.ie