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The attitudes of the key stakeholders on sustainable tourism in Ireland: The holidaymaker and tourism enterprise perspective

Abstract

The increased attention paid to sustainable management in tourism destinations has been considerable. However, the genuine demand for sustainable tourism in Ireland has been inadequately researched. This study discussing the attitudes of key stakeholders on sustainable tourism in Ireland bridges this gap in knowledge by providing baseline findings as part of a nationwide study examining the demand for sustainable tourism. While literature reveals the shift towards the sustainable management of tourism destinations is being consolidated at an international level. Key stakeholders acknowledged that all tourism should be sustainable and stressed the importance of having a sustainable tourism industry in Ireland. Yet challenges included factors potentially preventing businesses converting to sustainable tourism such as detailed information and the perceived costs incurred. Also there was a low awareness of sustainable tourism certification from holidaymakers. This study contributes new knowledge on the attitudes of the key stakeholders on sustainable tourism in Ireland. Also the framework developed for the assessment may be used in future in the context of a possible longitudinal study.

Key words: sustainable tourism; certification; sustainable tourism demand; Ireland.

Introduction

Significant research has been devoted to sustainable tourism development and management, which has in turn advanced its concept (Schianetz, Kavanagh & Lockington, 2007; Xu & Fox, 2014). Tourism with its growth potential has become a high priority for nations and communities globally. With the potential associated negative tourism impacts, new ways are being looked at to manage these. Therefore, the need for better planning is evident. The sustainable management of tourism requires consideration due to the contribution it makes to environmental, cultural heritage, social and economic issues. In order to understand the sustainable management of tourism, it is first necessary to understand sustainability and tourism.

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It was over fifty years ago when Walter Firey (1960) argued that sustainable development in any industry relies on the integrated planning and management of three interdependent systems - the environment, the economy and society (Lawson, Williams, Young & Cossens, 1998). This term “sustainability” has become a central topic in the tourism industry (Byrd & Cardenas, 2007). Sustainability is associated with progress and responsibility, freedom and culture. Although the term is becoming increasingly popular, Jenkins and Schroder (2013) indicated that doubts have been raised about whether the promised harmonisation of ecological, social and economic goals associated with sustainability is actually achievable. There is also debate about the term sustainable tourism which is said to be patchy and disjointed, often flawed with false assumptions and arguments (Liu, 2003). Furthermore, the terms sustainability, sustainable tourism and sustainable development are used interchangeably throughout literature. Those who have attempted to explore the differences in the former terms are both Butler (1999) and Harris and Leiper (1995). Liu (2003, p. 460) avoids a debate on the terminology of these words and states: “Sustainability is broadly considered state-focused which implies steady life conditions for generations to come; ‘sustainable development’ is more process-oriented and associated with managed changes that bring about improvement in conditions for those involved in such development”. Sustainable tourism is conveniently defined as all types of tourism (conventional or alternative forms) that are compatible with or contribute to sustainable development. Besides, it was noted that development does not necessarily involve ‘growth’ as it is a process of realising ‘specific social and economic goals which may call for a stabilisation, increase, reduction, change of quality or even removal of existing products, firms, industries, or other elements’ (Liu & Jones, 1996, p. 217). In agreement, Page and Connell (2006) state that it is clear that sustainable tourism does not imply a ‘no growth’ policy but does recognise that limits to growth exist and that environments must be managed in a long-term way. Liu (2003) however, differs with the notion to limit growth. Instead growth must be managed in a way that is appropriate to the tourists, the destination, the environment and the host population. After all, it has been reiterated that tourism will continue to grow. This study is in agreement with the latter understanding of sustainability and sustainable tourism for the purpose of the outcome of the study. After all, this realisation is to imply steady life conditions for future generations.

This study aims to provide a better understanding of the demand for sustainable tourism by discussing the views of the key stakeholders involved in sustainable tourism in Ireland. Principally the analysis addressed what the demand was for sustainable tourism among holidaymakers and tourism businesses in Ireland. In order to achieve this, a theoretical framework based on major themes identified throughout international literature on the subject was utilised to assess the attitudes of the key stakeholders on sustainable tourism in Ireland in 2013. The paper opens with a literature review on sustainability and tourism. This is followed by an overview of tourism certification and how it is considered to be a key tool in the sustainable management of tourism. Afterwards the methodology of research is described. Finally, the study findings are presented and summarised in a number of tables, which is followed by the conclusion and the direction of possible future research on this topic.

Literature review

The development of tourism in a sustainable manner is unattainable without stakeholder participation (Ap, 1992; Gunn, 1994; Andereck & Vogt, 2000; Gursoy, Jurovski & Uysal, 2002; Andriotis, 2005;

Byrd, Cardenas & Dregalla, 2009). This is due to the organisational structure of a destination being perceived as a network of interdependent and multiple stakeholders (Cooper, Scott & Baggio, 2009; d'Angella & Go, 2009). It is this which the quality of the experience and hospitality offered by the destination depends (March & Wilkinson, 2009; Hawkins & Bohdanowicz, 2011). The necessity of creating links with stakeholders has been widely acknowledged in tourism ever since the publication of Murphy's Community Approach 1985 (Hall, 1999; Sirakaya, Jamal & Choi, 2001; Simpson, 2008; Clarke, Raffay & Wiltshier, 2009). Murphy (1988) contended that mutually beneficial partnerships were essential for tourism planning. Stakeholders should not only be recipients of sustainable tourism plans but are needed to participate in all steps of management covering the planning process (Byrd, 2003). Public consciousness is also an essential factor to facilitate the stakeholders to participate in the sustainable management of tourism (Thiengkamol, 2009, 2011, 2012). For example, a previous study conducted in Ireland that piloted a model of sustainable indicators, stated that the main difficulty encountered was engaging with the public (Griffin, Morrissey & Flanagan, 2010). Never the less, difficulties found with participation may be overcome through the implementation of a myriad of stakeholder participation tools (Hanrahan, 2008). But despite the many advantages of stakeholder participation in advancing the transition towards sustainability, it is not often fully co-ordinated in the sustainable management of tourism (Miller & Twining-Ward, 2005). Each stakeholder group has a different set of needs and expectations relating to a destinations performance and its sustainability goals. Stakeholder perceptions are accepted as crucial for evaluating participatory processes and devising effective strategies for implementing sustainable tourism (Hardy & Beeton, 2001; Wall & Mathieson, 2006; Waligo, Clarke & Hawkins, 2013). As such a destination adopting a sustainable management approach to tourism should attempt to design one development strategy that achieves the objectives of various stakeholders (Theobald, 2005). As this study assess the attitudes of the key stakeholders in Ireland on sustainable tourism it will be necessary to take into account the UNEP-UNWTO (2005) aims of sustainable tourism, the European Tourism Indicator System (ETIS) (EC, 2013) and the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) criteria for destinations (GSTC, 2013). However, for sustainable tourism to be successful, the interrelationship between the triple bottom line aspects must be acknowledged (Swarbrooke, 1999; Byrd, Cárdenas & Greenwood, 2008). Since 2005, these aims have provided a beneficial baseline for sustainable tourism. Yet there have since been further developments. Cultural heritage has grown in significance possibly due to the growth in cultural tourism (UNWTO, 2009). Furthermore, cultural heritage is fragile and easily damaged if not taken care of (IFT, UNESCO, 2007). Therefore, the aims could be modernised to provide cultural heritage with the significance required. The aims are identifiable as a baseline within many policy instruments and tools for sustainable tourism. Besides, as the aims are identified as a major milestone in the literature, these will be embedded into the theoretical framework to assess the demand for sustainable tourism.

Sustainability has in fact become a practical concept that is deemed beneficial to the progress of tourism development (Chen, 2015). Although considerable and sustained research efforts have contributed to the assessment of tourism sustainability, there has been intense debate about how sustainability should be assessed (Zhang, Ji & Zhang, 2015). For example, Oyola *et al.* (2012) emphasised the role sustainable tourism indicators have in measuring a degree of sustainability by identifying and implementing innovative and relevant planning, development and marketing processes for developing tourism. However, there is little empirical research pertaining to the use of indicator systems by Local

Authorities in Ireland. Also Li, Yang, Liu and Zheng (2014) discussed the use of an environmental impact assessment (EIA) in measuring tourist activities on Island destinations. However, certification is 'the process of providing documented assurance that a product, service or organisation complies with a given standard' (Font, Sanabria & Skinner, 2003, p. 213). Vertinsky and Zhou (2000) further explain that certification provides opportunities for industries to coordinate competition, prevent excessive government intervention, and also present a positive destination image. As such, certification has been highlighted as a key tool in the sustainable management of tourism (Honey, 2002; Bien, 2007; Conaghan & Hanrahan, 2010). This recognition of sustainable practice through certification has been considered the most promising of voluntary approaches (Foh, 2001). Certification can be used to enhance the credibility of the tourism sector and create a degree of awareness (Honey, 2002; Bauckham, 2005; Bien, 2007). Initiatives such as codes of conduct, manuals, awards and certification have increased in numbers due to the lack of methods to enforce sustainable management in tourism (Font, 2002). The implementation of sustainable tourism certification is currently self-regulated. However, the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) (1998) considered the development of these voluntary tourism schemes as: 'the best way of ensuring long-term commitments and improvements'. As such Bendell and Font (2004) hope that certification may become a requirement to trade to ensure tourism organisations are working towards sustainable management. But like many tools for implementing sustainable tourism, certification is not without its challenges. There are over 100 certification programs for tourism and hospitality, with many of them overlapping in sector and geographical scope (Font & Buckley, 2001; Medina, 2005; Jarvis, Weeden & Simcock, 2010). However, market recognition cannot be guaranteed if international and /or domestic tourists are unfamiliar with a national scheme (Jarvis, Weeden & Simcock, 2010). Furthermore, this abundance of programmes has been known to generate confusion (Hansen, 2007) to the extent that they will all be ignored (Lubbert, 2001; Font, 2001; Morris, Hastak & Mazis, 1995; Brown *et al.*, 1997; Diamantis, 1998; Buckley, 2002). This will impede on the effective functioning of a certification program (Sharpley 2001; Honey & Steward, 2002; Sanabria, 2002; Eichhorn, Miller, Michopoulou & Buhalis, 2008). This confusion has also been recognised as a barrier to consumer demand (Carlsen, Getz & Ali-Knight, 2001; Reiser & Simmons, 2005; Proto, Malandrino & Supino, 2007; Jarvis, Weeden & Simcock, 2010) and is a factor that hinders the success of certification (Hansen, 2007; Bowen & Clarke, 2009). Nevertheless, the greater the awareness of certification programs, the demand for sustainable tourism products and services may grow (Dodds & Joppe, 2008). In 2002, Honey indicated the consumer demand for sustainable tourism certified products and services had been largely unknown. To date, this is unknown for the Irish tourism market. Research on certification in Ireland has been narrow as many studies fixated on the organic market (Roddy, Cowan & Hutchinson 1994; O'Donovan & McCarthy, 2002; Moore, 2006; Connolly, 2008). However Fáilte Ireland (2009) indicated certification will become more and more important as the demand for responsible products grows. Without certification, consumers would have to conduct their own research on the responsible management of a product or service, involving a considerable investment of time and effort (Buckley, 2002). Also tourists often believe certified products are more expensive (Lubbert, 2001). But Conaghan and Hanrahan (2010) query why a premium should be paid when there is such a plethora of certifications in existence. By establishing the attitudes of key stakeholders on sustainable tourism certification in Ireland, this would enable Irish tourism businesses to make an informed approach on whether or not to implement a certification program. Issues such as the awareness and proliferation of programs;

influence on purchasing decisions and if there is a preference for one label recognised globally are all assessed by the theoretical framework utilised in this study.

Methodology

Theorists have acknowledged that there has been extensive research investigating the attitudes and perceptions toward tourism and tourism development. Yet, the majority of this research has focused on one specific stakeholder group such as residents (Allen, Long, Perdue & Kieselbach, 1988; Long, Perdue & Allen, 1990; Martin, 1995; Akis, Peristianis & Warner, 1996; Brunt & Courtney, 1999; Andereck & Vogt, 2000; Besculides, Lee & McCormick, 2002; Andereck, Valentine, Knopf & Vogt, 2005; Byrd, Cardenas & Dregalla, 2009). These studies found that differences do exist in the attitudes and perceptions of different stakeholder groups toward tourism.

The purpose of this study was to determine the demand for sustainable tourism in Ireland by encompassing the views of the holidaymakers and tourism businesses. In order to achieve this, two surveys were designed incorporating sixteen criteria (Table 1 below) based on international literature on the chosen topic. Surveys are a popular research method for investigating attitudes and opinions (Denscombe, 2007; Connolly, 2008). However both surveys were slightly different as one focused on holidaymakers, the other for tourism businesses. Fáilte Ireland, the National Tourism Development Authority (NDTA) provided valuable input to ensure the embedded questions were appropriate and would be useful in generating new knowledge for the Irish tourism industry. Yet the risk of a large number of non-responses is a common problem associated with surveys. It was thought that by providing incentives it would be easier to obtain the required response rate.

Table 1

Criteria for assessing the demand for sustainable tourism in Ireland

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- Understanding of sustainable tourism
 - Demand for sustainable tourism
 - Demanding for support to convert to sustainable tourism
 - Demand for resources to implement sustainable tourism
 - Demand to incorporate the aims of sustainable tourism
 - Social and economic aims
 - Economic viability
 - Local prosperity
 - Employment quality
 - Social equity
 - Cultural heritage aims
 - Visitor fulfilment
 - Local control
 - Community wellbeing
 - Cultural richness
 - Environmental aims
 - Physical integrity
 - Biological diversity
 - Resource efficiency
 - Environmental purity
-

Table 1 continued

- Awareness of sustainable tourism certification
- Recognition of tourism certification labels
- Demand for one sustainable tourism certification label
- Potential greenwashing associated with certification aims
- Verification by an independent third party
- Demand for sustainable tourism certified products and services
- Pay more for sustainable tourism certified product or service
- Demand for sustainable certification in Ireland

Source: Adapted from Swarbrooke (2000); UNEP-UNWTO (2005); UNWTO (2007); Mowforth & Munt (2009); GSTC (2008, 2012); Conaghan (2013).

Subsequently, sponsorship was granted from Bewleys, a leading tea company in Ireland and Solis Lough Eske Castle, a five star hotel located in Donegal. Bewley's sponsored 5,000 individually wrapped special reserve fair-trade teabags. Solis Lough Eske Castle sponsored a two night break for two people sharing in a deluxe room, breakfast included with access to the spa. The sponsorship was used to incentivise tourism businesses and holidaymakers in particular to participate in the research.

Figure 1
Back of postcard



Sampling is one of the most fundamental elements of research (Sarantakos, 1997). The method of selective random sampling was employed to collect the holidaymakers email addresses. The holidaymaker survey population was confined to overseas and domestic holidaymakers of Ireland. This confinement eliminated the larger number of visitors that pass through for reasons of business and otherwise. For the purposes of transparency, holidaymakers for this study are defined as visitors who stated that their primary purpose for visiting the destination was a holiday (Fáilte Ireland, 2010). Of the 4,740 email addresses collected, 545 of the emails had bounced. In the end, 1,356 surveys were completed resulting in a response rate of 32%.

In terms of assessing tourism businesses, the survey was emailed to 2,360 of the 2,847 tourism businesses operating in Ireland that were on the Fáilte Ireland master database. This accounted for approximately 15% of the total tourism businesses in the country. Of the 2,360 businesses emailed, 126 bounced therefore 2,234 had received the email. A total of 369 tourism businesses completed the survey which is significant as this research needed to achieve a sample that provided a clear representation of the Irish tourism businesses.

Information technology has changed the way we conduct research and analyse data (Evans & Mathur, 2005). As such, the analysis of the electronic mail survey was conducted through the online survey operator. This offered the opportunity for instant data entry as well as immediate data coding. The surveys division into three sections was beneficial to facilitate the analysis of responses: About You, The Demand and The Perceptions. Following the data analysis, the findings were then explored.

Results and discussion

Sustainable tourism must be understood before it is supported or implemented. By understanding sustainable tourism, it allows the stakeholders to have informed participation (Farrell & Twining-Ward, 2004; Byrd, 2007; Byrd, Cárdenas & Greenwood, 2008). The majority of holidaymakers (80%) and tourism businesses (86%) indicated they understand the concept of sustainable tourism (Table 2).

Table 2
Understand the concept of sustainable tourism

Stakeholder group	Yes	No
Holidaymaker	80%	20%
Tourism business	86%	14%

A Fáilte Ireland report (2009) on 'Exploring the attitudes of holidaymakers towards landscape and natural environment' indicated 70% were aware of one of the terms 'green tourism' 'eco-tourism' 'sustainable tourism'. The findings from this study support those of Fáilte Ireland and found a possible increase in understanding since 2009. Also, sustainable tourism is a market choice, without the consumer there can be no sustainable tourism business (Tjolle, 2008).

Table 3

Demand for sustainable tourism

Question	Stakeholder group	Yes	Stakeholder group	Yes
All tourism should be sustainable?	Holidaymaker	66%	Tourism business	63%
Perceive holidaymakers demand for sustainable tourism?	Holidaymaker	n/a	Tourism business	66%

This research found that a similar percentage of the holidaymakers (66%) and tourism businesses (63%) think that all tourism should be sustainable. Furthermore the tourism businesses perceive that (66%) of the holidaymakers demand sustainable tourism. This corresponds to the expressed demand from the holidaymakers. This indicates that the tourism businesses have an understanding of their market and may be informed enough to make the decision to progress toward the sustainable management of tourism. Furthermore, the analysis here identified the majority of the sample of Irish tourism businesses (79%) demand support to convert to sustainable tourism.

Table 4

Demand for support to convert to sustainable tourism

Stakeholder group	Yes	No
Tourism business	79%	21%
Holidaymaker	n/a	n/a

This demand for support to convert to sustainable tourism may point to an important role from the NTDA, Regional Tourism Authorities (RTA), Destination Management Organisations (DMO) and tourism management organisations to support the conversion. However, 69% of tourism businesses demanded detailed information. Also funding to convert may be required as it was demanded (56%) by the tourism businesses, which signified that they perceive costs will be incurred to implement sustainable tourism. By undertaking training, the industry would be educated for a more sustainable future, (42%) indicated a demand for training.

Table 5

Business demand for resources to implement sustainable tourism

Resources	%
Detailed information	69%
Training	42%
Mentoring	20%
Funding to convert	56%
Other	6%

The 'other' answer contained responses suggesting marketing support of sustainable initiatives. Assessing the demand for sustainable tourism in Ireland would be incomplete without taking into account the UNEP-UNWTO (2005) aims of sustainable tourism. The study investigated whether tourism

businesses and holidaymakers expressed a demand to incorporate the aims of sustainable tourism in the management of the Irish tourism industry. In particular, economic viability prevailed as most ‘important’ by the tourism businesses (95%) possibly due to their operating primarily for economic gain. After all, economic benefits are usually the general driving force to serve tourists and have tourism development (Cooper, Fletcher, Fyall, Gilbert & Wanhill, 2008).

Table 6
Social and economic aims of sustainable tourism

Criteria	Stakeholder group	Important	Not important	Don't know
Economic viability	Holidaymaker	81%	7%	12%
	Tourism business	95%	1%	4%
Local prosperity	Holidaymaker	67%	22%	11%
	Tourism business	85%	10%	5%
Employment quality	Holidaymaker	71%	15%	14%
	Tourism business	84%	9%	7%
Social equity	Holidaymaker	70%	15%	15%
	Tourism business	62%	22%	16%

Local prosperity was regarded more important by tourism businesses (85%) than the holidaymakers (67%), likewise with employment quality. It is encouraging that the tourism businesses regard employment quality with such importance. Culture heritage aspect of sustainable tourism has been gaining importance recently not only for economic gains but due to more sustainable approaches. A reason for this growth in concern is possibly due to the prediction made by the UNWTO (2009) that cultural tourism will be one of the five key tourism markets of the future.

Table 7
Cultural heritage aims of sustainable tourism

Criteria	Stakeholder group	Important	Not important	Don't know
Visitor fulfilment	Holidaymaker	90%	4%	6%
	Tourism business	94%	3%	3%
Local control	Holidaymaker	57%	21%	23%
	Tourism business	60%	25%	15%
Community wellbeing	Holidaymaker	83%	7%	11%
	Tourism business	83%	10%	7%
Cultural richness	Holidaymaker	87%	6%	7%
	Tourism business	86%	8%	6%

From the twelve aims, visitor fulfilment is regarded the most important by both the holidaymakers (90%) and tourism businesses (94%). On the other hand, local control was the weakest of the twelve aims yet the demand for its incorporation in the management of the industry is still apparent. Also,

community wellbeing is fundamental as it attempts to get the balance right in the volume, timing and location of visits. It was regarded important by an equal percentage of the respondents (83%). However, the integration of these aims would be incomplete without consideration for the environment.

Tourism produces direct and indirect impacts on the environment and natural resources. As a result, the management of the physical integrity, biological diversity, resource efficiency and environmental purity is fundamental to the management of Ireland's desired natural aspects.

Table 8
Environmental aims of sustainable tourism

Criteria	Stakeholder group	Important	Not important	Don't know
Physical integrity	Holidaymaker	90%	4%	6%
	Tourism business	91%	4%	5%
Biological diversity	Holidaymaker	81%	8%	11%
	Tourism business	84%	8%	8%
Resource efficiency	Holidaymaker	74%	12%	14%
	Tourism business	83%	9%	8%
Environmental purity	Holidaymaker	87%	6%	7%
	Tourism business	90%	4%	6%

Without proper management and the integration of these aims, the tourism industry may result in the absence of an attractive environment. Without this, there would be little tourism (Mathieson & Wall, 1982). The findings show that there was no major difference among the social and economic, cultural heritage and environmental aims.













Sustainable tourism certification has been established as an effective tool for the sustainable management of tourism (Honey, 2002; Bien, 2007). But, low levels of awareness of certification are a factor which hinders the success of certification programs (Hamele, 2002; Hansen, 2007).

Table 9
Awareness of sustainable tourism certification

Stakeholder group	Yes	No
Holidaymaker	18%	82%
Tourism business	31%	69%

The level of awareness of sustainable tourism certification was low, more so from the holidaymakers (18%) than the tourism businesses (31%). This low level of awareness could be partially due to ineffective marketing (Font, 2001; Honey, 2002).

Table 10
Recognition of tourism certification labels

						
Holidaymaker	12%	12%	28%	6%	77%	10%
Tourism business	13%	29%	42%	8%	90%	14%
						
Holidaymaker	10%	7%	19%	9%	4%	27%
Tourism business	6%	4%	35%	6%	6%	25%

Yet international labels received a greater level of recognition. The findings support that an effectively marketed and international label may be more universally identifiable (Buckley, 2002; Font, 2002) in contrast to those local and national. For example holidaymaker recognition of the local Greenbox eco label was recognised by (4%), the national Green Hospitality Award (12%) and the international Fairtrade (77%).

Table 11
Demand for one sustainable tourism certification label

Question	Stakeholder group	Yes	Stakeholder group	Yes
The variety of sustainable tourism certification labels causes confusion?	Holidaymaker	69%	Tourism business	73%
Preference to have one label that is recognised globally	Holidaymaker	78%	Tourism business	73%

Yet both the holidaymakers (69%) and tourism businesses (73%) agree the variety of sustainable tourism certification labels cause confusion. This finding is consistent with theory (Honey & Steward, 2002; Hansen, 2007; Bowen & Clarke, 2009; Weeden & Simcock, 2010). Furthermore, they indicated a preference for one certification label that is recognised globally. Also, a concern of greenwashing associated with certification claims was identified. Over half of the holidaymakers (61%) and tourism businesses (58%) “strongly agree/agree” that not all labelled with certification are authentic and sometimes they are greenwashing.

Table 12

Potential greenwashing associated with certification claims

Stakeholder group	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
Holidaymaker	18%	43%	22%	3%	1%	14%
Tourism business	23%	35%	22%	6%	nil	14%

Q: Not all labelled with certification are authentic, sometimes they are greenwashing.

These findings attest certification has been hurt by a lack of credibility (Honey, 2002; Mil-Homens, 2011). Certification without credibility does not have a market. To combat potential greenwashing associated with certification claims, it is important to endorse credible programs that are verified by an independent third party.

Table 13

Importance of verification by an independent third party

Stakeholder group	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
Tourism business	30%	29%	22%	7%	1%	11%

The tourism businesses (59%) agreed with this assertion. It is essential if certification is to be meaningful and to prevent greenwashing (Font, 2001; Bien, 2006). The findings are a positive indication of how tourism businesses demand credibility. Additionally, this research found positive indications of a holidaymaker demand for sustainable tourism certified products and services.

Table 14

Demand for sustainable tourism certified products and services

Stakeholder group	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
Holidaymaker	15%	45%	29%	4%	1%	6%

Findings from this study disagree with both Budeanu (2007) and Buckley (2012) who stated few tourists select sustainable products specifically. The holidaymakers to Ireland are influenced by sustainable tourism certified products and services as (60%) 'strongly agree/agree' they would choose to use a tourism product or service that has sustainable tourism certification. It was however established that 40% of the holidaymakers 'don't know' if they would pay more for a sustainable tourism certified product or service, yet 36% would.

Table 15

Pay more for a sustainable tourism certified product or service

Stakeholder group	Yes	No	Don't know
Holidaymaker	36%	24%	40%

A similar proposition had been asked by Fáilte Ireland (2008), “Are holidaymakers willing to pay more for green alternatives?”, only 20% of the respondents selected ‘It’s worth paying more’ with 52% indicating it ‘is not worth paying more’. More research is needed to identify if the holidaymaker’s intention is different from their purchasing behaviour. But findings specific to the demand for sustainable tourism certification in Ireland had not been established to date.

Table 16
Demand for sustainable certification in Ireland

Stakeholder group	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
Holidaymaker	23%	45%	24%	3%	1%	4%
Tourism business	21%	30%	32%	8%	3%	6%

Both the holidaymakers (68%) and tourism businesses (51%) ‘strongly agree/agree’ that it is essential to have certification in the tourism industry in Ireland. The findings indicate the need for the Irish tourism sector to implement certification as a demand has been identified.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the majority of the 1,356 domestic and overseas holidaymakers and the sample of 369 national tourism businesses understand the concept of sustainable tourism. The holidaymakers (66%) and national tourism businesses (63%) demand that ‘all tourism should be sustainable’. However, in order for sustainable tourism to be achieved, specific actions must be taken at national and local level. For example, it is recommended that Fáilte Ireland (NTDA) communicate the attitudes of key stakeholders on sustainable tourism to the wider tourism industry. It is further recommended that the issues raised by this study be prioritised and addressed within national development strategies and Local Authority development plans. It is advocated that the provision of relevant mechanisms to support the industry in the transition to the sustainable management of tourism are put in place.

This study concluded that 79% of the sample of Irish tourism businesses will demand support to convert to sustainable tourism if this is required. They further demand resources in the form of detailed information, funding, training and mentoring to implement sustainable tourism. It is recommended that a core commitment of support is given by the NTDA, RTA, LEADER and the educational bodies. The provision of detailed information on the conversion to the sustainable management of tourism is recommended. There is a further recommendation that training and mentoring is established and provided by the NTDA to the Irish tourism businesses on the sustainable management of tourism. Also in relation to the UNEP-UNWTO (2005) aims of sustainable tourism, a high level of importance was expressed for these to be incorporated in the management of the Irish tourism industry. This was expressed by both holidaymakers and tourism businesses. The aims of sustainable tourism should be included as the scope of effective sustainable management of tourism (UNEP-UNWTO, 2005; Flanagan, *et al.*, 2007). It is recommended that training is provided to the industry on how they may incorporate these throughout their management practices.

The study concludes that international sustainable tourism certification labels attain a greater level of recognition by the tourism businesses and holidaymakers than national and local labels. It was found that the proliferations of labels generate confusion and there is a preference for one label that is recognised globally. There is however, concern for greenwashing. The tourism businesses agreed that it is important to have certification verified by an independent third party. It is recommended that the NTDA promotes a globally recognised GSTC compliant certification program to the tourism industry. Two of Ireland's leading attractions, Guinness Storehouse and the Cliffs of Moher have implemented the Sustainable Travel International certification which conforms to the GSTC. It is recommended that the benefits to be gained from implementing certification are communicated in order to encourage the tourism industry to self-regulate. This would save the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), NTDA and County Councils (Local Authorities) the cost of enforcement and regulation of the sustainable management of tourism. It is suggested that the NTDA communicate the importance of certification to these bodies and outline the cost savings to be made through its implementation.

Until now, the Irish tourism industry has not examined the attitudes of the key stakeholders on sustainable tourism in Ireland. Ireland's natural resources are a main contributing factor for attracting holidaymakers to visit Ireland; therefore tourism destinations are reliant on effective sustainable management to ensure the protection of these desired aspects. Several recommendations were offered by respondents to encourage uptake of certification. Further research would provide valuable insight into these individuals' motivations, their corporate decision-making and how they might balance the financial imperatives of business with their personal ethical beliefs.

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