

**SUSTAINABLE TOURISM: DEVELOPING LOCAL CAPACITY FRAMEWORKS - THE COLEAD (COOPERATING FOR LEADERSHIP IN TOURISM) INITIATIVE****Andrew Jones <sup>a</sup>, Sheena Carlisle <sup>b</sup>, Giusy Cardia <sup>a</sup> & Silvia Barbone <sup>c</sup>**<sup>a</sup> *University of Malta*, <sup>b</sup> *Cardiff Metropolitan University* & <sup>c</sup> *JLAG Ltd***ABSTRACT**

This study analyses the importance of sustainability in tourism and how it can be implemented in the management of tourism projects and destinations through a clear and structured methodology utilising the PM4SD (Project Management for Sustainable Development) approach to project implementation. The methods applied to this paper focus on a review and evaluation of the CoLead project and its effectiveness in transferring sustainable tourism projects from theory into practice. This study is based upon two case studies, in Bulgaria and Wales and have adopted a broad qualitative approach based upon in depth interviews with key protagonists and participants associated with the project. The paper's findings raise questions regarding broader applicability, sustained support, stakeholder participation and long term management and funding for the continuation for such projects. In this respect the paper concludes with broader lessons that can perhaps be learnt from projects such as CoLead.

**Keywords** *Sustainable Tourism; capacity building; project implementation.***COLEAD – DEVELOPING CAPACITY IN SUSTAINABLE TOURISM**

Co-operation for Leadership in Tourism (CoLead) is a European project, co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Commission working in partnership with the University of Malta, Cardiff Metropolitan University, JLAG, INTASAVE and the Bulgarian Economic Forum. Launched in 2016 CoLead will aim to implement the Project Management for Sustainable Development (PM4SD) methodology as a blended learning capacity building tool that will train and empower professionals, civil servants and trainers with appropriate management skills and expertise to design and deliver transformative sustainable tourism projects (CoLead, 2016). This will encompass: the development of 12 brand new case studies demonstrating the application of PM4SD in live and past projects; the development of new online training materials for a new online training platform and an up-to-date revision of the PM4SD handbook. In addition the implementation of the project will be primarily based upon two five day 'pilot training programmes' using The PM4SD training structure. First, in Sofia Bulgaria and second, in Cardiff Wales UK. Through the use of an online platform, timetabled lectures, case studies and small group interaction, the pilot training will aim to build management capacity for tourism management skills and enhance future contributions to sustainability for key stakeholders. The training will aim to provide both the knowledge and understanding to work effectively within a project management team to successfully deliver a sustainable tourism project. In turn the project aims to build capacity in order to apply and understand methods that utilise criteria such as PM4SD effectively within a project.

***From Theory to practice***

The importance of sustainable tourism has been recently reiterated by the UN in its declaration of 'International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development' (UN, 2017). The declaration, which represents key interests across tourism sectors follows the notion that well-designed and well-managed tourism can contribute to the three dimensions of sustainable development.

It is possible to identify numerous definitions of sustainable tourism (Garrod and Fyall, 1998; Benckendorff & Lund-Durlacher, 2013; Edgell, 2016) and some common aspects identified in the Encyclopaedia of Sustainable Tourism (Cater et al 2015). Normally these definitions recognise that

the benefits and costs of tourism may be represented by economic, environmental, and socio-cultural impacts (Weaver, 2005; Miller, 2005).

Many authors, nevertheless, see sustainable tourism as an overloaded concept (Sharpley, 2012). Questions concerning the effective implementation of sustainability in tourism are very pertinent in this respect. In this context the management of sustainability in tourism is commonly represented by the temporal dimension which recognizes that tourism has impacts that are generated today but will be experienced in the future (Cohen and Higham, 2011). Moreover, community involvement in tourism has also been a core issue at the centre of the sustainability debate (Beeton, 2006; Messer; 2010).

Generally sustainability principles can be transferred to the implementation of programmes and projects through the use of 'sustainability indicators' which, according to the UNWTO, provide essential instruments for policy making, planning and management processes at tourism destinations (WTO, 2004). The most known indicators for implementing sustainable tourism include for example Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC); the European Indicators for Sustainable Tourism (ETIS); the QUALITYTEST and the ECOLABEL. Despite such tools there is a general recognition that it remains difficult to implement sustainability without a concrete methodology to implement projects and activities to support sustainable development.

Although the recent policy developments have increased the awareness of the importance of sustainability of tourism, concrete progress has been weak due to the inability to transform policies into action. PM4SD has gone some way to fill this gap. PM4SD is a specialised certification scheme for Project Managers working across tourism sectors. The methodology was developed by APMG-International in partnership with the Foundation for Sustainable Tourism (FEST), an organization dedicated to supporting governments, academies and organisations that plan, deliver and manage tourism programs and projects with sustainability (PM4SD, 2015).

PM4SD is based on PRINCE2 (Projects In Controlled Environments), a structured method for effective project management, the "de facto" standard used extensively by the UK Government and widely recognised and used in the public and private sector, both in the UK and internationally. The principles aims of PM4SD focus on several factors that provide key indicators for evaluating sustainability. These for example include criteria that assess: I) design and implementation II) project management III) productivity vis-à-vis cost IV) team management V) use of internationally recognized sustainable tourism indicators VI) public-private partnerships VII) design innovation, and VIII) international best practice. It is the prime focus adopted by CoLead which aims to build local regional and national capacity by shifting policy from theory to practice.

This study thus evaluates the importance of sustainability in tourism within the context of project management and project implementation. In turn it evaluates how local tourism projects and initiatives can be managed, at one level, by applying the theoretical notions of sustainable tourism whilst addressing at another level more practical or pragmatic elements and techniques which can be applied to assist with the practical implementation of a project's sustainability. In this context, the CoLead project provides a practical framework for developing capacity building tools that follow a clear and structured project management methodology such as PM4SD.

### ***The research approach***

The methods applied to this paper focus on a review of the CoLead project and its effectiveness in transferring projects from theory into practice. The methods to evaluate the project based upon two case studies in Bulgaria and Wales –UK have adopted both action research through a participatory action research platform and a broader qualitative approach based upon in depth interviews with key protagonists and participants associated with the project. In this context the key objectives of the project evaluation aim to assess the ongoing implementation of the CoLead Project and lessons that can be learnt at the outset. It is still early days with another two years of the project remaining. Thus

far however, there are certain indicators and experiences of feedback from the project team and from the early initiatives and experiences from participants and key stakeholders that provide an understanding of the current merits, pitfalls and challenges that confront a project of this nature. In essence the research objectives of this evaluation will aim:

1. To present and evaluate thus far, the framework and implementation plan for the CoLead Project
2. To present and assess the methodology to support building capacity for sustainable tourism within the CoLead Project and challenges experienced thus far.
3. To present and evaluate the initial findings from the CoLead training programme and the merits, pitfalls and challenges that will confront the project for the remaining two years.

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Although in its initial stages the results from the project can conclude, thus far, that the role of CoLead, can be an important tool for boosting sustainable tourism development and can create keen local interest from local partners. In a broader context despite the temporary nature of such projects, results also suggest that if such projects are designed, planned, and managed well they can facilitate the acquisition of the necessary resources for the stimulation of local tourism sustainability. Early and initial feedback over the first year of the project suggests that although there are benefits it is, nevertheless, a one off initiative with the constraints and limitations of a two pronged case study approach. In this respect issues associated with broader applicability and application, sustained and limited funding, participation, collaboration and stakeholder engagement remain key challenges that have already been experienced or reported. As such, the experience of CoLead can provide broader lessons from which sustainable tourism theoretical perspectives and principles can be applied and put into practice. As always there remain questions regarding broader applicability, sustained support and long term management and continuation for such projects. In this respect the paper concludes with broader lessons that can perhaps be learnt from projects such as CoLead

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