
Climate Change Mitigation among Accommodation Providers in the South West of England: Comparisons between Members and Non-Members of Networks

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Introduction

This paper explores the relationship between network membership and innovation towards more sustainable tourism development. In particular it examines the extent to which tourism businesses have introduced measures to mitigate the effects of climate change within their operations.

In recent studies of the changing dynamics of the tourism sector, the concepts of innovation and knowledge transfer have featured prominently (Shaw and Williams 2009; Hall and Williams 2008). In a growing body of knowledge, it is argued that innovation among businesses and organisations is vital in order to be able respond to contemporary challenges, in particular in the area of sustainable tourism (Hjalagar 1996, 1997). New challenges require original interventions. For instance, although innovation is a fuzzy concept with multiple and contested meanings (Coles et al 2009), recent studies have highlighted its importance in both mitigation of, and adaptation to, climate change (Hall 2006; Saarinen and Tervo 2006). In other words, the more innovative businesses become the greater their ability to respond successfully. Innovations may be relatively modest in scope, such as converting to A-rated appliances or adding insulation. Alternatively, they may be radical and associated with new technologies or inventions, such as using Photovoltaic cells, so-called 'Smart Metering' or the latest wood chip boilers. Businesses innovate at different rates but the key challenge, as so-called 'Wedge Theory' (Stern 2007) acknowledges, is to encourage as many businesses as possible to innovate towards mitigation and as soon as practicable. Otherwise under 'business as usual' scenarios total emissions are likely to continue to rise in a sector that already accounts for around 5% of global CO₂ emissions (UNWTO 2007).

Innovation seldom takes place in perfect isolation. Businesses and organisations are better placed to respond to contemporary challenges where they exchange knowledge in the form of information, experiences, skills, expertise, best practices and technological insights. Networks offer a medium for such exchanges. Conventional wisdom suggests that the more extensive and/or efficient the network, the greater the likelihood for circulation to the benefit of all members. As sustainable development is in the common good, networks would appear an ideal means to encourage the spread of more responsible and innovative practices. Not surprisingly, a variety of networking

arrangements, architectures and interactions have been identified as a means by which to enhance the delivery of sustainable tourism (Bramwell and Lane 2000; Coles 2008).

As a result, a number of associations, organisations and professional bodies at a range of geographical scales from the local to the supra-national have been established in order to promote the principles and practices of sustainable development in tourism. By implication, if the mission of such networks is to facilitate knowledge exchange to encourage change, it is reasonable to assume that members should exhibit enhanced levels of awareness of and practices in sustainable business issues (if the network functions efficiently and/or is adding value). There have, though, been few attempts to examine empirically the extent to which members practice the principles of sustainable business compared to non-members. In short, the specific research question which is addressed by this short paper is 'does network membership really result in higher levels of sustainable business practice in tourism, in particular in the area of climate change mitigation?'