Putting Social Impact Assessment to the Test as a Method for Implementing Responsible Tourism Practice

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Biosketches

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Abstract:

The discourse on the social impacts of tourism needs to shift from the current descriptive critique of tourism to considering what can be done in actual practice to embed the management of tourism's social impacts into the existing planning, product development and operational processes of tourism businesses. A pragmatic approach for designing research methodologies, social management systems and initial actions, which is shaped by the real world operational constraints and existing systems used in the tourism industry, is needed. Our pilot study with a small Bulgarian travel company put social impact assessment (SIA) to the test to see if it could provide this desired approach and assist in implementing responsible tourism development practice, especially in small tourism businesses. Our findings showed that our adapted SIA method has value as a practical method for embedding a responsible tourism approach. While there were some challenges, SIA proved to be effective in assisting the staff of our test case tourism business to better understand their social impacts on their local communities and to identify actions to take.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Since the 1970s, the social impacts of tourism on host communities has been the subject of great debate amongst social scientists and an increasing range of tourism stakeholders as part of the worldwide movement towards sustainable development (Cohen, 1972; Crick, 1989; Deery et al., 2011; Wall and Mathieson, 2006). Today, the inherent difficulties of understanding and measuring the social impacts of tourism continue to hinder progress in taking action and responsibility for actively managing these social impacts in practice. Existing approaches to measuring the social impacts of tourism – including empirical research attempting to find scientific and statistically robust answers (Deery, 2011), the preoccupation with certification schemes (Font, 2013), and the development of social indicators using a triple bottom line (TBL) approach (Goodwin, 2007) – have all been criticised for not being successful in achieving better management of the social issues created by the tourism industry and for being unsuitable for small businesses (i.e. most tourism enterprises) to implement (Font, 2013; Stoddard et al., 2012; Vanclay, 2004).

Whilst encouraging progress within the tourism sector has been made over the last decade in terms of implementing environmental management systems (EMS) (Carruthers and Vanclay, 2012, 2007; Dodds and Joppe, 2005), the systematic management of the social impacts of tourism activities lags far behind (Blackstock et al., 2008; Buckley, 2012; Font et al., 2012; Mihalic, 2014; Mowforth and Munt, 2009). The view taken here is that the debate on the social impacts of tourism needs to shift to developing what can be done in practice to embed the management of these social impacts into the existing planning, product development and operational processes of the key tourism stakeholders, such as local government, local communities and private sector tour operators and travel agents. In order to engage these key stakeholders in responsible behaviour change, we argue that what is needed is a pragmatic approach for designing research methodologies, social management systems and initial actions

that is shaped by the real world operational constraints and existing systems used by tourism businesses.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the potential of social impact assessment (SIA) to provide a practical method to assist in responsible tourism development and facilitate the pragmatic approach hitherto lacking. We considered this by conducting a trial study in Bulgaria to investigate whether SIA could be effectively embedded into the existing processes and operations of a local travel company (Odysseia-In). Odysseia-In specialises in adventure and cultural tours in rural communities in Bulgaria. Our research also sought to build the capacity of Odysseia-In staff to own and use the SIA process so that they could better understand and demonstrate what they are doing to be a responsible travel company, and more actively manage their social impacts as part of their commitment to pioneering responsible tourism practice in Bulgaria.

Our study addressed this need for practical assistance in the tourism industry by 'putting SIA to the test' to see how useful SIA might be in responsible tourism practice, and by identifying any practical adaptations needed to make SIA suitable in this small business context. In theory, the SIA approach with its values, principles and methods (Esteves et al., 2012; Vanclay, 2003; Vanclay et al. 2015) has a lot in common with responsible tourism, but in practice there has been very little attention to investigate how SIA might be useful as part of a management approach that embraces responsible tourism in line with the sustainability objectives of the Cape Town Declaration on Responsible Tourism in Destinations (ICRTD, 2002).

2. SOCIAL IMPACTS OF TOURISM

The social impacts of tourism have been much considered in the academic tourism literature (Cohen, 1972; Deery et al., 2011; Leslie, 2012; Rutty et al., 2015; Wall and Mathieson, 2006). As in SIA (Vanclay, 2002), social impacts are typically understood as not being limited to a narrow or restrictive understanding of 'social'. Fox (1977:27) defined the social and cultural impacts of tourism as "the ways in which tourism is contributing to changes in value systems, individual behaviour, family structure and relationships, collective lifestyles, safety levels, moral conduct, creative expressions, traditional ceremonies and community organizations".

The interpretation of tourism impacts thus connects with the understanding of social impacts in the SIA field, "all social and cultural consequences to human populations of any public or private actions that alter the ways in which people live, work, play, relate to one another, organise to meet their needs, and generally cope as members of society" (Burdge and Vanclay, 1996:59).

There is a large body of literature which blames the tourism industry (including tour operators and travel agents) for the negative social and cultural impacts on host communities, including issues such as cultural change, increased crime, an increase in begging and gambling, local people being pushed out by rising prices and sometimes forcibly evicted, in-migration of outsiders, increased sex industry activity and visibility, the devaluing of local language and culture, and an inequitable distribution of the profits from tourism (Deery et al., 2011; Easterling, 2004; Wall and Mathieson, 2006). Tourism is also credited with positive consequences, such as: the broadening of international peace and understanding; reinforcing the preservation of heritage and culture; reducing religious, racial and language barriers; and enhancing the appreciation of one's own culture (Wall and Mathieson, 2006).

Commencing from the classic works of Erik Cohen (1972; 1974; 1979) and Valene Smith's (1978; 1989), '*Hosts and Guests*', a distinct anthropology of tourism has emerged. Whilst other scholars typically recognised some benefits of tourism, anthropologists tended to raise concern that tourism damaged culture, which was evident in the key concepts of this anthropology of tourism discourse, such as: 'acculturation', where the borrowing of some elements of other cultures takes place as a result of the contact between different societies (Burns, 1999; Nunez, 1989); 'Doxey's irridex' (or index of irritation) relating to the nature of the relationship between tourists and their host communities (Doxey, 1976); the 'commodification of culture', in which the cultural meaning of cultural activities and artefacts is lost because of changes in their production needed to suit tourist consumers (Greenwood, 1989); and the 'invasion of private backspaces' by tourists in search of 'authenticity' (MacCannell, 1973).

Much recent literature (e.g. Archer et al., 2005; Burns and Novelli, 2008; Deery, 2011; Wall and Mathieson, 2006; Skinner and Theodossopoulos, 2011; Singh, 2012; Van Beek and Schmidt, 2012) is increasingly moving away from the tendency to categorise the impacts of tourism exclusively into either the advocacy platform (the good) or the controversy platform (the bad) (Jafari, 2001). There is a noticeable shift towards a more balanced perspective that recognises that the consequences of tourism have become increasingly complex (Wall and Mathieson,

2006). It is accepted, for example, that the commercialization of culture might revive interest in traditional art forms as well as having the potential to modify them substantially. There is also increasing awareness that the complexity of tourism may make impact impossible to measure. "Many of the impacts of tourism are manifested in subtle and often unexpected ways … primary impacts give rise to secondary and tertiary impacts and generate a myriad of successive repercussions which it is usually impracticable to trace and monitor" (Wall and Mathieson, 2006:6).

Deery (2012:65), who is critical of the literature on the social impacts of tourism, considered there was a "dominance of a quantitative paradigm which has not facilitated a deep understanding of the impacts of tourism". She also considered that: "The research undertaken to date has tended to provide lists of impacts without a clear understanding of how perceptions of these impacts were formed and, more importantly, how such perceptions could be changed if necessary" (Deery, 2012:65). While there is "reasonable agreement as to the nature of the impacts and the variables which influence residents' perceptions, recent quantitative research does not provide an in-depth insight into the reasons for residents' perceptions and the subsequent consequences of such perceptions" (Deery, 2011:2). In other words, there is a focus on examining the symptoms of the problem rather than its inherent causes. This compounds the related problem that there is limited academic research on what can be done by tourism stakeholders to responsibly manage these social impacts in practice and to address their related sustainability challenges. Similarly, the practical guidance documents available in the grey literature on how to implement sustainability, whilst an improvement on what is offered through academia, are also limited in terms of making specific recommendations for tourism businesses to identify and implement social impact management systems and associated measures.

However, regardless of what the literature has to say, there are increasing external social pressures on tourism (and other) businesses to go beyond the strict requirements of the law or the market place to manage their impacts (Buckley and de Vasconcellos Pegas, 2013). Depending on the country of operations, these pressures include to: "minimise social impacts associated with differences in wealth and culture; provide employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for local residents; train staff and customers in cultural sensitivity; contribute directly to local community health and education; encourage philanthropy in cases where rich

tourists visit poor communities; and negotiate and uphold fair leases and contracts with community landowners" (Buckley and de Vasconcellos Pegas, 2013: 522).

3. RESPONSIBLE TOURISM

Building on the Brundtland Commission's definition of sustainable development (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987) and the inclusion of tourism in the sustainable development agenda arising from the World Conference on Environment and Development (or Earth Summit) in Rio de Janiero in 1992, the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) in 1993 defined sustainable tourism development very generally as "meeting the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunity for the future" (cited by Sharpley, 2000). Sustainable tourism has now been redefined as "tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities" (UNEP and UNWTO, 2005:11).

Many argue that the meanings of 'sustainable development' and 'sustainable tourism' remain vague or fuzzy and consequently difficult to operationalize (Berno and Bricker, 2001; Mihalic, 2014; Miller and Twining-Ward, 2005; Sharpley and Telfer, 2015; Wall and Mathieson, 2006; Weaver, 2006). Whilst recognizing that the imprecision of these concepts has political advantages in that it "allows many different interests to sit at a common table with the potential for exchange of views and, hopefully, learning" (Wall and Mathieson, 2006:292), critics feel that that this imprecision reduces its scientific validity and hampers its application as an analytical and practical tool (Buckley, 2012; Wall and Mathieson, 2006; Wheeller, 1991, 1993).One critic of sustainable tourism is Harold Goodwin, a founder of the responsible tourism approach, who argued that:

> "sustainable development lacks definition and measurable indicators to determine whether or not tourism is being successfully managed towards sustainability by government. Lip service is paid to the concept: it is used to generate work for consultants and NGOs, to bolster the reputation of companies and governments, but rarely are the outcomes measured or reported … The concept appears to be operative and is often used to secure resources and support, but in practice the principles are not applied, the concept is inoperative, the objectives are not achieved. It is left to someone else. Responsibility is not taken" (Goodwin, 2011:16).

It was in response to such criticism, alongside changes in consumer demand and the evident negative impacts of the post-war tourism boom, that responsible tourism emerged. Whilst the term was first used in the early 1990s to describe alternative (to mass) forms of tourism and understood as being broadly synonymous with sustainable tourism at the time (Sharpley, 2013), it is now promoted as a conceptually distinctive approach or social movement (Diani, 2000; Goodwin, 2011) for managing all forms of tourism, rather than being a particular type of tourism or a niche market (Goodwin, 2011; Hall; Scheyvens, 2011; Sharpley and Telfer, 2015). This current approach to responsible tourism builds on the objectives of sustainable tourism and requires that "producers and consumers identify sustainability issues which they can address, that they take responsibility for doing so and demonstrate the outcomes. At the core of Responsible Tourism is the ethic of responsibility, the willingness and capacity to respond, to exercise responsibility" (Goodwin, 2011:31).

This focus on the ethic of responsibility was greatly influenced by Jost Krippendorf (1982; 1987) who argued that ecology should be placed before the economy in tourism, not only for the sake of the economy but for all who participate in it. He advocated a new form of tourism that would "bring the greatest possible benefit to all the participants – travellers, the host population and the tourist businesses, without causing intolerable ecological and social damage" Krippendorf (1987:106). This new form of tourism that directs our attention to behaviour and actions by individuals that are influenced by ethical principles was essentially the agenda for responsible tourism (Blackstock et al., 2008; Leslie, 2012).

This agenda was formalised at the first International Conference on Responsible Tourism in Destinations, which was held in 2002 in Cape Town, South Africa, and resulted in the 'Cape Town Declaration on Responsible Tourism' and associated guiding principles (ICRTD, 2002). The Cape Town Declaration used the triple bottom line approach as the basis of its foundational principles about the social, economic and environmental responsibility of tourism. It specified what should be implemented to have a positive impact in a tourism destination. For example, one guiding principle for social responsibility is to "assess social impacts throughout the life cycle of the operation – including the planning and design phases of projects – in order to minimise negative impacts and maximise positive ones" (ICRTD, 2002). The Cape Town Declaration identified seven main areas of focus for the development of a tourist destination in a way that is locally appropriate (see Box 1).

Box 1: Characteristics of Responsible Tourism

(Source: International Conference on Responsible Tourism in Destinations, 2002:1)

- minimises negative economic, environmental, and social impacts;
- generates greater economic benefits for local people and enhances the well-being of host communities, improves working conditions and access to the industry;
- involves local people in decisions that affect their lives and life chances;
- makes positive contributions to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage, to the maintenance of the world's diversity;
- provides more enjoyable experiences for tourists through more meaningful connections with local people, and a greater understanding of local cultural, social and environmental issues;
- provides access for physically challenged people; and
- is culturally sensitive, engenders respect between tourists and hosts, and builds local pride and confidence.

Responsible tourism is thus a "sustainable approach to the practice of tourism" (Sharpley, 2013: 383) that can be characterised by an emphasis on the need to: change mainstream tourism; monitor and report on outcomes; be accountable for actions; develop in response to market forces; enable community involvement; involve the private sector in reducing poverty through business activity rather than just alleviating it through philanthropy; and use a 'pro-poor tourism approach' (Goodwin, 2011). The pro-poor tourism approach parallels 'pro-poor growth', i.e. economic growth in which the poor benefit disproportionately. Thus, pro-poor tourism is defined as tourism that generates net benefits to the poor, i.e. benefits are greater than costs (Bennett et al., 1999), and reflects a range of strategies in responsible tourism development which focus specifically on unlocking opportunities for the poor, for example by creating employment and market access for local businesses.

These practical objectives of responsible tourism have received fairly widespread acceptance by the sector (Goodwin, 2011) and it can be argued that it has "evolved into a tourism-specific manifestation of what is more broadly referred to as corporate social responsibility (CSR)" (Sharpley, 2013: 383). However, responsible tourism has not escaped criticism (Jenkins, 2002; Mowforth and Munt, 2009; Sharpley, 2013; Wheeller, 1992, 1994, 1997) and there are definitional and conceptual issues in light of its' ambiguous relationship with sustainable tourism (Mihalic, 2014; Sharpley, 2013) and its specific focus on 'responsibility' (Sharpley, 2013). Furthermore, the performance of pro-poor tourism in practice has been heavily criticised (Ashley and Goodwin, 2007; Mitchell and Ashley, 2007).

Of particular relevance here, critics argue that tourism studies, and by relation both sustainable and responsible tourism, is not a discipline and as such does not have its' own distinctive set of concepts, theories and ways of progressing, and it relies on a wide range of other disciplines for its' content (Tribe, 1997). It is argued that "responsible tourism is defined very much by its potential outcomes, not by the process or procedures necessary to achieve these outcomes" (Sharpley, 2013: 384). Whilst the Cape Town Declaration provides guidelines for economic, social and environmental responsibility, it is fair to say that it is often "not clear how responsible tourism or, more precisely, responsibility, might be achieved" (Sharpley, 2013: 384). Despite its focus on practice, responsible tourism does not have clearly defined methods for implementation (Blackstock et al, 2008), and in particular there is a gap in relation to how social impacts should be managed in a focused and systematic way using a range of strategies. Thus, the question remains as to how responsible tourism can become more effective in influencing how tourism businesses manage their social impacts in practice. In this paper we investigate whether SIA can assist with this challenge.

4. MANAGEMENT OF SOCIAL IMPACTS BY SMALL TOURISM BUSINESSES

Typically, external factors and internal organizational issues constrain the capacity and motivation of tourism businesses to manage their social impacts or to collaborate with the full range of stakeholders necessary to understand and respond to the social context (Font and Harris, 2004; Garay and Font, 2012). Small businesses face numerous barriers that account for their poor performance in terms of adopting sustainability practices (including social measures): lack of interest, inertia and ambivalence on the part of owners/managers; limited awareness and understanding of their environmental and other responsibilities; lack of time; lack of resources; costs involved (e.g. for 'green products'), lack of information; contentment with the status quo, operational barriers, lack of proof of benefits, consumer scepticism, aversion to risk consumer satisfaction, lack of supporting infrastructure; lack of availability and/or awareness of local products and produce (Leslie, 2007; Tzschentke et al., 2008a; Vernon et al., 2003).

Reconciling the tensions between economic viability and sustaining the social and environmental systems in which businesses operate is possible and desirable. This is

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demonstrated by the progress in the tourism sector over the last decade in implementing environmental management systems (Jovicic, 2011; Font et al., 2012). Conversely, despite some notable piecemeal achievements – e.g. the revised Travelife international and industry-led certification scheme and sustainability management system for hotels, accommodation and tour operators (Travelife, 2014) – the systematic management of the social impacts of a tourism business's activities is inadequate. In practice, the private sector in tourism typically adopts a rather limited, ad hoc approach to managing their social impacts through the implementation of their corporate social responsibility (CSR) or other internal sustainability management activities. There is not scope to elaborate further on the detail and debate surrounding these approaches here but they vary considerably according to the size and motivations of a business (Buckley and de Vasconcellos Pegas, 2013), and encompass a variety of existing sustainability techniques such as industry regulation, codes of conduct, environmental management systems, certification schemes, self-assessment and reporting initiatives, and a range of socio-economic responsibility initiatives and actions for employees and local communities (Buckley and de Vasconcellos Pegas, 2013; Font, 2004; Font et al, 2012; Garay and Font, 2012; Vernon et al., 2003).

This ad hoc approach and the associated techniques for managing sustainability are criticised for a preoccupation with the environment at the expense of socio-economic issues (Buckley, 2012; Font and Harris 2004; Font, 2013; Leslie, 2012; Tearfund, 2001). Mowforth and Munt (2009: 200) observe that the tourism industry perceives sustainability in a very narrow and efficiency-focussed way where "social, cultural, distributional effects may be more difficult to measure, but they could not be much further from consideration than they are at present". Another criticism is that many of these techniques are, ill-suited to small businesses for many reasons, including: the low level of environmental awareness of some owner-managers; the costs of compliance impacting disproportionately on small businesses; the amount of work involved; the limited availability of information and advice; and a poor fit with the existing culture and informal management approach (Essex et al., 2003; Font, 2013; Gerstenfeld and Roberts, 2000; Jarvis et al., 2010; Vernon et al., 2003). In other words, many tourism businesses lack the appropriate motivation, understanding, capacity, or mechanisms for identifying, measuring and managing their social impacts in a holistic, systematic and cost-efficient way.

We argue that a new, pragmatic and business-focused social impact management system, which is shaped by real world operational constraints, is needed to support tourism businesses to identify practical procedures to further embed the responsible management of their social impacts into their existing sustainability management approach/measures, organizational structures, planning, product development and operational processes and activities. In our research, we have made adaptations to the SIA method to develop such an approach, which we have trialed in a tourism operation in Bulgaria. Before describing this, however, we need to give some background on social impact assessment and how it was envisaged it could be applied and add value in the context of responsible tourism.

5. SOCIAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

SIA is about the processes of managing the social issues associated with planned interventions, and is a field of practice, discourse and paradigm in its own right, evolving since its origins in the early 1970s (Esteves et al., 2012; Vanclay 2003, 2006, 2012, 2014; Vanclay et al., 2015). Originally SIA was a technique for predicting the social impacts of a project as part of an environmental impact assessment (EIA). Now, contemporary SIA researchers and practitioners are interested in the "processes of analysing, monitoring and managing the intended and unintended social consequences, both positive and negative, of planned interventions and any social changes processes invoked by those interventions so as to bring about a more sustainable and equitable biophysical and human environment" (Vanclay, 2003:6).

Carrying out an SIA in practice is essentially a learning and iterative process comprising four sequential but overlapping phases: (i) understand the issues; (ii) predict, analyse and assess the likely impact pathways; (iii) develop and implement strategies; and (iv) design and implement monitoring programs. These phases involve undertaking some 26 tasks which vary according to context. The end result should be a social impact management plan (SIMP) and related management documents which provide an integrated set of actions and procedures to manage the social issues created by a project (Franks and Vanclay, 2013; Vanclay et al., 2015).

SIA has experienced many difficulties in practice (Vanclay, 2004, 2006; Harvey, 2011) and it is useful to elaborate on those difficulties here to assist in establishing the good practice used in

our trial, as well as to compare with the findings of our study. Vanclay and Esteves (2011), for example, considered there was a need for a shift in thinking from the traditional approach which saw SIA as being only a regulatory tool and/or a tool to identify and mitigate impacts to being a much more proactive approach to enhancing the benefits of projects through:

- being a source of data integrated within company decision-making systems;
- providing structured, regular information to the company about its social environment in a way that guides business planning processes;
- providing information to the community about the company's operations and their impacts; and
- involving the community in decisions around the most appropriate social investments.

Harvey (2011) provided a useful overview of many of the limitations of some SIA practice including: the poor treatment of the economic impacts and local involvement; too much emphasis on preservation and conservation of traditional ways of life at the expense of appreciating change that reflects what local people want; an emphasis on local people being weak and vulnerable which has encouraged the creation of paternalistic approaches generating dependency; attempts by SIA practitioners to construct a business case for SIA rarely convince; information is delivered in a form and language that is often alien to local communities; and that SIA only represents a point in time and fails to establish a regime that can consider evolving circumstances.

In response to these criticisms of SIA practice, Vanclay and Esteves (2011:12-17) looked to the future and highlighted some key points that need to be considered to improve SIA practice (summarised in Box 2). This framework for best practice in SIA was used in the development of the approach used for our trial.

Box 2: Good SIA Practice (Adapted from Vanclay and Esteves, 2011:12-17)

- SIA ought to incorporate and respect human rights, and to be ethical in how SIAs are conducted
- SIA should advocate that the principle of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) are observed by all project proponents
- It must be acknowledged that proponent-led SIA may not always have legitimacy in the eyes of the community, and that community-led processes will often be desirable, especially in Indigenous communities
- SIA should be more oriented towards how affected peoples can benefit from projects
- SIA should take a holistic approach and be integrated with human health and wellbeing issues; and broader social, economic and ecological sustainability
- SIA must be anchored in ethically robust theoretical foundations related to social change. SIA requires a greater understanding of foundational concepts such as scale, power, justice and sustainability, as well as the theoretical frameworks around inclusive, pluralist and participatory approaches
- SIA must include and facilitate meaningful public participation
- SIA must be aware of the possibility of conflict and take a major role in reducing conflict
- SIA should consider gender impacts and the differential distribution of impacts
- SIA should consider and address cumulative impacts more seriously
- SIA should consider project closure issues more, including at project planning
- SIA can be applied in a much wider range of settings than traditional project-based ex-ante assessment
- SIA should lead to the development of a social impact management plan (SIMP) (to be effective in terms of being the process of managing the social issues of projects)
- To be effective, SIA must be cognizant of organizational realities, and embedded in organizational processes and culture and adapt to the realities of the different stakeholders

In light of this review of SIA, the following bullet-points explain why SIA was identified as having potential to support tourism businesses to manage their social impacts more responsibly:

- the principles of SIA share much common-ground with the objectives of the Cape Town Declaration on Responsible Tourism and the pro-poor tourism principles
- SIA provides a formal and structured mechanism for the responsible management of the social impacts
- SIA is a practical method that can be integrated into each stage of the project or business planning cycle
- SIA facilitates the involvement of the community and other stakeholders in the decision-making process
- SIA emphasises adaptive management, the mitigation of harm and the enhancement of benefits

- SIA is cognizant of organizational realities and can be embedded into existing organizational processes
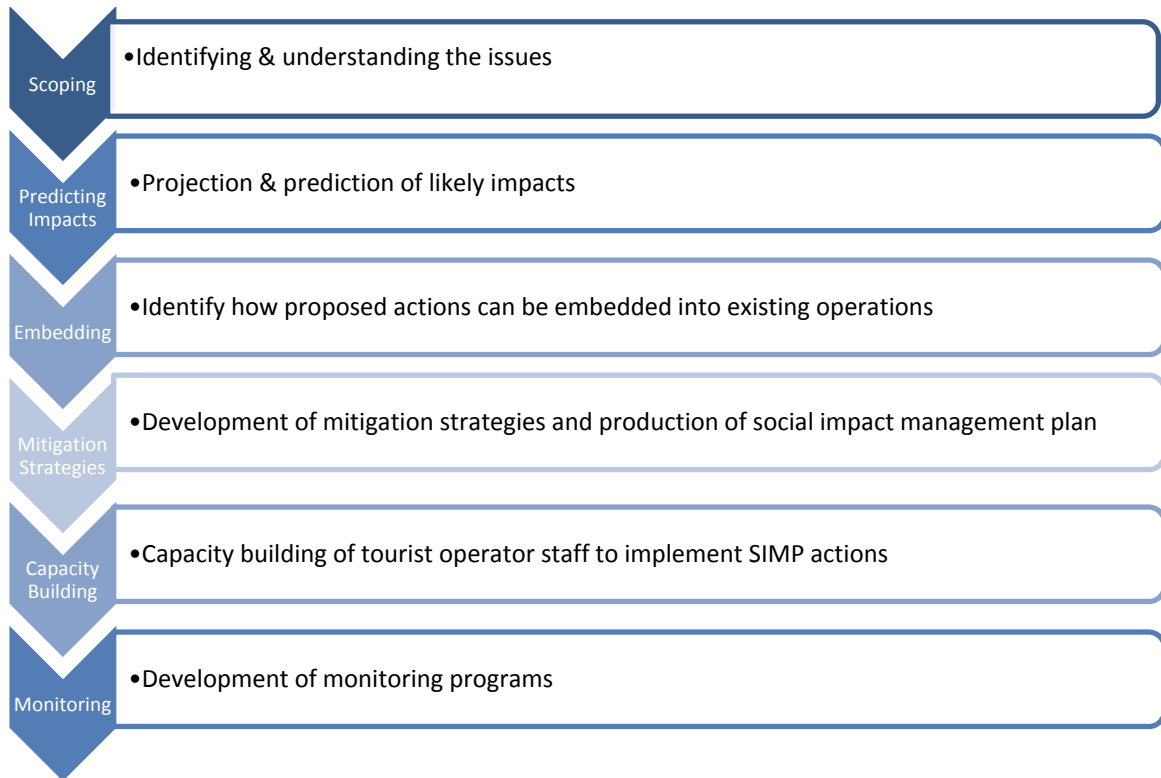- SIA is a well-established approach recognized internationally by other sectors.

6. PILOTING THE APPLICATION OF SIA IN A TOURISM CONTEXT

6.1 Overall research design

Our overall research design was originally intended to comprise the following steps. First, we would establish the current best practice framework of SIA and its potential utility for responsible tourism – which was synthesised from the current key SIA sources, namely Esteves and Vanclay (2009); Esteves et al. (2013); Vanclay (2003); and subsequently Vanclay et al (2015). Second, we would adapt the framework based on our understanding of the tourism industry. Third, we would pilot the framework in a real tourism context. Fourth, based on the pilot, we would adapt the framework as appropriate. In practice, the fourth and third phases overlapped in that the framework developed iteratively as it was being implemented in the field.

We started by using the generic framework of four phases as originally outlined in Esteves and Vanclay (2009) (developed further in Vanclay et al., 2015). Ultimately, in order to suit the tourism context and the specific needs of our particular test application, Odysseia-In, two additional phases were added – one to emphasise embedding the required management actions into the existing operations of the tourist operator; and the other to provide additional capacity building to assist tourist operator staff to implement the SIMP. Figure 1 summarises the six phases of the framework which are elaborated further below in terms of how they were actually applied in our test case.

Figure 1: Six Phases of the Trial Methodology

Phase	Description
Scoping	• Identifying & understanding the issues
Predicting Impacts	• Projection & prediction of likely impacts
Embedding	• Identify how proposed actions can be embedded into existing operations
Mitigation Strategies	• Development of mitigation strategies and production of social impact management plan
Capacity Building	• Capacity building of tourist operator staff to implement SIMP actions
Monitoring	• Development of monitoring programs

6.2 Methodology for the test case, Odysseia-In

In order to trial the SIA method in a responsible tourism context, a test case using a rapid and participatory SIA with a local travel company and with the communities in which it operates was conducted. The test case was selected by using the contacts of the researchers. Primarily because of the willingness of the company to assist, the test case chosen was Odysseia-In, a small Bulgarian in-bound tourism provider that is establishing walking tours designed to be sold by responsibletravel.com (a travel company selling responsible and eco travel packages). Odysseia-In is a family-owned special interest travel company which provides walking, skiing and adventure tours as well as cultural and village life experiences in Bulgaria for independent travellers and small groups largely from Europe. Their walking tours are primarily in rural areas of Bulgaria, and depending on the length of the tour involve visits to several villages.

Established in the 1990s, Odysseia-In has a local staff of approximately 16 office staff and guides. Company decisions are made largely by the founding owners based on both commercial considerations and their non-economic motivations and commitments towards

nature conservation and supporting local communities. These commitments and related activities are summarised in their responsible tourism policy available on their website (http://www.hiking-bulgaria.com/page/Responsible-Policy/2/index.html) which uses a triple bottom line approach to consider their impacts on their staff, local communities and Bulgarian tourism industry.

Two villages, Kalofer and Gorno Draglishte, were selected for study since they were among the main communities included in Odysseia-In's new responsible walking tour itineraries. These itineraries were designed in partnership with the PAN Parks Foundation to enable tourists to discover the area in a way which respects the natural environment and supports local businesses. Kalofer is a small, established tourism destination situated in the Central Balkan National Park, and has a declining population currently around 3,000 people. With substantial external funding, it has developed a range of tourism activities and infrastructure based on the natural attractions of the National Park and the town's cultural heritage (e.g. local traditions, folklore, Bulgarian Renaissance architecture, and local history, especially as the birthplace of the revolutionary hero, Hristo Botev) (Kalofer Ecotourism Association, 2014). In contrast to Kalofer, Gorno Draglishte is a small, rural village of around 1,000 people situated in South-West Bulgaria between three mountains in the Valley of Razlog. Following some small-scale external funding, Gorno Draglishte is slowly emerging as a small tourist destination based on its guesthouses, authentic local farming culture, and proximity to Rila National Park, Bansko ski resort and the famous Church of Saint Theodore Tyron.

The SIA methodology was tested by using the results from our observations and discussions with people in these villages to get an indication of the social impacts the walking tours create. We then used these findings to consider how Odysseia-In might change its overall operations to better monitor and manage their impacts across all the communities in which it operates.

The fieldwork was done in two stages by a research team consisting of two responsible tourism researchers, an expert in social impact assessment, and three Odysseia-In staff. The first stage comprised a ten day period in September 2011 where rapid, cost-effective and simple data collection methods were used to collect the required data for the different stages of the SIA and produce a SIMP. The second stage, in December 2012, was the capacity building stage which was designed to better understand the practical challenges facing Odysseia-In staff after it emerged that they had struggled to implement their SIMP without external

assistance. All research was done in an ethically-sound way, consistent with social research as undertaken in SIA (Vanclay et al., 2013).

Participatory workshops, key informant interviews and transect walks were the main methods used for our qualitative approach to research, which aimed to consider the impacts and benefits of tourism from the perspectives of those who are affected by tourism. Transect walks along the typical tourist route of Odysseia-In guests were carried out in both case study communities. Transect walks have been defined as: "systematically walking with key informants through an area, observing, asking, listening, discussing, learning about different zones, local technologies, introduced technologies, seeking problems, solutions, opportunities, and mapping and/or diagramming resources and findings" (Pretty et al., 1995 cited in Cornwall, 2011: 116).

The participants in our study comprised two main groups: firstly staff from Odysseia-In; and secondly the members of the two sample communities who are directly impacted by tourism, e.g. owners and workers of local guesthouses, restaurants, craft shops and tourist attractions, as well as people living around the main sites of tourist interest. Whilst participants in the key informant interviews and workshops were selected by Odysseia-In staff and the owners of the guesthouses they use, the transect walk allowed a more random selection of participants from among community members who happened to be present at the time of the walk. From the comments provided, we have no reason to believe that there was bias or distortion due to the selection of participants. We also believe that all participants understood what the research was about and they felt free to share their concerns with us.

6.3 Odysseia-In and adapting the design of SIA

From the beginning, we needed to consider what would be appropriate and feasible to expect in relation to an on-going SIA process from a relatively small, profit-making company such as Odysseia-In. This was first done during the initial scoping phase by asking staff to identify the business case and motivation for why they should invest effort in SIA so that we together could shape the SIA process and activities to be included in the SIMP.

In light of the business context and constraining factors facing Odysseia-In, the design of the methodology adopted for this SIA aimed to meet the following requirements:

- Business-focussed and fitted with their profit-making and social responsibility objectives

- Rapid, straightforward and participatory in line with limited resources (i.e. time and money) and staff capacity

- Embedded into their existing operations and procedures using a familiar language for the local tourism context rather than being a separate process using the jargon typically associated with academic research and SIA

- Build the capacity of their staff so that they could carry out SIA activities independently (i.e. without an external expert) in the future.

6.4 Identifying and understanding the issues (scoping)

During the initial stages of the SIA process, the participatory workshops with Odysseia-In staff and community members, and the community transect walks were used to gather data and produce community and tourist profiles, a timeline of tourism development in the area, and an inventory of tourism assets and services. The transect walk followed the typical Odysseia-In tourist route in each destination in order to observe the main existing and potential sites and services they use or could use, and included spontaneous interviews with community members that were encountered on the way. In addition, the Odysseia-In staff workshop was used to explore their motivations and perceived business case for engaging in the SIA process.

6.5 Projection and prediction of likely impacts

During the participatory workshops and the transect walk interviews, local people were asked to identify the key people providing services to Odysseia-In, and for their views on the social, economic and environmental impacts (positive and negative) of tourism generally and Odysseia-In in particular. In addition, they were asked to comment on what else Odysseia-In could do to minimise any negative impacts and maximise the local benefit of their walking tours to help identify actions to be included in the SIMP. The staff were asked to identify how they would know and how they could provide evidence that these impacts had occurred.

6.6 Identify how proposed actions can be embedded into existing operations

To facilitate embedding SIA into Odysseia-In's existing operations and processes, during the initial staff workshop, their existing product developing planning processes and responsible tourism policies and practice were mapped and reviewed to identify practices and potential opportunities/actions for integrating SIA into existing operations. In the next phase of the SIA, these proposed opportunities/actions were included in the SIMP.

6.7 Development of mitigation strategies and production of a SIMP

Based on the findings from the data collected for the SIA, the SIMP was produced by the research team. The SIMP consisted of actions to mitigate the social impacts of Odysseia-In's tourism activities. They were categorized under the headings of social, economic and environmental. Responsibility for each action was allocated at an organizational or community level. It included specific activities for the two case study communities, as well as more generic actions for Odysseia-In to address within its business operations generally.

6.8 Capacity building of Odysseia-In to implement SIMP actions

An additional capacity building phase was added to the SIA process when the external members of the research team returned to Bulgaria in December 2012 for one week to review the SIMP with Odysseia-In staff. It had been reported by Odysseia-In that implementation of the SIMP was going slowly. The purpose of this second visit therefore was to monitor what progress had been made, to understand why there were difficulties, and to provide additional capacity building support to help Odysseia-In implement the SIMP. Specifically, support was given to assist them to review/develop their: responsible tourism policy; sustainability monitoring systems; checklist of questions for product development tours; code of conduct for suppliers, guides and guests; and guidance on a responsible employment policy.

6.9 Development of monitoring programs

For the last phase of the SIA process, performance indicators were developed to monitor the impacts through planning activities with Odysseia-In staff in a process facilitated by the research team. Lastly, Odysseia-In staff were tasked with feeding back the findings from the SIA to all stakeholders, as well as writing an annual report on Odysseia-In's responsible tourism performance and progress on implementing their SIMP. As it happens, for various reasons including staffing issues, they have not actually produced these annual reports.

7. FINDINGS FROM THE SIA OF ODYSSEIA-IN'S WALKING TOURS

The trial SIA resulted in two types of findings which are presented in this paper. In the next section (Section 8) we provide our assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of our adapted SIA as a methodology and as a potential practical tool for responsible tourism development practice. Here, however, we discuss the outputs of the SIA as carried out with Odysseia-In in terms of: the identification of tourism issues and contextual information; potential/existing social impacts; opportunities for embedding SIA into existing operations; proposed actions; and monitoring indicators.

7.1 Background tourism and contextual issues

The initial phases of the SIA rapidly and effectively identified the required data for a community profile for both Gorno Draglishte and Kalofer such as their population size, main religions, main sources of income, extent of in/out migration, main tourism assets, available transportation infrastructure and tourism facilities, key community groups and organisations and their interests and concerns with tourism, and community decision-makers in relation to tourism development. Information was also gathered to produce a historic profile of the development of tourism in both of these case study destinations, including data to create a basic tourist profile such as on the type and annual number of tourists, and main tourist season. Furthermore, key tourism issues were identified from the perspective of local participants in the SIA. For example, issues such as too few tourist numbers in relation to the number of local guest houses, fees being paid by tourists to visit the local church were going to a central state fund rather than being earmarked for local tourism development, insufficient

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marketing, and inequitable distribution of tourism benefits. More positively, these discussions resulted in the identification of new products and activities that Odysseia-In could potentially include in their walking tour itineraries, such as a cow milking experience, exploring caves and a mineral water spring. Finally, feedback was obtained from Odysseia-In staff on their existing responsible tourism and operational practices as well as their motivation and perceived business case for participating in the SIA, which are summarised in Box 3 (also see section 8.1 for further discussion).

Box 3: Odysseia-In's Business Case for carrying out the SIA

- Competitive advantage in relation to other travel companies offering similar products in Bulgaria

- Reduce risk of "green washing" and of reputational damage e.g. exposure of negative practice

- Support their advocacy role for sustainable tourism nationally

- Add to their credibility in the communities where they work

- Increase product sales and strengthen their market positioning as a responsible tour provider for international tour operators/partners

- Improve internal management systems which will likely result in cost-savings

- Improve staff motivation through recognition of the company's responsible tourism performance

- Identify new opportunities for product development

- Obtain benefits of external analysis of the company provided by research team

7.2 Potential and actual social impacts

During the fieldwork, it was difficult to get community participants to distinguish between Odysseia-In's impacts specifically and those of tourism in general. However, the following five main types of positive social impacts attributable (at least partly) to Odysseia-In were identified:

- Increased income for those local tourism businesses that are included on Odysseia-In itineraries, e.g. accommodation providers, handicraft retailers, restaurants and entrance fees to various sites and local attractions

- Increased employment associated with accommodation and other support services

- Increased number of young people remaining in the communities due to tourism employment opportunities

- Increased cross-cultural contact and greater appreciation of local culture resulting from interaction between local people and Odysseia-In's tourists

- Increased awareness about sustainability issues resulting from Odysseia-In's guides and advocacy work with tourism businesses.

In terms of negative impacts, the communities identified that Odysseia-In, and tourism generally, posed a risk in terms of the:

- Rapid modernisation of local culture

- Environmental impacts, in particular litter and footpath erosion

- Arrival of outside entrepreneurs who might develop inappropriate tourism infrastructure and/or take business away from local businesses and/or not 'fit in'

- Internal conflict caused by the unequal distribution of the benefits from tourism within the communities.

In response to these impacts, communities suggested that to maximise the local benefit of their tours, Odysseia-In should: be more generous in the price they pay providers; include more opportunities for tourists to purchase local products and handicrafts in their itineraries; include a greater range of local attractions on their itineraries; support host communities with product development by mentoring; use a wider variety and number of guest houses to spread the benefits more; use their guides more to assist in the language barrier between tourists and guest house owners; and contribute more to local charitable conservation and community funds.

7.3 Opportunities for embedding SIA

The embedding phase revealed a number of practical opportunities for SIA to be embedded into their existing operations and 'way of doing things'. These opportunities were then

incorporated into the SIMP. It is not necessary to elaborate on the detail here, but essentially the test case revealed seven entry points for embedding SIA into Odysseia-In's existing operations, namely through adaptations to their: annual report; Responsible Tourism policy and approach; marketing/product information; product study tours; information on their partner websites; tourist and client feedback questionnaires; and advocacy and project work (e.g. their Green Lodge scheme, which certifies and assists local accommodation providers to be more sustainable). Whilst this potential for embedding SIMP actions and SIA steps generally into existing operations was very evident to the researchers, in practice Odysseia-In did not do very much to implement the proposed actions until they were assisted more in this task (which led to us adding a capacity building phase to the model).

7.4 Proposed actions and preparation and implementation of a SIMP

When it came to the fourth phase of the SIA (developing the mitigation strategies), the limited time and resources available resulted in the external researchers taking greater control over the development of the SIMP. Initially, 34 potential actions Odysseia-In staff could take were included. Whilst staff initially indicated they were satisfied with the proposed SIMP actions, with the benefit of hindsight it can be seen that this was when ownership of the SIA process started to slip away from Odysseia-In. The identification of actions for the SIMP did not sufficiently involve Odysseia-In staff to ensure that the actions were fully understood, feasible in practice, and allocated to specific individuals having responsibility for implementation.

In the year that followed, Odysseia-In implemented very few of the identified actions. Therefore, in December 2012 the research team returned to review the appropriateness of the SIMP and to try to better understand the nature of the support Odysseia-In needed. A review of the SIMP with Odysseia-In staff revealed that a number of the actions were not realistic or well-understood. After much discussion, a revised SIMP containing 20 priority actions was produced structured around the key headings in their responsible tourism policy, namely: organisation/operations; communities and culture; economic impacts; environmental impacts; tourism industry; our team; our customers.

7.5 Monitoring Indicators

Based on the impacts identified during the participatory workshops and transect walks, a pragmatic (i.e. small) number of indicators were identified by Odysseia-In staff which they felt they could monitor using their existing data sources (e.g. HR records, tourist satisfaction questionnaires, financial records, feedback from guest house owners) (see Box 4). However, an annual sustainability report using the suggested indicators has not yet been produced which suggests that monitoring has proven to be more onerous than expected.

Box 4: Odysseia-In social impact indicators

- Number of Bulgarian people employed per annum

- Total spend on local suppliers per annum (number of guest nights multiplied by estimated average spend per guest)

- Number of new local products included in Odysseia-In walking tour itineraries

- Number of Odysseia-In guides employed, trained and certified by Mountains & People (Bulgarian Association of Mountain Leaders which is an NGO providing training and certification)

- Number of sustainability training and awareness-raising activities for providers and tourism industry

- Level of guest satisfaction with Odysseia-In walking tours (including % of tourists who feel they have gained knowledge about Bulgarian culture/changed their behaviour/changed their opinion about local people and culture)

- Level of guest house owner's satisfaction Odysseia-In walking tours and the extent of local benefit

- Number of tourists receiving pre-tour sustainability information/code of conduct

- Number of accommodation providers with local Green Lodge label

- Number/amount contributed to local conservation and education initiatives in host communities

- Number of staff volunteer hours donated to providing environmental protection in host communities

7.6 Overall summary of Odysseia-In

The SIA identified that Odysseia-In were already taking numerous policy and operational measures to manage the social impacts of their business responsibly. It also enabled local community members to highlight other actions Odysseia-In could do to maximise their local benefit. However, going through the SIA process demonstrated that Odysseia-In had been approaching their activities in a rather ad-hoc and reactive manner rather than having a

strategic, proactive approach to identifying, managing, monitoring and reporting on their social impacts. It was hoped that the pilot SIMP would help Odysseia-In achieve a more formalised, holistic and systematic approach to impact management through embedding the proposed actions into their existing ways of doing things. However, initially they struggled to implement this without external support. Whilst the short, follow-up capacity building phase provided to Odysseia-In staff did help in addressing this implementation gap, it also identified that they faced resource and capacity issues that limit their ability to implement the rest of their SIMP without external assistance.

8. FINDINGS ON SIA AS A METHODOLOGY FOR RESPONSIBLE TOURISM PRACTICE

The primary purpose of this research was to conduct an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of using the SIA methodology/framework as a pragmatic approach in responsible tourism development. Our test case provided much evidence to allow us to comment on the performance of our adapted SIA method in a specific tourism context using the topics: creating benefits for host communities; providing a convincing business case for the private sector; being embedded into existing operations; capacity building and ownership of SIA by local staff; facilitating community participation; and creating effective monitoring systems.

8.1 Business case for the private sector

Odysseia-In staff identified a clear business case (Box 3) for participating in the trial SIA that to some extent was consistent with the arguments in the SIA and responsible tourism literature – essentially that businesses that are expected to actively manage the impacts of their operations and contribute to poverty reduction need to see the value (i.e. business case) to them of going beyond meeting the minimum requirements (Ashley and Goodwin, 2007; Esteves and Vanclay, 2009; Goodwin, 2011; Vanclay and Esteves, 2011).

Odysseia-In's reasons for participating also included a number of non-economic motivations related to their desire to support local communities and protect the environment, as well as being able to evidence that they were a responsible tourism business. This provides support

for the contrary argument in the literature that non-economic motivations of small lifestyle business also affect their level of engagement with sustainability (Garay and Font, 2012; Sampaio et al., 2012; Thomas, 2015; Thomas et al., 2011).

The discussion about the business case for SIA was resumed after completion of the SIMP to see whether Odysseia-In were satisfied with the return on their investment in the trial SIA. Overall, they were satisfied with the benefits of the SIA in respect of having external researchers advise on their sustainability performance, and in helping them demonstrate to their stakeholders what they are doing, in giving them more credibility with local communities and business partners, identifying potential new products, reducing the risk of 'green washing' and contributing to staff satisfaction with their employment at Odysseia-In.

The rapid SIA process adopted for the test case, however, was not seen to perform well in terms of creating competitive advantage, increasing product sales, or in being able to demonstrate cost savings associated with improving their internal management systems especially because the relevant monitoring was not in place. Furthermore, their new responsible walks that are marketed on responsibletravel.com and positioned using their sustainability credentials had not resulted in a single sale in the 12 months following the implementation of the trial. While this is not a good sign, it raises the related and on-going debate about how to effectively market the sustainability of tourism products. It is also a reminder that private sector involvement in sustainability activities can have a varied outcome and is not without commercial risk (Ahebwa and van der Duim, 2013; Ahebwa et al., 2012).

8.2 Creating benefits for host communities

Contrary to Harvey's (2011) critique that SIA poorly assessed economic impacts, the test case performed quite well on this. It found that a key strength was SIA's potential to facilitate the private sector to involve the community and other stakeholders in a process that identifies the impacts of their tourism business and how this might be better managed. An unexpected local economic benefit of the community transect walks and workshops was that they acted as a means for identifying under-utilised local products, activities and attractions potentially of interest to tourists. Odysseia-In is now considering adding some of these to their walking tour itineraries to improve visitor experience and increase their local economic contribution. The test case identified that the SIA process supported Odysseia-In in taking a step back to reflect

on their existing policies and practice from a sustainability perspective and establish a process for managing their social impacts. Unfortunately, even after the additional capacity building phase, the method fell short when it came to building the capacity of Odysseia-In to implement their SIMP in practice (see section 8.4 for further discussion).

8.3 Embedding SIA into existing operations

Another key strength of the trial was that mapping Odysseia-In's planning processes and reviewing their responsible tourism policy and practices was very effective in facilitating the identification (if not their implementation) of opportunities for embedding the SIA process and SIMP actions into existing management systems, product development, customer feedback and reporting processes. This ability to incorporate SIA into the tourism sector's existing 'way of doing things' is critical in terms of it becoming less onerous to implement, and more likely to be sustained over the long term.

8.4 Capacity building and ownership of the SIA by local staff

The test case demonstrated that carrying out an SIA requires significant amounts of time, investment of financial and human resources, and a high level of capacity or skills. During the implementation of the initial scoping and predicting impacts stages, Odysseia-In staff were effectively trained in SIA and the participatory data collection methods, and they already had existing relationships with the sample communities, and the ability to speak Bulgarian in addition to English and other tourist languages. These factors contributed greatly to them having a high level of ownership of the SIA, and one could envisage the staff having the capacity to repeat this part of an SIA without much external assistance. Conversely, one of the failures of the test case was that the time and financial constraints on the external researchers resulted in the SIA process not sufficiently involving or building the capacity of the Odysseia-In staff in the identification and on-going implementation, monitoring and reporting of their SIMP.

Odysseia-In staff reported that the initial SIMP was too ambitious in light of their financial and human resource constraints and the current economic recession, which is resulting in a tough business environment and distracting their focus away from their sustainability performance.

It was also felt that some of the SIMP actions were understood in theory by them, but they needed external assistance over a longer period to understand how they might implement them in practice in their own activities. Whilst the revised SIMP produced during the additional capacity phase was more appropriate and more effectively involved Odysseia-In staff, there was still insufficient time to provide the on-going capacity support that was needed for the implementation and ownership of all the activities in the SIMP. Thus, in support of the existing literature on the limitations of SIA (Vanclay and Esteves, 2011), a serious limitation of our rapid SIA was its over-reliance on external experts (i.e. the research team) and its limited performance in providing capacity building or mentoring support. For relatively small travel companies, especially in a country such as Bulgaria where responsible tourism development is in its infancy, there is limited access to the financial and human resources or external support needed to implement all of the identified actions. These findings resonate with many small businesses around the world and with the research on the characteristics and constraints small businesses face in adopting sustainable practices (Garay and Font, 2012; Jarvis et al., 2010; Sampaio et al., 2012; Thomas et al., 2011; Tzschentke et al., 2008a, 2008b).

Odysseia-In's sense of ownership could have been improved through further adapting the explanation and definition of SIA to fit more closely with their specific business context. This would need to include addressing the common perception that SIA is more interested in the negative impacts than the positive ones (João et al., 2011).

8.5 Community participation

Another strength of the SIA process was that it capitalised on local knowledge and helped to facilitate the participation of a wide range of key stakeholders. The transect walk and informal stakeholder interviews were easy to do and involved a good range of stakeholders and raised issues that may not have been covered in a more formal workshop. However, we acknowledge that the rapid and pragmatic ('just enough') approach to data collection adopted for this pilot SIA could be criticised for not adequately capturing all the different perspectives that might exist in a destination or on a topic. One concern is that participation in the SIA process may have increased the expectations communities have about Odysseia-In. This potentially poses a risk to Odysseia-In if they do not manage these expectations, or if they fail to deliver on actions they committed to do during the process.

8.6 Monitoring systems

The approach adopted by the pilot did not allow enough time and resources for sufficient stakeholder involvement in the identification of indicators for monitoring Odyseeia-In's SIMP, and the process was not as transparent or systematic as it needed to be. In practice, monitoring even a small number of indicators proved to be rather onerous for Odysseia-In and most identified indicators were not effectively monitored during the pilot. This reminds us that if SIA is going to succeed in its application in this tourism context, a streamlined and pragmatic approach to the identification of impacts and associated indicators is needed and must be embedded into existing operational and management systems. However, the challenge remains how to make this streamlined approach rigorous enough to identify the appropriate indicators and monitoring mechanisms.

8.7 Summary of the effectiveness of SIA in a responsible tourism setting

The test case of using SIA in the context of a small tourism operation in Bulgaria demonstrated that SIA has value as a practical method for implementing responsible tourism development, although some further adaptations are needed to address some weaknesses.

In particular, SIA facilitated a specific focus and structured, holistic approach for identifying the types of social impacts resulting from our test case business, and tailor-made opportunities and actions for how they might be managed as part of an adaptive management system that was embedded into the company's existing sustainability activities and overall operations and ways of doing things. A further strength of our trial SIA was that it proved effective in providing a structured approach to involving company staff and members of the local communities in the initial stages of data collection in which information was rapidly collected to build a social profile of the communities and identify the potential and existing social impacts (negative and positive) of the company in question. An understanding of the destinations in which they operate is a vital first step in assisting tourism businesses to reflect on their activities from a sustainability perspective and to engage more with relevant stakeholders.

Our modified SIA method, however, needs to be adapted in practice to address challenges such as: the limited local human, financial and in-country resources and capacity available; the

need for more appropriate social impact indicators and monitoring mechanisms in this context; implementation difficulties, especially in the absence of external assistance; the lack of familiarity of tourism businesses with SIA technical terminology and methods; and the lack of convincing evidence and a clear business case for investing in socially-responsible behaviour during an economic recession. Further adaptations need to be made to our method for it to more effectively involve and build the capacity of staff in the identification of the SIMP and its on-going implementation.

There are also a number of areas where the method could be improved in terms of how well it takes into account the organizational realities and real world constraints of small tourism businesses. The characteristics, capacities, resources, ownership, motivations, and knowledge of sustainability and responsible tourism influence how effectively small tourism businesses are able to engage with the SIA process. There is a need for more research to better understand these variables and the implications they have for how the SIA method should be further adapted, especially to suit the small business tourism context.

9. CONCLUSION

Despite its limitations, our test case application of SIA in responsible tourism made a useful contribution to identifying a rapid, cost-effective, pragmatic and structured approach that can support tourism businesses to identify practical procedures to embed the responsible management of their social impacts into their existing organizational structures, planning, product development, and operational processes and activities. However, in line with the existing literature on the performance of SIA in practice (Harvey, 2011; Vanclay, 2011), it is clear that such businesses require short to medium-term mentoring and capacity building support from SIA-aware responsible tourism experts to assist them in implementing the practical actions identified and to take full ownership of the SIA process in the long run.

Facilitating such improvements to our approach to using SIA in a tourism context would require identifying what business models, partnerships and strategies currently exist within the tourism industry that could give tourism businesses access to the cost-effective mentoring and capacity building support that is needed. Further investigation may raise additional real world

operational constraints as well as opportunities. Fine-tuning our test case approach may identify a better balance between providing a pragmatic approach and the extent of capacity building support that is needed in practice by tourism businesses to make their operations more responsible.

These next steps to further develop this pragmatic approach require a closer collaboration between responsible tourism and SIA practitioners to address the methodological and operational challenges identified through this trial study, and to nurture SIA-aware practice within the tourism industry. Despite the commonalities between the responsible tourism and SIA approaches (in terms of their sustainability objectives, values, principles and methods), to date these two fields of research and practice have largely been operating in different circles. It is time to bring these complementary worlds together to work towards managing the social impacts of tourism more responsibly.

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