

CONCEPTUALISING INTEGRATED RURAL TOURISM

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ABSTRACT Rural spaces are no longer associated purely with agricultural commodity production but are seen as locations for the stimulation of new socio-economic activity, often incorporating tourism, leisure, speciality food production and consumption and e-commerce. Within the context of debates about integrated and territorial approaches to rural development in Europe's 'lagging regions', this paper introduces the notion of 'Integrated Rural Tourism' (IRT) and describes the various methods of research used in an EU research project that forms the basis of this special edition. IRT is theorised as tourism explicitly linked to the economic, social, cultural, natural and human structures of the localities in which it takes place. The argument is that IRT – as a theory and approach – leads to more sustainable tourism (broadly conceived) than other forms of tourism because it creates powerful network connections between social, cultural, economic and environmental resources. The notion of IRT is also intended to open up practical ways of thinking about improving linkages between tourism and local and regional resources, activities, products and communities in the light of changing trends in tourism demand.

KEY WORDS: Integrated rural tourism, lagging rural regions, rural development, SPRITE

Introduction

This paper introduces the notion of ‘Integrated Rural Tourism’ (IRT) in the context of SPRITE, an EU Fifth Framework research project. Endnotes 1 and 2 provide details of this six-nation project. The paper explores previous research in rural tourism and establishes the case for an integrated approach to understanding its complex nature (environmental, economic and social) and the role it plays in all these dimensions of the lives of local actors. Current academic and policy debates advocating a more integrated and territorial approach to rural development in Europe question the pre-eminent position of agriculture within rural economies (Goodman 2004; Ward and Lowe 2004). While rurality is seen as a space with multiple functions that extends beyond food production, agriculture is recast as a component of a wider and more territorial approach to rural development (Marsden *et al.* 2002). Increasingly, differentiated rurality stems from the shifting agenda in contemporary European agricultural policy seeking to challenge the classic sectoral vision. While agriculture remains central to new visions of rural development, policy discussions about ways to reform the CAP, particularly its ‘second pillar’ (the Rural Development Regulation 1257/99), call upon European agriculture to “play a productive and market function, a territorial management function, an environmental and management function, as well as a rural development function” (Buller *et al.* 2000). The idea is to encourage rural communities to incorporate new sources of income as complements to rather than substitutes for existing activities. Thus there is not only a shift in European agricultural policy away from the previous ‘agrarian’ green ideology and towards a more ‘ecological’ green ideology which encourages environmentally feasible methods of production, but also an emphasis on the development of new niche consumer markets

likely to impact positively on rural economies (Ilbery and Kneafsey 2000; Baker 2005). This new multi-functional countryside requires strategies that promote proactive networks of actors leading to community-wide ownership of solutions; improved awareness of opportunities; the resolution or amelioration of conflicts among actors; the planning and implementation of resource-use practices that lead to their sustainable use and sensible management; the development of new complementary institutional arrangements; and the establishment of an interactive participative process that links policy formulation and implementation so that lessons learnt are incorporated in the policy process (Bellamy and Johnson 2000; Patterson *et al.* 2004; Johannesen and Skonhøft 2005). In parallel to these changes of approach to agriculture, an integrated approach to managing rural tourism is proposed that encompasses, for example, the recognition of nonlinear processes and connectivity between actors, activities and resources. It comprises a long-term perspective with a broad spatial focus, recognising the relevance of the human and cultural context and diversity of values relating to tourism growth and development. In particular, the nature of rural networks in resource-poor lagging rural regions is discussed with a view to providing pathways for greater dialogue and shared responsibility among stakeholders. The paper outlines the key actors included in the surveys, the different research methods used and the various case-study areas.

Previous Research on Rural Tourism

There have been many approaches to the analysis and fuller comprehension of rural tourism as both an economic sector and a socio-cultural practice (Jenkins and Oliver 2001). Previous models in rural tourism identified in the literature include:

- core/periphery approaches (Selwyn 1996; Weaver 1998; Russo 2005);
- consumerist approaches, whereby tourists consume places (Urry 1995) and ‘otherness’ as ‘positional goods’ (Hirsch, 1978; Cloke and Little 1997) or are in pursuit of novel aesthetic and material commodities (Lash and Urry 1994);
- commercialisation approaches (whether tourism’s features are endogenous or exogenous, and viable or non-viable) (Cohen 1993);
- existential approaches, whereby tourists seek a transcendence from everyday life (Turner and Ash 1975), or seek to reconstitute an (often mythical) sense of wholeness, authenticity and structure which has been undermined by modernity and globalisation (MacCannell 1989; Selwyn 1996; Robinson and Boniface 1999);
- dramaturgical or performative approaches (Boorstin 1964) where tourists and their hosts act out roles and re-imaginings (Goffman 1975; Ryan and Aicken 2005) and the ‘geographies of display’ (Crang 1998), and where tourism even becomes a ‘game’ or a ‘virtual experience’ (Feifer 1985; Tulloch 1999);
- economic approaches, consumer-oriented (Ashworth and Goodall 1990), and where tourism can be economically harmful, a stimulant or redistributive (Tisdell 2000);
- community-focused approaches, whereby tourists intrusively seek authenticity (MacCannell 1989), and where tourism ranges from being culturally exploitative and destructive to having a ‘desegregational’ role (Lanquar 1990) or to being a catalyst for the restoration or maintenance of traditions (Scheyvens 2002);
- sustainability approaches (Wahab and Pigram 1997), however, the concept of sustainable tourism is often somewhat incoherent, given the lack of consensus

over its meaning and development of indicators to monitor its progress (Cater 1994; Miller and Twining-Ward 2005).

None of these approaches seems wholly satisfactory in the context of IRT which is not merely a tool to facilitate greater coordination among actors but also involves roles and responsibilities associated with both the implementation and the monitoring of tourism development strategies, and resource management at the local and regional level. Each of the above approaches tends to privilege one sector or discipline and hence one set of interactions and interests. However, the key feature of rural tourism is its pervasiveness in the lives of tourists, businesses and host communities, and the associated “duty of care” on the part of stakeholders to use and manage resources sustainably. Hence this paper has adopted an integrated and inter-disciplinary approach to the study of rural tourism as experienced across Europe, to overcome the limitations of previous approaches and better address the issues of equity, social justice, and actor expectations of accountability in tourism management (Endnote 1).

Integration and rural tourism

There has been considerable academic and policy debate around a more sectorally integrated and territorial approach to European rural development. Current policy movements such as the Agenda 2000 reforms, Rural Development Regulation 1257/99, the mid-term (2003) review of the Common Agriculture Policy and the World Trade Organisation talks in 2004-6 are exposing rural areas to global markets and competition, particularly in the hitherto protected agricultural sector. Moreover, support to rural lagging economies will no longer be viewed in a principally

agricultural context, but in broader terms encompassing other sectors important to the rural economy, namely food processing, light manufacturing, arts, crafts and tourism. The pivotal position of tourism in this context arises because many of the products and resources of lagging rural regions potentially have very strong linkages with tourism. Tourism and other products, such as crafts and foods, can be marketed together as a form of linked exploitation of rural and regional production and imagery. Tourism can permeate, and be integrated with, local and regional economies in a complex manner, which leads to direct income benefits for localities and to wider developmental benefits based on association, synergy and participation (Jenkins and Oliver 2001). Within this context, the aim of this paper is to introduce and explore the notion of Integrated Rural Tourism (IRT) as a tool for rural development.

While the concept of ‘integration’, together with analogous concepts such as ‘partnerships’, is used pervasively, it is clear that the concept is understood in a number of different ways. These include:

1. spatial integration, as in the integration of core tourist areas with areas where tourism is less well developed (Weaver 1998);
2. human resource integration, as in the integration of working people into the economy as a means of combating social exclusion (by education and training, for example) and gaining competitive advantage (Mulvaney *et al.* 2007);
3. institutional integration, as in the integration of agencies into partnerships or other formal semi-permanent structures (Selin and Beason 1991; Vernon *et al.* 2005);

4. innovative integration, as in the integration of new ideas and processes into the tourism ‘product’ to achieve growth or competitive advantage (Macbeth *et al.* 2004);
5. economic integration, as in the integration of other economic sectors with tourism, particularly retailing and farming (Dudding and Ryan 2000; Veeck *et al.* 2006)
6. social integration, as in the integration of tourism with other trends in the socio-economy, notably the drive for quality and concerns for environmental (particularly landscape) protection and sustainable development (Kneafsey 2001);
7. policy integration, as in the integration of tourism with broader national and regional goals for economic growth, diversification and development (Dredge 2006);
8. temporal integration, as in the integration of the past with current economic, social and cultural needs and requirements, especially through the commodification of heritage (Ryan and Aicken 2005); and
9. community integration, as in the integration of tourists into local communities as ‘guests’, such that they occupy the same physical spaces, satisfy their existential and material needs in the same manner, and become embedded in the same value chains as members of the host society (Oakes, 1999).

Clearly, therefore, the term ‘integration’ – while not a new one – is both fluid and evolving. Also, it should be noted that these usages of the term ‘integration’ are overlapping and are used interchangeably in the literature. The SPRITE project attempted to analyse rural tourism across all the dimensions that potentially can be integrated and this set of papers reports some of the results.

The concept of integration has gained currency in the tourism literature, particularly with reference to tourism planning and management (Gunn 1988; Innskeep 1991; Butler 1999; Youell 2003). Research into sustainable tourism emphasises integrating environmental concerns into tourism (Wahab and Pigram 1997). Authors have also addressed ways of integrating economy and culture with tourism to achieve a functionally successful community, in both ecological and human terms (Priestly *et al.* 1996; Stabler 1997). More recently, the importance of local participation and control has been recognised, with integration defined according to the percentage of local people employed, the type and degree of participation, the locus of decision-making power and ownership of resources in the local tourism sector (Stem *et al.* 2003; Briedenhann and Wickens 2004). This can be seen in the recomposition of rural populations and the diversification of farm families' incomes.

In this paper, the concept of IRT is proposed as a means of thinking critically and comprehensively about the actors, resources and relationships involved in this notoriously fragmented industry. We define IRT as tourism that is explicitly linked to the economic, social, cultural, natural and human resources of the localities in which it takes place (Jenkins and Oliver 2001). Some actors may be 'more' or 'less' integrated into tourism than others. Accommodation providers, for example, may be well integrated into the local tourism product, whereas a speciality cheese producer may be less integrated even if some tourists buy the cheese. The notion of integration provides a means of thinking about ways of bringing diverse actors, networks and resources together more successfully into networks of co-operation and collaboration (Saxena 2005). Moreover, the idea of IRT should encourage a holistic

conceptualisation of tourism, which in turn suggests a research methodology that seeks to engage with multiple actors and networks involved in its constitution.

Notionally, the benefits of IRT are likely to be wide-ranging and can comprise both static and dynamic benefits, some of which can be quantified and others which are best analysed qualitatively. The potential benefits can be categorised under five headings.

Direct economic benefits Integrative linkages between tourism and local economies have considerable potential to increase the value added to, and reduce the value leakage from rural areas, leading to improved income and employment multipliers.

Experiential benefits Complementary approaches to marketing and packaging of products and services should provide visitors / tourists with a distinctively local and quality package of products and services, resulting in better experiences for both tourists and host communities.

Conservation benefits For example, IRT should improve the incentives for the conservation and regeneration of resources, both natural and human-made, through closer cooperation among different actors and more actions on the ground. This should enhance recreation and tourism providers' capacity to engage in sustainable development.

Developmental benefits IRT can become a path to rural pluriactivity and rural multifunctionality, providing valuable new opportunities for the development of lagging regions that go beyond a simple compensation for agricultural decline. It can permit a wide range of local economic actors to benefit from the use of a locality's resources through stimulating positive local responses to market trends such as market

segmentation, niche marketing and new product development. It can also allow for the potentially beneficial exploitation of rural and regional imagery;

Synergistic benefits IRT provides an increased likelihood of co-ordinated and consistent institutional policies for rural and regional development, and it should encourage partnerships among a range of local actors who can then reap wider developmental benefits based on association, synergy and participation.

An often-overlooked fact in the debate about benefits via tourism is that, in many rural areas, the onus lies on small, family-centred enterprises and groups for its promotion and development. Typically they have a low capital base and function with limited skills and experience. Also, they may be too specialist or in the wrong location (too remote) (Fleischer and Felsenstein 2000). This necessitates a renewed focus on strategies that generate benefits for actors and on networks that reconnect these apparently 'disconnected' actors in face-to-face proximities where obligations and advantages go hand in hand.

Thus it is theorised that IRT is constructed through social networks of exchange that are embedded, empowering and endogenous (see Table 1 for definitions) but which possess the apparently contradictory ability to dis-embed themselves, where beneficial. In this paper, discussion on embeddedness, empowerment and endogeneity is presented, and the complexities of promoting embeddedness / disembeddedness, empowerment and endogeneity in networks are explored. This is followed by an introduction to the study regions and a methodological discussion.

Conceptualising networks and IRT

IRT is forged through the construction of networks that enable actors to exploit and barter resources such as local traditions, art forms, celebrations, experiences, entrepreneurship and knowledges. Networks embrace a range of formal and informal arrangements, from casual groupings of like-minded individuals to highly prescribed forums of organisations supported by paid staff, fiscal resources and communication technology (Saxena 2005). However, networks are not pre-given social facts and can be difficult to create, sustain and manage. Authors point to several dilemmas associated with setting up a network (Dyer and Nobeoka 2000; Schönström 2005). These mainly include problems associated with motivating self-interested network members to participate in the network and to openly share valuable knowledge with other network members, eliminating *free riders* who enjoy the benefit of the public good but without contributing any value themselves and maximising the efficiency of knowledge transfers among a large group of individual members. This implies that actors have to consciously engage in ‘investment strategies’ to create a strong identity within the network through processes of socio-economic bonding that facilitate the transfer of both tacit and explicit knowledge and ensure long-term micro-interactions (Woolcock 1998; Falk and Kilpatrick 2000; Jóhannesson *et al.* 2003). These are facilitated through both ‘weak’ and ‘strong’ ties (Granovetter 1973, 1985). Weak ties are made through highly formalised, short-term relationships. Strong ties involve much closer relationships, are often repeated transactions, and are negotiated on the basis of implicit understandings. Bonding processes among actors are facilitated through socially meaningful relationships based on trust, giving advice or sharing

information and ‘influence acceptance’, which is the degree to which exchange partners voluntarily change their strategies to accommodate the desires of other partners (Wellman and Gulia 1999; Saxena 2006).

Networks enable actors to access information, search for, obtain and share resources, engage in co-operative actions for mutual benefit, develop collective vision, diffuse ideas and mobilise resources with a view to attracting visitors. This in turn can appeal to inward investors, increase local pride and counter negative perceptions (Powell and Smith-Doerr 1994; Bramwell and Rawling 1996). Following Flury (1999), Glosvik (2003), Rosenfeld (2003) Yates (2003) and Jack (2005), some of the attributes of networks operating in rural contexts can be summarised as follows.

1. They are more likely to be “soft” than “hard” networks. Soft networks have open membership, usually imply a ‘cooperative’ style of interaction or ‘horizontal relationships’ and can consist of diverse members ranging from businesses and organisations to local NGOs, community groups and individuals. The latter are a combination of hierarchical, cooperative and competitive modes of interaction that take place to achieve specific shared business objectives such as the targeting of new markets, joint product development, co-production, or co-marketing, and are likely to require formal agreements for sharing profits or resources.
2. They are more likely to be driven by need or crisis with the intent of providing pastoral and practical support to community members than by necessity to generate quick profit.

3. They are less likely to become economically self-sufficient. Although sustained by contribution of volunteers, most cannot support themselves on membership or service fees alone and require financial support from agencies for their core activities.
4. They tend to be cooperative in nature, with an emphasis on social norms and reciprocity, interpersonal ties of collegiality and friendship that help in serving a broad range of interests in the community rather than focusing narrowly on specific actions.
5. They are non-hierarchical, but possibly vary in their potency (e.g. 'weak' or 'strong' ties). Strong ties sustain activity within the network and are used extensively to provide knowledge and information but also to maintain, extend and enhance business status and personal reputation. Strong ties also provide the mechanism to invoke 'weak' ties, represented by nodes operating in a wider social context. Hence, the value and strength of weak ties is not related to the weakness of the relationship, but in the possibility of connections to other networks.
6. They differ in the degree of formalisation (varying between explicit membership agreements and tacit understandings) and duration (short-or long-term relationships).
7. They are both open and closed. Open networks are structured in a manner that allows members easy access to a broad range of services. They are readily accessible and due to their flexibility are able to capture knowledge externalities from other actors and networks which in turn contribute to acquisition of additional sources of information and data (Creech and Willard 2001). Closed networks are collectivistic in nature and are characterised by an attitude of 'us

versus them'. However, this closeness among members facilitates transfer and exchange of tacit knowledge assisted through deep personal and social bonds and collective values among network members (Coleman 1988; 1990; Putnam 1995).

In addition to these general network attributes, we draw on ideas from rural development research to suggest that, for successful IRT to occur, rural networks must also be simultaneously embedded and disembedded, endogenous and empowering. As such, our research goes some way towards disturbing the conventional (and in the authors' view excessively) binary understandings of these terms, which are briefly summarised in Table 1 (Kneafsey, *et al.* forthcoming).

Table 1. Binary understandings of network characteristics

<p>Embedded Embedded networks are built around local knowledges and relationships. They can form the basis for innovative activities originating from locally specific conventions. But they may lack dynamism.</p>	<p>Disembedded Disembedded networks can facilitate access to external markets. However, without careful labelling and traceability systems, disembedded local products and resources risk 'losing' their distinctive origins and production processes.</p>
<p>Endogenous Endogenous networks reinforce strong attachment to place, promoting local participation and ownership of resources and retention of value added. But they may lack access to superior external resources.</p>	<p>Exogenous Exogenous networks enable actors to access human and monetary resources not available locally, and provide channels for getting local interests onto mainstream agendas. However, by failing to link with local socio-economic structures, they can create high economic leakage, leaving the economy vulnerable to external shocks.</p>
<p>Empowering Empowering networks facilitate local participation in managing physical, cultural and economic resources. But participation may be partial.</p>	<p>Disempowering Disempowering networks are dominated by local, regional or national elites, with their large resources. But they may fail to establish decision-taking systems accredited as representative and accountable. They offer limited</p>

	opportunities for community development and participation.
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Networks contributing to IRT development are embedded in particular localities, although the extent of their geographical reach and complexity may vary. In our use of the term embeddedness we are seeking to emphasise the territorial context in which network formation takes place, reinforcing cultural identity constructions through the creation of distinctions between “insiders” and “outsiders”. Thus embeddedness suggests not only that resources or activities are directly linked to place, but that relationships are also formed within particular socio-cultural contexts in specific localities. The unique socio-cultural characteristics and identities, which are embedded in place, help to shape relationships and networks and create psycho-emotional bonds between the individual and the place by providing repertoires of shared values, symbols, and traditions (Hinrichs 2000; Murdoch 2000; Kneafsey *et al.* 2001; Palmer 2003). The premise is that areas can specialise around local clusters of economic activity, exploit comparative advantages, and even out-shine urban regions, especially those that lack the requisite advantages and institutional thickness (Amin and Thrift, 1994). However, it is to be noted that whilst tight social ties contribute to the establishment of social norms, sanctions and trust, they may also be associated with coercive relationships and attempts by socially dominant actors to control and the free choice of members of the network. Uzzi (1997, p.59) warns of the implication of overly embedded networks for stifling economic action and releasing negative emotions. Thus tourism resources need a degree of disembeddness, since too much embeddedness can curtail the market reach of the local tourism product, which will then remain marginal in relation to the globalised tourism sector. Conversely,

disembedded resources and activities may result in social and cultural detachment and high levels of economic leakage from the locality. Despite their positive role in expanding the socio-economic life of rural businesses and resource controllers, they can constrain tourism development by creating conditions that are at odds with the interests, prospects and perspectives of communities in lagging regions (see Table 1). For instance, they can disembed market behaviour from a wider context of social relations, norms and institutions. Disembedded networks potentially run the danger of generating structures of production and marketing that lead to the commoditisation of people and natural and human artefacts by 'non-local actors' effecting change and control from a distance (Murdoch and Marsden 1995). Thus there is a real tension between the rhetoric of locality (i.e. social capital and local economic development) and the economic need to 'act global' (Marsden 1998). Hence, we argue that the networks contributing to IRT development can both embed economic action within local social and political practices and, at the same time, enable local products and services to be disembedded in order to contact markets further afield.

In order to limit the negative impacts of disembeddness, we propose that networks for IRT also need to be endogenous. Thus discourses on endogeneity are adopted that emphasise the retention of maximum benefits in a locality, by using and adding worth to local resources and by focusing on the requirements, capacities and values of local people (Goodwin *et al.*, 1999). The concept of endogeneity is closely linked to that of embeddedness, in that endogenous development is built around locally distinguishing economic, environmental and cultural resources that can be utilised by innovators and entrepreneurs to establish a region's identity. The crucial point, however, is that

endogenous development is structured to retain maximum benefits in a locality by using and adding value to natural, economic, and sociocultural elements and focusing on the needs, capacities and values of local people and the complex phenomenon of tradition that can be defined as the handing down of customs, beliefs, and ideas intergenerationally (Niessen 1999; Ray 2000). Endogenous development is conducted at a scale appropriate to local environmental and social resources and often incorporates complementary use of resources and should ideally lead to increased partnership and synergy. It encourages strong local participation in decision-making about resource use and enables local actors to adapt external opportunities to their own needs (Long and Ploeg 1994). However, since local areas may not have the preconditions that are needed for learning, innovation and growth, too much reliance on local initiative can limit their ability to benefit from possibilities for 'new combinations' of global trends and local traditions, such as agrotourism, guided excursions and innovative arts and crafts. Therefore, endogeneity rarely implies the absence of external, exogenous elements, however remote a region may be. It is a process of continuous (re)interpretation and (re)negotiation of both external and internal elements by locals that allows for a continuous evolution of new forms of survival and forms of interaction with markets, technology, administration and natural resources, opening up the cross-cultural production of local meanings, self-images, representations, and modes of life (Amin and Thrift 1994; Salazar 2005). However, networks that are overly exogenous can limit the integration of different stakeholders, local groups and individuals through initiating development processes that are transplanted into a lagging rural region and externally determined, leading to the benefits of development being exported from the region and local values being

damaged. Exogenous elements can limit local participation to mere ‘tokenism’ (Goodwin *et al.* 1999), negatively impacting on symbolically constructed “communities” or “culture-territories”, the obscuring of which may indirectly exclude and disempower some local actors if they do not feel affinity with the constructed cultural identity (Shortall 2004).

Following the inter-linked features of embeddedness and endogeneity, another characteristic of networks in IRT is that they are empowering. The notion of empowerment implies a crucial distinction between individual or psychological, empowerment and community empowerment. The former is concerned with individuals’ subjective experiences of the world, the extent to which they attribute their negative circumstances to social factors rather than personal failings, and the extent to which they feel they can control events in their own life (Gruber and Tricket 1987). Community empowerment, on the other hand, is concerned with modifying the social structure to reallocate power between groups. The collective aspects of empowerment imply that the whole community benefits from being included in decision making (Oxaal and Baden 1997; Oughton *et al.* 2003). The two elements of empowerment are interlinked, psychological empowerment being necessary to achieve community empowerment, although the reverse is not necessarily true. However, a fundamental paradox can be identified “in the idea of people empowering others because the very institutional structure that puts one group in a position to empower also works to undermine the act of empowerment” (Gruber and Tricket, 1987, p. 356). Institutional support for microcredit / microenterprise initiatives, for example, can promote a narrowly individualistic definition of empowerment, which

places importance on self-reliance and home-based income-generating activities without careful examination of the social context within which local communities operate (Thompson 1991; Camagni 1995). Powerlessness may also be reinforced by the dominant policy discourses concerning rural communities' ability to engage in concerted action. Thus for networks to be truly empowering, they need to act in a facilitative or enabling role to enhance feelings of self-efficacy among members through the identification of conditions that foster powerlessness and through their removal by both formal organisational practices and informal techniques of providing efficacy information (Conger 1989). In this way, the networks could empower rural actors by encouraging them to challenge and change the interpretations and stories they tell about themselves. This also suggests that as a result of this discursive process the existing boundaries between policy makers and local actors may become increasingly blurred, allowing for more 'interconnectedness' between them.

IRT can thus be conceptualised as a web of networks of local and external actors, in which endogenous and embedded resources are mobilised in order to develop the assets and capabilities of rural communities and empower them to participate in, influence and hold accountable the actors and institutions that affect their lives.

Whilst this provides an analytical starting point, the realities of rural development are often more complex. As will be demonstrated in the papers that follow, the contradictory and multi-faceted dynamics of rural networks can create both opportunities and threats to the development of IRT.

A further key concept in IRT is that of scale (Ray 1998; Sharpley 1996). This implies that the networks contributing to IRT are not static, but continuously change through the addition and / or removal of new nodes and links. The rate at which nodes in a network increase their connectivity depends on their fitness to compete for links. For example, in social networks some individuals may acquire more social links than others. We find that this competition for links translates into multi-scaling, *i.e.* a fitness-dependent dynamic exponent, allowing fitter nodes to overcome the more connected but less fit ones (Bianconi and Barabási 2001). Consequently, one has to bear in mind the dynamic forces that act at the level of individual nodes, whose cumulative effect determines the rural networks' large-scale topology. A step in this direction is the acknowledgement of the fact that network evolution is driven by at least two coexisting mechanisms: "1) growth, implying that networks continuously expand by the addition of new nodes; 2) preferential attachment, mimicking the fact that a new node links with higher probability to nodes that already have a large number of links" (Bianconi and Barabási 2001, p. 436). Thus the concept of scale presents all the actors involved in tourism with important challenges in terms of both achieving their goals and reaching compromises with those differently minded.

The concept of sustainability is also relevant as the goal is to achieve sustainable outcomes through networks that balance social, economic and environmental aspirations for communities and best equalise benefits and costs for key stakeholders, and do not deteriorate the quality of resources. Implicit within this argument is the intent to achieve harmony between modernity and tradition (Tracey and Clark, 2003). Mirroring the close connection between culture and sustainability (Jenkins 2000), IRT

is closely linked to the notion of sustainable development, a term that in itself is normative and relative. The concept of sustainability is a useful 'guiding fiction' which stimulates and organises discourse around a problematic issue without the rigour of a precise definition (McCool and Moisey 2001) and which, seen as a process (Aronsson 2000), stimulates the need for economic, social, institutional and structural change. Further, the concept is multi-dimensional; interpreted in its broadest sense, it has economic, socio-cultural, political, geographical and ecological aspects. The economic aspect is primarily a matter of satisfying human material needs and goals; the social and political aspects relate in general to questions of equality, justice and influence; the geographical aspects concern the spatial consequences of human behaviour; and the ecological aspects involve the issue of protecting natural variety and preserving natural cycles. The sustainable harnessing of resources and activities, therefore, tends to lead *inter alia* to economic viability, and resource and socio-cultural conservation, while the unsustainable harnessing of resources and activities tends to lead to high rates of business failure and to resource and socio-cultural deterioration.

In many respects, 'IRT' overlaps with 'sustainable tourism', recent definitions of which are becoming increasingly holistic (Swarbrooke 1999; Sharpley 2000). Rather than being concerned with just minimising tourism's impacts, the concept of sustainable tourism development has gradually broadened into a notion that now takes into account the long-term viability of good quality natural and human resources, the quality of life for host communities, visitor satisfaction, and conservative use of natural and social resources (Bramwell and Lane 2000; Robinson *et al.* 2000; Tosun

2001). However, engagement with concepts listed as key in IRT development remains somewhat limited in the sustainable tourism literature. Also, since sustainable tourism can be interpreted (and once was) in a narrow sense of relating to the physical environment, we prefer to use the term IRT to avoid confusion. Thus while drawing upon the thinking behind sustainable tourism, IRT is robust in its focus upon a strong culture of mutual support and information exchange that link previously disparate economic, social, cultural, natural and human activities and resources. This is essentially required to address fully the many concerns for tourism destinations, which are often unclear, multiple, conflicting, contested and continually shifting. They can impede progress towards achieving sustainable and integrated forms of tourism.

Understanding and writing clearly about the complex relationships between the diverse range of actors involved in tourism continues to pose a challenge. The interplay between individual personalities, local specificities and global processes of change still requires more research. Relating more specifically to the notion of integration, further investigation is needed to obtain a deeper understanding of the mechanisms that help to sustain the dis/embedded, endogenous, and empowering attributes of networks (Kneafsey, *et al.* forthcoming). Also needed is a way of distinguishing the generic factors from those arising from unique case histories where local businesses, resource controllers and other actors shape IRT development in detail. Crucially, the creation of embedded and endogenous networks does not necessarily result in empowerment for all concerned. Issues of participation and

inclusion remain central to the project of creating equitable, sustainable and integrated tourism development.

SPRITE regions, actors and research methods

One of the objectives of SPRITE was to examine how IRT has developed in different areas. Is it the case that different combinations of resources, skills and political/administrative cultures (in general and towards tourism in particular) will have led to different types of IRT? To answer this question, research was conducted in the six countries of the participating research groups, namely the Czech Republic, France, Greece, Ireland, Spain and the United Kingdom. The participating research groups are listed in Endnote 2. This set of countries includes large and small nations, richer and poorer ones, northern, southern and central European states, and those where tourism is more important in the national economy and those where it is less so.

Within each country two study regions were selected (Figure 1). Both were rural areas that had either Objective 1 or Objective 2 EU status because of their lagging economies. They were selected to provide national pairings of contrasting tourism settings in terms of the scale or history of tourism development and the *a priori* degree to which rural tourism was integrated into mainstream structures in the regions. Figure 1 also shows those sub-regions with definable territorial names that were selected for particular study when the research examined small-scale networks such as the effect of tourism on specific host communities.

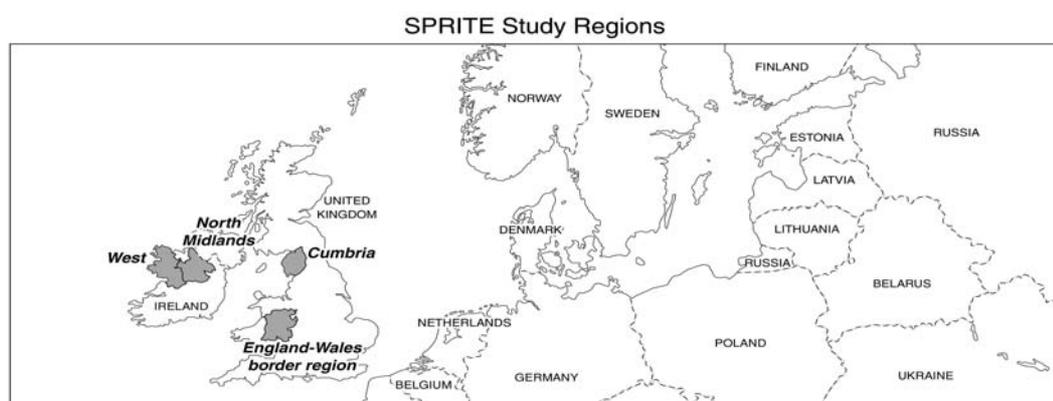




Figure 1. SPRITE study areas: countries, regions and sub-regions

UK Cumbria: Central Lakes, Central Fells, Furness, Copeland. England-Wales

Border: Pembrokeshire / Eardisland, Bishop's Castle / Knighton, Builth Wells /

Cilmeri / Aberedw.

Greece Kalavryta (part of Achaia): Selected settlements across the region.

Evrytania: Prefecture of Evrytania.

France Basse Normandie: Marais du Cotentin et de Bessin Regional Natural

Park. Auvergne: Bassin d'Ambert, Regional Natural Park of Livradois-Forez.

Ireland The West Coast: West Galway and West Mayo. North Midlands: North

Lakelands.

Czech Republic Šumava Mountains: Šumava National Park. Novobystřicko /

Jindřichohradecko: Česká Kanada.

Spain North Catalonia: Alta Ribagorça. Inland Valencia: Aitana Valleys.

If one is to take seriously the multi-dimensionality of IRT as both a social practice and an economic sector, one must study the range of actors involved in tourism's development with their distinctive self-interests and goals. The *tourists* (excluding residents and including day visitors and second home owners) form the demand side and in each region 100 were studied. The *businesses* supply tourist services and products; 50 were studied in each region. Twenty *institutions* that promoted or regulated tourism were surveyed in each region. Twenty *resource controllers* were researched, these being agencies and individual actors controlling the supply of key resources for tourism such as finance, training or land. Ten *gatekeepers* in each region were investigated, these being groups which marketed the area's tourist potential, provided tourists with information and helped shape its image. Finally 50

members of *host communities* in each region were included in the research to determine residents' perspective on various impacts of tourism.

The predominant focus of SPRITE's research was on using qualitative research methods to evaluate and analyse research findings (Patton 2002). However, the data collection methods used with each actor group varied according to the type of information needed and the nature of the respondents. For example, the surveys of the tourists were the most structured, although still providing scope for individual qualitative responses. The discussions with the host communities were the most free-flowing; at times the researchers engaged in participative observation to gain further insight into local networks and social relationships, although adequately addressing the core of key conceptual themes (discussed earlier) to ensure comparability of results among the 12 study regions. Overall, three styles of recording field data (following Corsaro 1981) were found to be the most useful in guiding the survey work: In the *field notes*, a running account was made of the slowly unfolding research process helped by transcriptions of audiotapes. These guided the earliest phases of research and provided an overall representation of key issues in the sub-regions. The *personal notes* were where the researchers listed their own perceptions, self-reflections, memories, and impressions in the form of individual diaries, to identify later their own possible influences on the data and the effects of personal events on the data collection and analysis. In the *theoretical notes*, emergent trends were recorded, also including hunches to follow up later in the research. These helped in further refining the research focus and addressing concerns among actor-groups. Taken together, these surveys of the actors and their inter-relationships in formal and

informal local networks were chosen because of the way IRT is produced and consumed, encouraged and restrained, and mediated and regulated as an economic, social and cultural practice.

However, one of the limitations of using qualitative methodology is the threat of conclusions based on the selection of data that fits the researchers' existing theory or preconceptions and the selection of data that 'stand out' to the researchers" (Maxwell, 1996). However, ongoing discussion with colleagues about the research process served to stimulate researchers' reflections regarding this potential problem.

Nevertheless, the influence of the researchers on the subjects in the study is inevitable in qualitative interview process (Maxwell, 1996). However, the objective of the researchers was to understand this influence not to eliminate it. Some general guidelines were followed to minimise this. The researchers avoided value-laden reactions to interview dialogue; and allowed subjects to lead the discussion as much as possible.

Following this introductory paper, the articles brought together in this special issue of *Tourism Geographies* are centred on the subject of how tourism actors in selected lagging rural regions across Europe have responded to the notion of IRT and its key concepts. In particular, the attention is on strategies that use the interests of tourists in local culture to strengthen local identity. A striking characteristic of IRT is the way in which it promotes self-awareness, pride, self-confidence and solidarity among local actors, as most of the contributions to this special issue demonstrate. The papers which follow focus on key aspects of the research looking into various aspects of IRT.

"Resources and activities complementarities: the role of business networks in the provision of integrated rural tourism." (Petrou *et al.* 2007). This paper explains how networks of businesses can promote or limit the development of integration in rural tourism, using contrasting areas in the UK, Spain and Greece as comparators.

"Measuring integrated rural tourism" (Clark and Chabrel 2007) devises a novel way of operationalising the multi-dimensional measurement of IRT so that one can identify where in space, time and among actors IRT is being achieved. This allows IRT to become a usable policy tool as well as an academic concept

"A Decision Support System (DSS) for integrated tourism development: rethinking tourism policies and management strategies." (Bousset *et al.* 2007). A DSS for IRT creates a novel model, based on empirical evidence from the actors, of scenarios which allows one to predict how different futures for IRT might be configured to maximise overall public benefit from the sector. It assesses the ease with which scenario development can be achieved.

"Promoting integrated rural tourism: comparative perspectives on institutional networking in France and Ireland." (Cawley *et al.* 2007). Here, one examines the contrasting roles of institutions of different sorts and scales in France and Ireland, particularly how they are promoting or hindering the integration of rural tourism. The paper demonstrates the role of political context in shaping IRT development.

"Exploring tourists and gatekeepers' attitudes towards Integrated Rural Tourism in the England / Wales Border Region." (Ilbery *et al.* 2007). This paper investigates the perceptions of tourists and gatekeepers (such as tour operators and destination marketing organisations) on IRT, noting their role in consuming and marketing the more recently acknowledged qualities of rurality such as farming, food processing, creativity and the arts, heritage and outdoor recreation.

Together, these papers examine the steps that tourism actors in lagging regions have taken either to deflect exogenous tourist developments in order to keep control of their own lives or to initiate endogenous tourism developments for community gain. In terms of academic disciplines, the approach is largely interdisciplinary; most scholars contributing to this special issue work in geography, economics, ecology, and leisure and tourism studies. The emphasis is on showing how the concept of IRT has developed at different rates and in different forms in the study areas, and explaining these spatial variations.

Conclusions

This paper has set the scene for those that follow in this issue of *Tourism Geographies*. It has explained the conceptual and methodological frameworks shared during the research and which are used in the papers. Additionally we have shown how it is possible to create a coherent and broad definition of 'integration' in the context of modern rural tourism that overcomes the partial approaches to the topic which have excessively privileged one group of actors, without succumbing to excessively dualistic models with 'winners' and 'losers'. The approach used here

allows a more complex and nuanced set of outcomes, varying spatially in tune with local circumstances.

Rural communities are affected in distinctive ways by the paradigm of competition that dominates traditional economic development policy. This is particularly true for the communities in lagging rural regions that lack the critical mass of people or infrastructure to compete for industry and business. Thus the guiding philosophy of IRT recognises that local actors are an important and significant part of a region (both in terms of culture, geography and population) and can benefit from policies that empower them and enhance their long-term well-being. A consequence of this is that endogenous development (in this case for rural tourism) is highly contextual, as the papers that follow demonstrate.

There is clearly a need for further research on actors' perceptions and experiences to understand how IRT can be managed within a sustainable framework. Future studies might explore the basis upon which rural networks of exchange are structured and stakeholders prioritised in a manner that accords them various levels of salience.

Further research could be done to understand better the basis for various actors' potential to both compete and cooperate. Also valuable would be an exploration of the role of local leaders' social capital in managing relationships, especially in terms of minimising negative behaviour among members and enhancing cooperation. Further research could also test the hypothesis that the most central and most connected actor in the network is able to influence its structure or its potential to grow or conversely remain static.

Endnote 1

This paper is based on a collaborative programme of research funded under the EU's Quality of Life and Management of Living Resources programme (QLK5-CT-2000-01211 - SPRITE) and undertaken by the universities and research centres listed in Endnote 2. SPRITE is the acronym for "Supporting and promoting integrated tourism in Europe's lagging rural regions". The authors particularly wish to thank Moya Kneafsey (University of Coventry) and Tim Jenkins (formerly of the University of Wales, Aberystwyth and coordinator of the SPRITE project) for their valuable contributions towards the SPRITE conceptual framework.

Endnote 2

Participating research groups

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Department of Economics, University of Patras, Patras, Greece

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