

Community Engagement in Drive Tourism in Ireland

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ABSTRACT *This paper presents research which investigates community engagement with the Wild Atlantic Way (WAW) drive tourism product. This drive tourism product is Ireland's first long distance drive touring route stretching along the Atlantic coast for 2500km on the western coastline from Donegal to West Cork. Qualitative interviews were employed with a representative sample of community members along the WAW. The results presented in this paper provide a deeper insight into community engagement with drive tourism on the WAW. The research revealed a high level of approval for the project but a low level of community-integrated involvement with the WAW. The research also identified community perspectives in relation to drive tourism in Ireland. Finally this paper concludes that while there are low levels of community engagement with the drive tourism product, there is a significant level of community support for the development of this drive tourism product in Ireland.*

Keywords: *Community, Community Engagement, Drive Tourism, Ireland, Wild Atlantic Way (WAW)*

Introduction

Community engagement in tourism has been well documented (Kayrooz, Sanders & Ritchie, 2005; Shilling, 2007; Chanchani, Roy & Narayan, 2009; Honey, 2009; Stone, 2012; Waligo, Clarke & Hawkins, 2013; Presenza, Del Chiappa & Sheehan, 2013; Philips & Roberts, 2013). However, community engagement in drive tourism in Ireland has not received much attention in tourism academia and is an area in need of further investigation. International best practice has highlighted a wide variety and degree of community participation; engagement and consultation with drive tourism. Following this, the success of drive tourism depends on the level of community engagement in tourism developments (Carson et al, 2002; Issac & Van der Sterran, 2004; ITIC, 2011; WTTC, Timothy & Boyd, 2015) as communities have been identified as vital to a tourist's experience (DTTS, 2013; Fáilte Ireland, 2014). However securing community support and engagement for tourism developments can be a difficult task. Furthermore a community engagement process requires management, in some cases by Local Authorities or state agencies (DECLG, 2014). This therefore outlines the importance of community engagement in developing drive tourism.

In Ireland, large-scale drive tourism routes are a relatively new concept, and will require careful planning and management. Considering the Wild Atlantic Way (WAW) incorporates hundreds of coastal communities along the route, sustainable planning and management is essential to maximize the benefits of tourism to the local communities while minimising negative impacts of tourism. Importantly, planning responsibly for tourism is imperative for tourism to deliver positive social, economic and environmental outcomes (Dredge & Jenkins, 2007). Therefore in order to maintain this product and to grow its potential, the local community along the WAW could play a significant role. As a result, community engagement cannot be underestimated and is central to any planning developments for drive tourism.

If communities are more involved in the decision making process of tourism planning and management, their livelihoods can be affected directly in a positive way (Aung, 2013). Consequently in order to maintain tourism sustainability, a collective policy making process between Local Authorities, government agencies, businesses and most

importantly, host communities is needed to plan and regulate tourism development (Vernon, Essex, Pinder & Curry, 2005; UNEP, 2005; Dredge, Macbeth, Carson, Beaumont, Northcote, & Richards, 2006; Muhanna 2006; Department of the environment, community and local government, 2012). Hence, community engagement needs to be an integral part of a strategy for holistic tourism promotion from local to national levels. As such community engagement for any tourism initiative is a necessity for its long-term success. This Irish study has identified community engagement in the WAW drive tourism product. More significantly, this paper will provide a deeper insight into who defines the community along the WAW and the current state of host community involvement in drive tourism in Ireland. Finally this paper reaches a conclusion that highlights that while the level of community awareness of the WAW is high, the overall level of community engagement is low, yet communities support the development and roll out of the WAW drive tourism product in Ireland.

Defining communities along the WAW

A crucial step in developing community engagement in drive tourism on the WAW is defining the composite make up of communities situated along the WAW. Theory has illustrated that a community is the linkages of individuals brought together by the sharing of a range of factors (Geiser, Horwitz, & Gerstein, 2012). These factors can include a community as place, interest and governance (McCabe, Kease, & Brown, 2006). Considerably there have been numerous attempts to define what exactly a community is. Jamel & Getz (1995) state the term community refers to a body of people living in the same locality. However others (Porteos, 1989; Joppe, 1996; Sproule & Suhandi, 1998; Delante, 2003; Leonard & Barry, 2010; Green, 2014) have argued that the term cannot solely be defined in geographic terms. Arguably Delante (2003) states that a community is essentially a communication community based on new kinds of belonging, no longer bound by place, who are able to belong to multiple communities based on religion, nationalism, ethnicity, lifestyle and gender. This contemporary definition of community best illustrates the various community population placed along the WAW. Likewise each community has unique characteristics, its population and socio economic profile, its history and culture, its level of autonomy or dependence, its level of organisation and its isolation (Hashagan, 2002). This study therefore determined the complexity of the community stakeholders incorporated into the WAW drive tourism product. Table 1 (below) provides a composite makeup of communities directly along the WAW.

Table 1. Composite make up of the community directly along the WAW

People and Place		Community Voluntary Groups	
Rural and Urban Coastal Communities		Chamber of Commerce	<u>A wide range of clubs</u>
2500 Kilometres of coast with diverse range of Flora and Fauna		Tourism committees	Fishing clubs
3 Provinces		Rotary Clubs	Sailing clubs
8 Counties		Tidy Towns	Hill walking clubs
5 Gaeltacht regions		Tourism Towns	Caving clubs
53 Blue flag Beaches		<i>Comhaltas</i> Ceoltóirí Éireann	Dive clubs
7 National Parks and Forest Parks		Foroige	Surfing clubs
39 Churches Abbeys and Monasteries		Garda Reserve	Horse riding clubs
Islands		RNLI	Gardening clubs
Tourist Arrivals		Mountain rescue	Walking/running clubs
266,000 North West*		GAA clubs	Scouts/girl guides
815,000 West*		ICA	Sea scouts
499,000 Shannon*		Young at heart	Adventure clubs
1,101,000 South West*		Bird watch Ireland	Cycling clubs
Business		State Agencies and NGO's	
240 Hotels	Restaurants & Café's	8 Local Authorities	Department of Transport Tourism & Sport
102 Guest houses	Petrol stations	4 Fáilte Ireland Regional Offices	Department of Environment
113 Self-catering schemes	Surf schools	5 Airports	Community & Local Government
487 Listed self catering units	Race courses	5 Train stations	Office of Public Works
638 B&B's	Equestrian centres	17 Ferries	National Parks & Wildlife
10 Historic houses	Adventure centres	35 Local Bus services	Irish hotels federation
212 Museums and Attractions	Car hire companies	National Roads Authority	Institute of Technologies
7 Pubs with accommodation	Pharmacies	An Garda Síochána	Universities
6 Restaurants with accommodation	Financial institutions	Iarnród Éireann	Solas
6 Activity holiday accommodation	Retail outlets	Bus Eireann	Keep Ireland Open
42 Caravan and camping	Festival & Events companies	An Taisce	Community tourism organisations
43 Bicycle rentals	Post offices	Leader	(Inishowen Ecotourism Network,
3 University accommodation	Public houses	Western Development Commission	Burren connect. Loop Head
50 Historic houses and castles	GP's	Leave no Trace	tourism, Westport tourism, Team
37 Gardens	Tourism organisation	Emergency services	Sligo, Bera tourism and
48 Golf Clubs	Tour operators	Health Service Executive	development Association, etc)
9 Visitor farms	Travel Agents	Environmental Protection Agency	
55 Art Gallery's	Telecommunication providers	Coillte	

* (based on Fáilte Ireland figures for holidaymakers in 2012)

The complex community makeup identified above (Table I), is made up of a range of different stakeholders including local residents, business providers, community voluntary groups and state agencies. Crucially an understanding of the term “community” is imperative for the success of any community engagement initiative (McCabe et al, 2006). In fact, Hashagan (2002) suggests that community planning needs to acknowledge the diversity if it is to be effective. With this in mind, it is important to reflect on the fact communities could hold a key to the success and development of the WAW drive touring route.

Additionally the relationship between local residents and the wider community are affected indefinitely by tourism development (Jurowki et al, 1997; Kim Uysal & Sirgy, 2013). However it is important to note that only if the host communities are involved in tourism will it survive (Derrett, 2002). In order for this to happen tourism planning should take tourists and host communities into account on an equal basis (Liu & Wall, 2006). Therefore by correctly planning for tourism, a community will benefit greatly in terms of economy and development (Kreag, 2000; Boz, 2008). Nonetheless tourism planning without a comprehensive consultation process with communities is likely to reduce the effectiveness of the process (Buultjens et al, 2012). Sustainable planning possibly administered by Local Authorities may be an essential activity for the future development of community engagement (DECLG, 2013) with the Irish tourism product. In fact, Tuson

and Timothy (2003) believe community engagement in the implementation of tourism plans and strategies is vital in achieving success for tourism products. This activity should center on the role in the empowerment of local communities to facilitate continued community support and involvement in drive tourism in Ireland. Despite this, developing drive tourism within destinations can be a difficult task that demands the participation of community members to develop and maintain drive tourism products such as the WAW.

Developing Drive Tourism on the WAW

Developing drive tourism on the WAW is unlikely without the support of the local community (TSC, 2012). Bearing this in mind, the sustainable development of drive tourism on the WAW is essential for each stakeholder along the coast since the aim of drive tourism products is to attract additional visitors to rural destinations and enhance revenues within communities and the local economy (DTTAS, 2013). Undoubtedly transport plays an important role in Tourism activity (Prideaux, 2000), being seen as an enabler of tourism (Faulkner & Poole, 1989). Additionally developing drive tourism incorporates more than the physical infrastructure of roads and signs. It encompasses the development of an entire drive tourism product made up of attractions, accommodation, services, infrastructure and people. More specifically the drive tourism product impacts multiple stakeholders and communities over the entire 2500 Kilometers of coast. This can represent certain challenges in relation to engaging communities in a meaningful way.

Subsequently there are a number of factors to consider for the success of drive tourism products in Ireland. These dominant factors can have a direct impact on the way drive tourism is developed within destinations. In particular, meeting community and consumer needs, a commitment to road quality, safety and maintenance, signage, roadside infrastructure, accommodation and facilities, biodiversity, visitor infrastructure, technology application and marketing and promotion (Queensland Government, 2014). The usefulness of such factors are crucial in the continual process of developing drive tourism along the WAW for the reasons that drive tourists should feel safe and comfortable while exploring the country (Carson, Waller & Scott, 2002). To a greater extent, as individuals take to the roads, they can assist enterprises, communities and regions in revitalizing their image, their products and services (Derrett, 2002). Therefore it would be beneficial if the host community were willing to engage in developing the WAW. Also, from a visitor host community perspective, it has been found that travelers are now seeking real experiences and local information as opposed to things on appearance seems “touristy” (Olsen, 2002). For this reason local communities are key to play delivering a tourist experience.

Similarly Taylor and Carson (2010) reported that drive tourists activity is an important source of improving rural destinations vitality and economic development. Alternatively, to encourage a greater level of participation among local communities in sustainable community based rural tourism, planning and decision making processes between all stakeholders in the community is detrimental. Murphy & Murphy (2004) state that the more the community is consulted and engaged, the more they will be inclined to accept and support tourism. In fact, collaboration efforts between trail organisations and community groups may be instrumental in correcting erroneous perceptions and smoothing negative resident attitudes about route development (Timothy & Boyd, 2015). However, if community engagement is not conducted in good faith by not fully engaging the

community, it can be perceived as cynical and manipulative exercises (Planning NSW, 2003). In order for the potential of drive tourism to be realised, stakeholder partnership agreements between the state, private sector and community groups must be developed (Queensland Government, 2013). These partnerships can help formalise and deliver this large-scale tourism product. Partnerships and collaborations also have potential management mechanisms as it allows more widespread engagement over issues and concerns of different populations (Timothy and Boyd, 2015). However establishing if community members are willing or interested in engaging with the WAW is what was the aim of this study.

Methodological Approach

This paper provides an assessment on the level of community engagement with drive tourism in Ireland. The study is the first baseline study of community engagement in relation to the WAW in Ireland. It makes a contribution to knowledge by providing a deeper insight into community engagement with Irelands first drive tourism product. This up to date assessment involved extensive primary and secondary data collection and investigation into community engagement with the WAW. The primary data within this paper is derived from a non-probability purposive sample of 517 community members situated and interviewed along the WAW. Each community member was interviewed face to face and asked a specific set of questions in relation to their involvement in the WAW. This particular approach allowed for a balanced viewpoint from all community members and therefore respondents were interviewed in towns, villages and in remote rural areas along the Wild Atlantic Way from Kinsale (Co. Cork) to Greencastle (Co. Donegal). Analysis has revealed a slight prominence of female community members (52%) who participated in the research. A snapshot of the sample is illustrated in Table 2 (below).

Table 2. Sample of Community Members Profile

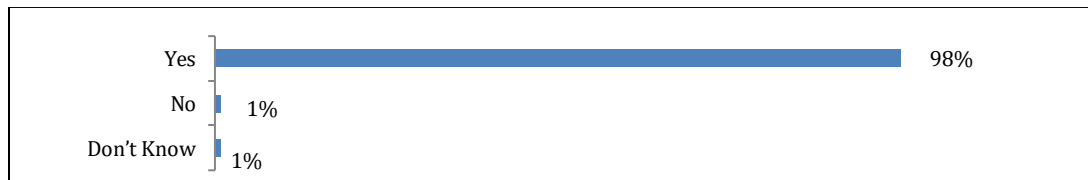
Gender	Age	County	Work Status
48% Male	13% 18-29	15% Cork	33% employed in tourism
52% Female	32% 30-49	16% Kerry	29% unemployed/retired
	40% 50-64	1% Limerick	38% employed outside tourism industry
	15% 65+	15% Clare	
		15% Galway	
		13% Mayo	
		11% Sligo	
		2% Leitrim	
		12% Donegal	

The intention of this study is to use the findings from assessing community engagement in the WAW to identify community member's perceptions of the WAW. Of the overall community members interviewed, 67% were purposely selected because they didn't work within the tourism or tourism related sector, this included unemployed and retired community members. This approach allowed for a balanced perspective of the tourism product from the wider community. The results from this sample provide a deeper understanding of community engagement in the WAW drive tourism product in Ireland.

Results and Discussion

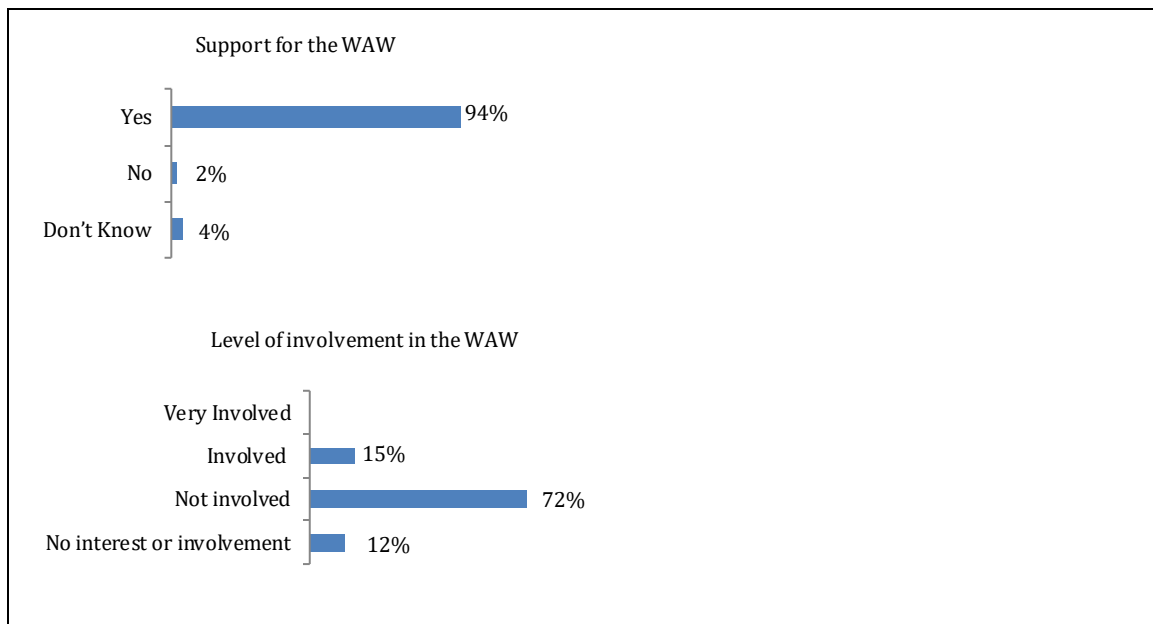
This paper has reviewed existing theory in developing drive tourism, the complex makeup of stakeholders involved with drive tourism in Ireland and their importance in drive tourism. Much investigation focused on the initial level of community engagement for drive tourism in Ireland. Analysis was able to determine who the community perceived to be responsible for the development of the WAW and if they believed it was a positive tourism initiative in terms of communities being proud of the WAW. This research allowed a significant level of data to be gathered in order to provide a greater perspective on the familiarity of the WAW concept among its community. Results below illustrate familiarity of the WAW in relation to the sample. As can be seen from table 3 (below), the vast majority (98%) had some level of knowledge concerning its concept. It has been noted by Thakadu (1998) that some communities are more familiar with tourism related ventures when there are immediate potential benefits to be gained. Factually numerous benefits could be obtained from community stakeholder involvement with the WAW. These benefits could in turn determine the level of engagement in tourism.

Table 3. Familiarity with the WAW



The research therefore examined the level of community support and involvement for drive tourism. Community support for drive tourism is considered by most to be a key factor in the roll out and success of this tourism product (Lucchetti & Font, 2013). Therefore the researchers discussed this with respondents along the WAW. Community support and engagement is required because destinations need to ensure the local community supports the industry (Murphy & Murphy, 2004). In fact, the development of sustainable tourism products is difficult without the support and participation of community members (Fallon & Kriwoken, 2003; Gursoy & Rutherford, 2004; Nicholas, Thapa & Ko, 2009). Table 4 provides an indication of the community member's level of support and involvement in the WAW.

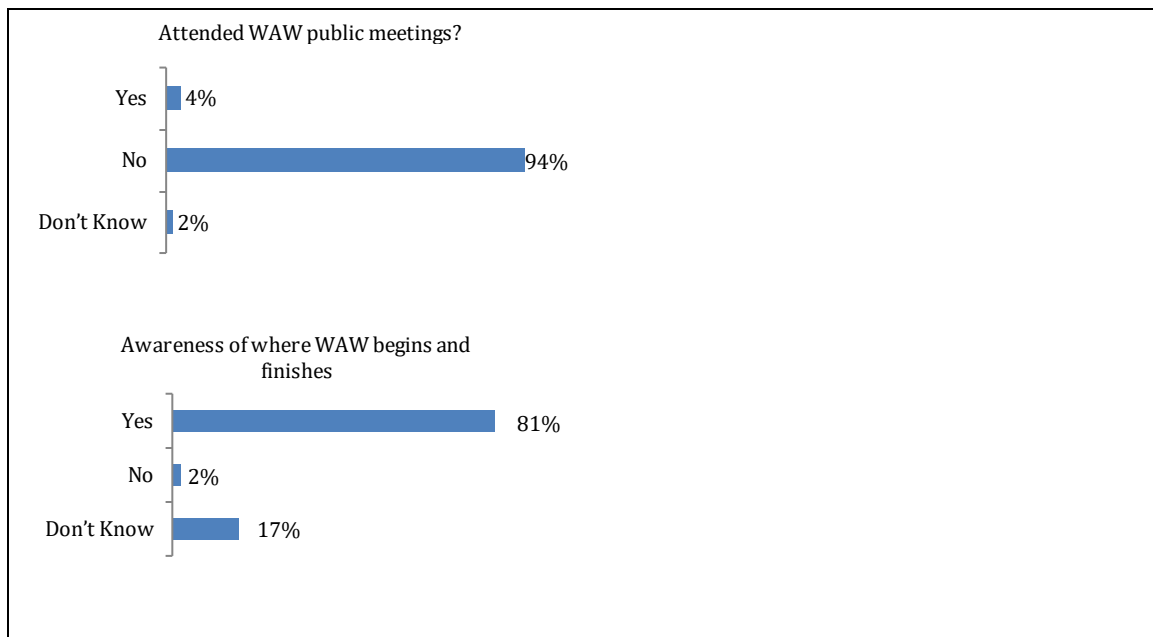
Table 4. Community support and involvement



Interestingly 94% of respondents support the WAW. Further to this 72% are not involved in the WAW while 12% have no interest or involvement in the WAW. This would seem to suggest that the residents of communities often do not know where to begin when it comes to participation in tourism developments (Joppe, 1996). For this reason, a community participation approach to tourism development has been advocated as an attempt to integrate the interests of all community stakeholders including residents, as a critically important group in these developments (Murphy & Murphy, 2004). Additionally Planning for community engagement can play an intricate part in the development of tourism along the WAW. Consequently this should centre on the role in the empowerment of local communities to facilitate continued community support and stewardship of the tourism product.

Furthermore the attendance of community members at public meetings held in relation to the development of the WAW and the community's knowledge on where the WAW begins and finishes was assessed. Additional information regarding community involvement highlighted that the majority of community members interviewed had not attended any public meetings provided by Fáilte Ireland (94%) (See table 5). These meetings were public exhibitions and consultation sessions held by the tourism authority to inform community members on developments of the WAW. It is worth noting that these public meetings were rolled out at key locations along the west coast of Ireland. In relation to the awareness of where the WAW starting and finishing points were, 81% stated they were aware of where the WAW began and finished.

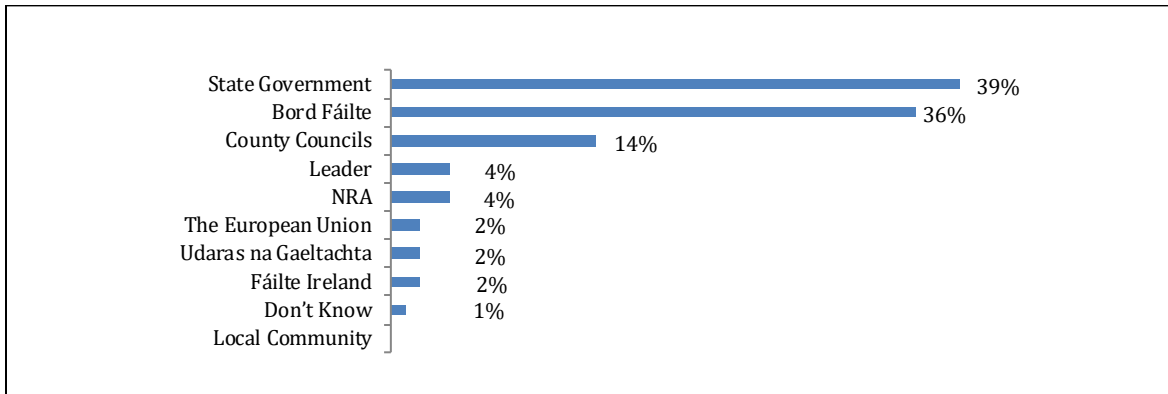
Table 5. Community awareness of the WAW



However, on further questioning of the 81% of respondents who were correct in answering Donegal to Cork, 91% did not specifically know where in these counties the WAW community based drive tourism initiative began and finished. It has been suggested that a lack of awareness may hinder the progression and success of development projects (Stylidis, Biran, Sit & Sivas, 2014). Yet, it is important to note that the most fundamental form of participation is awareness in local people (Thai APEC study centre, Ratanakomut, 2006). Therefore developing the host community's awareness of tourism involves a strategic focus on the overall and long-term operation of tourism as an industry within the local community (Australian Government, 2012). Thus a process of community engagement for the WAW is necessary for the sustainability of the tourism product.

Additionally the communities along the WAW were asked to identify whom they thought were the key stakeholders engaged with the WAW. Moreover it is necessary to note that tourism stakeholders include any individual or group involved, interested in or affected (positively or negatively) by tourism (Aas et al, 2005). Relevant stakeholder engagement in communities can contribute significantly to deliver and provide support for a sustainable tourism industry (DTTAS, 2013). The results show that communities perceive a wide variety of stakeholders to be engaged in the WAW. The top three stakeholders identified by community members with regard to stakeholder engagement were the state government at 39%, Bord Fáilte

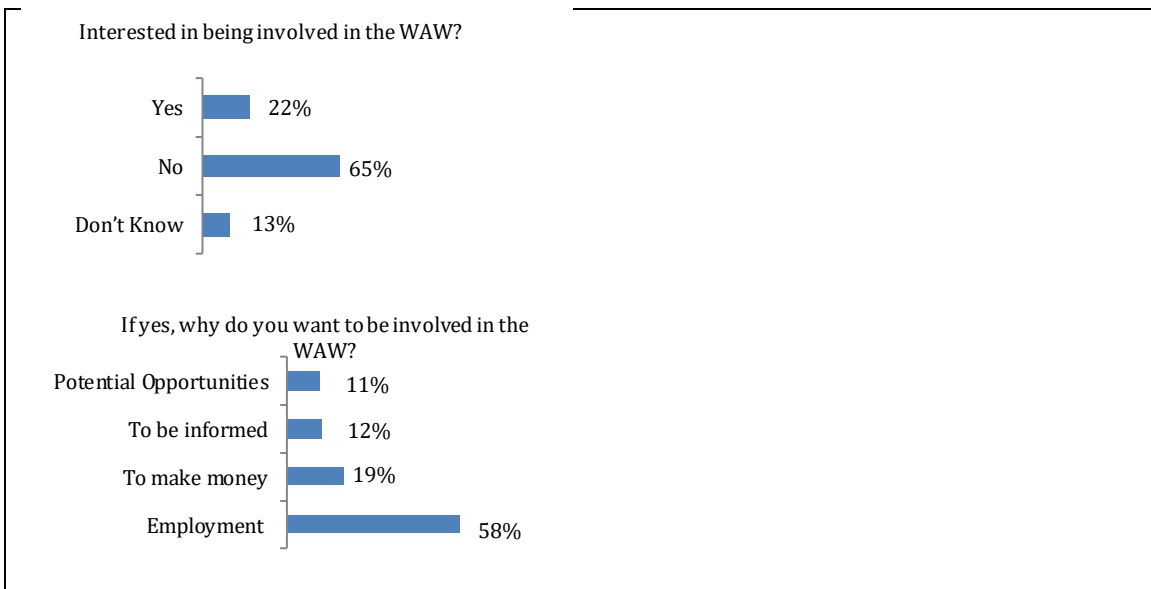
Table 6. Community's perception of the key stakeholders engaged with WAW

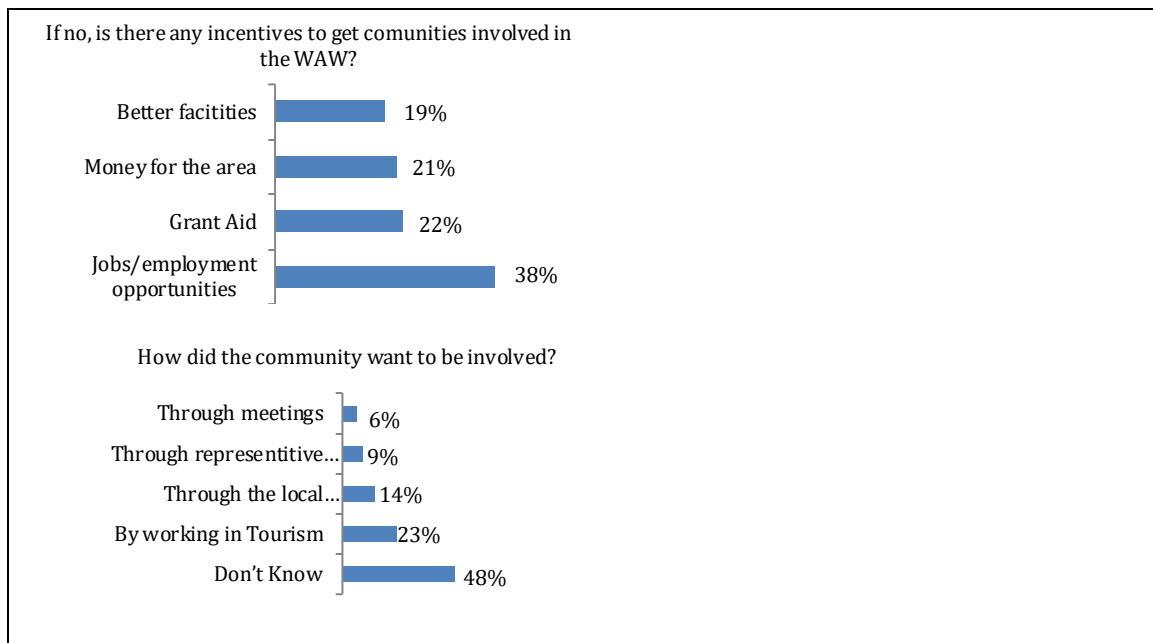


at 36% (Bord Fáilte were replaced by Fáilte Ireland in 2003) and County Councils 14%. It is important to note that no community member acknowledged the local community as a key stakeholder. Yet, the local community has been identified in numerous studies as a principle stakeholder in community based tourism developments (Dekadt, 1979; Aung, 2013; Dabphet, 2009; Presenza, Del Chiappa & Sheehan, 2013; Waligo, Clarke & Hawkins, 2013). Even still, the support of tourism stakeholders is essential for the development, successful operation and long term sustainability of tourism (Dabphet, 2013). Nonetheless community stakeholders can be used to create a tourist friendly destination therefore it is necessary that they are involved in the roll out and management of the drive tourism product.

Further research allowed for data to be gathered and analysed determining the specific levels of engagement among the local communities situated along the WAW drive touring route. Analysis here was concerned with identifying whether or not the community members are at all interested in being involved in the WAW, and if so, why and how they would like to be involved. Additionally the sample was asked whether or not there was anything that would incentivise them to get involved with the WAW.

Table 7. Community interest in engaging with the WAW



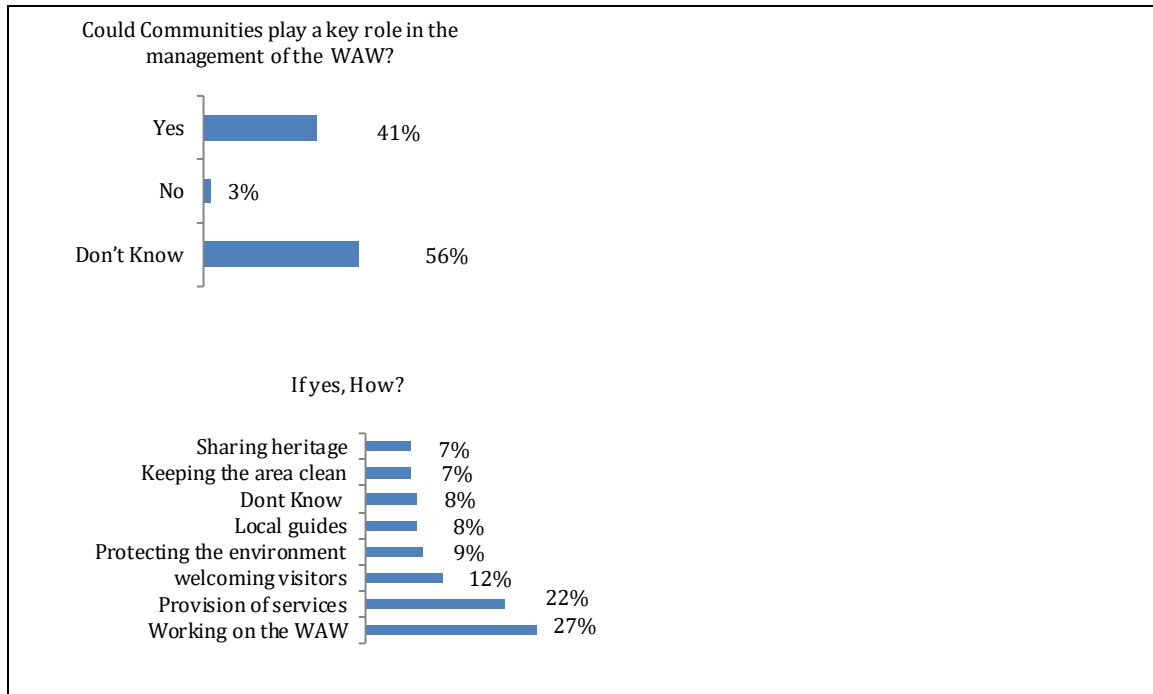


It is important to note that one of the core elements of tourism development is to encourage local community participation, as it is central to the sustainability of the tourism industry (Maganda, Sirima & Marwa Ezra, 2012). This study identified that over half the community members (65%) expressed no interest in being involved in the WAW. This is disappointing considering community involvement is regarded as a critical factor in the development of community based tourism (Jones, 2005; Lepp, 2007). Further research Illustrated that 38% stated that jobs or employment opportunities would incentivise them into becoming involved in the WAW. Of the members interested in being involved in the WAW, their reasons varied from employment at 58%, to make money at 19% and potential opportunities arising out of the WAW at 11%. It was revealed that 12% of the community involved in the WAW stated they are involved '*To be informed*', in particular wanting to be updated on further developments within their area. Despite the complexity of planning processes for tourism, one feature acknowledged for successful destination management planning is a high level of community engagement (Robinson, 1999; Tuson & Timothy, 2000). In fact, community participation, involvement and a sense of ownership are essential elements in the sustainability, viability and success of Community Based Tourism (CBT) (Choi & Sirakaya, 2006; Simpson, 2008; Mitchell & Reid, 2001; Tosun, 2000). It has even been noted that local empowerment can expand community involvement in tourism developments (Okazaki, 2008). For this reason, community involvement in CBT, in particular drive tourism in the WAW should be a planning priority within communities on the west coast of Ireland. However in order for this to be achieved, it may have to be administered through government such as Local Authorities.

Similarly, the research also gathered information on whether or not community members think communities could play a key role in the management of the WAW as well as determining if communities are proud of the WAW. To begin managing tourism is a time consuming process which demands clear policies, ongoing dialogue with stakeholders and constant monitoring (Pederson, 2002). The importance of an effective organisational structure for tourism management and a need for controlled integrated planning cannot be

underestimated (Inskeep, 1991). For this reason, collaboration of key stakeholders offers strong opportunities to manage tourism (Jamal & Gets, 1995). Therefore community participation in managing tourism is vital. However an understanding of local residents perceptions of or attitudes towards tourism is considered a vital ingredient of tourism planning and management (Sharpley, 2014). The results are shown below.

Table 8. Community's role in the management of WAW



The majority of interview candidates did not know if communities could play a key role in the management of the WAW (56%). A further 3% stated “no”, communities could not play a key role in the management of the WAW while 41% stated “yes”. Interestingly, it has been noted that an imperative element to manage routes and trails sustainably involves community members (Timothy & Boyd, 2015). There were a wide variety of suggestions from respondents who stated communities could play a key role in the management of the WAW, with 27% stating that by working on the WAW could contribute to its management. However, it is important to note that communities were not considered a key stakeholder to be involved in the WAW from a community perspective. Twinning-Ward (2007) suggested that local control of tourism operations could contribute to the success of local capacity development of the tourism product. Further responses in relation to how communities could manage the WAW are illustrated above (table 8). Moreover collaboration from communities can provide an effective mechanism for community involvement in tourism planning and management (Jamal & Getz, 1995). The results here suggest that community members are unaware of the benefits to be obtained from their involvement.

Finally, when clarifying community perceptions of the WAW, respondents were asked if they thought communities were proud of the WAW. Tourism can provide numerous benefits to community residents. In fact, being involved in tourism has revealed

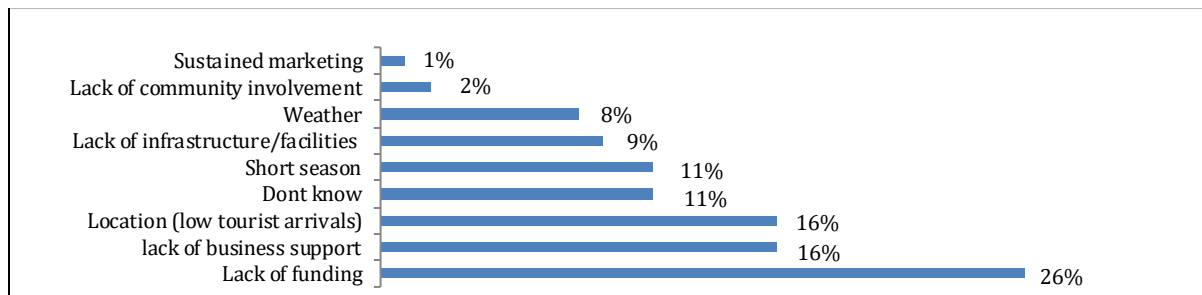
that it contributes to enhancing community life in terms of community belonging and a sense of pride (Andereck, Valentine, Knopf & Voght, 2005). Additionally Haywood (1988) believes that healthy thriving communities are the touchstone for a successful industry.

Table 9. Are the Community proud of the WAW



A majority (82%) of respondents stated they were proud of the WAW while the minority (17%) didn't know if they were proud of the tourism initiative. In addition to this, the study aims to highlight any barriers the local communities along the WAW may consider in developing the WAW. These views are outlined below in table 10. From a community member's perspective, several barriers have been identified. These barriers may affect the practicality of applying tourism development. More specifically they may impact the development of drive tourism and the WAW in the future.

Table 10. Barriers to developing the WAW



The most significant barriers suggested by the community related to issues such as a “Lack of funding” and a “lack of business support”. Both of which if not properly addressed may lead to uncoordinated development and low levels of support for the WAW. Respondents who stated “lack of business support” (16%) explained that ‘if businesses had more government support business providers might in turn employ more staff which in turn supports the WAW development’. The location and low tourist arrivals was a factor mentioned in many areas of the WAW with seasonality issues and the lack of infrastructure and facilities being a common theme emerging with this question. Interestingly weather was considered a barrier by the respondents, this may be related to the increased marine activities along the coast, which are dependent on weather conditions. Moreover a lack of expertise can be a barrier to participatory tourism development as well as a lack of awareness of tourism and language barriers which are factors that prohibit effective community tourism development (Jamal & Getz, 1995). More importantly, a key barrier identified to developing the WAW was a “lack of community involvement”. However only 2% of respondents identified this as a barrier. Consequently, it has been noted that community development seeks to dismantle barriers to participation in tourism

(Blackstock, 2005). Moreover factors for success in developing iconic self-drive routes include most importantly, the involvement of communities along the way, an understanding of the drive tourist, as well as the development of attractions, effective interpretation, signage and infrastructure. Overall it seems that most community members are familiar with the WAW drive tourism product and proud of the initiative. However it is clear that the majority of the sampled members of the community have no major interest in being involved with the Wild Atlantic Way. However according to Heitmann (2010) with good management practices communities can actively participate and be involved in the process of developing and managing products and impacts on the physical environment can be kept to a minimum.

Conclusion

This paper has reviewed literature on community engagement in drive tourism to highlight the overall level of community engagement with drive tourism in Ireland specifically for the WAW. Much investigation into this research topic focused on the importance of effective community engagement for drive tourism in Ireland, which cannot be underestimated. It has been highlighted that a diverse range of community groups are situated along the WAW touring route. Moreover literature has revealed that community engagement is essential in providing valuable tourist experiences. What this paper has found is that the level of engagement with drive tourism is notably low, however, the drive tourism product seems to be accepted by the community with a high level of pride illustrated by community members. Overall, the product seems to be working well to date. In fact other tourism stakeholders from communities excluded from the route have been seen to actively pursue inclusion to become part of the WAW drive tourism route.

Furthermore this study identified numerous gaps in research in relation to community engagement in drive tourism in Ireland as this area has received little attention. Consequently, looking forward as the WAW develops as a product it is worth noting that a lack of community engagement can hinder the development of drive tourism and sustaining the tourism product. Furthermore there may be no holistic understanding of drive tourism and the community may not realise the benefits of tourism to communities. Yet involving communities is vital in the planning and development of drive tourism to maintain the product and enable its success. In fact the integration of all stakeholders in the development process could safeguard the sustainable management of the tourism product (Heitmann, 2010). In addition to this, results illustrated community perceptions of whom they associated as key stakeholders involved with the WAW. Interestingly the local communities did not identified themselves as key stakeholders in developing the WAW. Moreover an examination of results revealed that a majority of community members expressed no interest in being involved with the WAW however as this product matures and tourist arrivals increase, this may change. However, at present, community support for the development of drive tourism on the WAW is high. This could possibly be administered through Local Authorities who have a legal obligation to consult with communities when developing county development plans (Planning and Development Act 2000). In conclusion, it seems community members along the WAW do not realise the importance of their involvement in drive tourism in Ireland, which supports the low level of community engagement with drive tourism. Yet in order to get communities involved in the WAW, perhaps awareness of the perceived benefits of the tourism product to local residents and

host communities is needed. However even though there are low levels of community engagement with the drive tourism product, there is still a significant level of community support for the development of this drive tourism product in Ireland.

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