

International Centre for Responsible Tourism

Tourism in Transition? Incorporating tourism into the Transition model Anna Waddilove and Prof. Harold Goodwin

*International Centre for Responsible Tourism, Leeds Metropolitan University, Leeds, UK
Headingley Campus, LS6 3QS, UK Tel (+44)113 8125880; Fax (+44) 113 8133111; E.mail:
h.goodwin@leedsmet.ac.uk*

*This paper is based on MSc research undertaken at the International Centre for Responsible
Tourism and supervised by Professor Harold Goodwin. The full length report is available on
request from Anna Waddilove (email: annawaddilove@yahoo.co.uk).*

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INTRODUCTION

This research accepts that there are various definitions of 'sustainable community' and focuses on a grassroots, community response to shifting to a low carbon society, for which climate change and peak oil are the main drivers. The particular sustainable community model which has been selected for exploration is the Transition movement. The research question under investigation is the contribution tourism can make to sustainable communities. In relation to the Transition movement, this is a new area of research.

The relevance of sustainable communities to tourism is becoming increasingly evident. Tourism will be at the sharp end of an energy-constrained future, especially in terms of travel itself. Domestic tourism is, therefore, likely to increase and any increase places even greater emphasis on sustainability concerns. Tourism can only become more sustainable at the local level -tourism generally 'happens' in communities. By their nature, sustainable community initiatives take an integrated approach to their development, and may therefore be able to offer examples of ways in which tourism can become more responsible and sustainable. It is suggested that the notion of local distinctiveness will play an increasingly important role in people's holiday choices if holidaying closer to home and it is argued that Transition Initiatives are well placed to showcase this aspect given their focus on re-localisation.

The main objectives of the research were to determine the extent and types of tourism-related activity taking place within Transition Initiatives around the UK; whether there are any examples of responsible tourism good practice emerging which could be replicated elsewhere; the kinds of tourism that would most benefit sustainable communities; and the character and extent of collaboration between Transition Initiatives, the tourism industry and local government. This was done through a combination of questionnaire surveys (sent to each of the official UK Transition Initiatives listed on the Transition Towns Wiki website¹ in June-July 2008; n=58) and key informant interviews.

Case studies were undertaken in Glastonbury and Totnes, both located in the south west of England, as these were the two towns considered to be most actively addressing tourism issues. Fieldwork took place in the two towns in August 2008. Figures 1 & 2 (below) detail the organisations and businesses from which key informants were selected.

This paper aims to assist sustainable community initiatives, such as the Transition movement, to incorporate tourism into their remit, and to raise awareness of the issues within the tourism industry and local government.

¹ <www.transitiontowns.org> [Accessed 30/9/09].

GLASTONBURY	TOTNES
<p><u>Transition Glastonbury</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key contact* • Transport sub-group** • Heart & Soul sub-group*** • Food sub-group¹ <p><u>Local government</u></p> <p>Town Council:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Councillor* <p>Mendip District Council:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tourism Dept. • Transport Dept. <p>Somerset County Council:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tourism Dept. <p><u>Industry</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Glastonbury Abbey • Guesthouse owner • Bicycle hire shop / café owner** • Somerset Area Tourism Partnership¹ <p><u>Other</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chamber of Commerce • Pilgrim Reception Centre*** • Mendip Strategic Partnership <p>¹(Interview questions sent & responded to via email)</p>	<p><u>Transition Town Totnes</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key contact (member of Food/Economics & Livelihoods sub-groups) • Transport sub-group* • Totnes Pound sub-group** • Local Government Liaison sub-group*** <p><u>Local government</u></p> <p>Town Council:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Councillor <p>South Hams District Council:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tourism Dept. • Community Development Dept. <p>Devon County Council:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic Development Dept. <p><u>Industry</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Totnes Castle • Totnes Elizabethan Museum • River Link • Guesthouse owner • Destination Devon • Tourist Information Centre <p><u>Other</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chamber of Commerce • Totnes Rickshaw Company* • Totnes Strategy Group*** • PhD researcher**

*/**/**/**** denotes one key informant with two roles
Figure 1 Figure 2

BACKGROUND

The tourism sector

The tourism sector clearly has an impact on the earth’s climate whilst at the same time being vulnerable to the effects of both climate change and peak oil.

The sector is faced with a daunting task: “...to develop a coherent policy strategy that decouples the projected massive growth in tourism in the decades ahead from increased energy use and GHG emissions.” (UN World Tourism Organization/UN Environment Programme 2008, p.27). With air travel forecast to double in the next ten years (NEF 2008), David Metz (former Chief Scientist in the UK Government’s Department for Transport) proposes that “we would have to bring to a halt the ever increasing growth in mobility that has characterised human history if we are not to damage the human environment unacceptably.” (2008, p.14).

Air travel is the primary mode of transport for international tourism (NEF 2008); aviation is a major contributor to climate change; there is increasing awareness of peak oil’s impact; hence, an increase in domestic tourism may be both desirable and inevitable.

Domestic tourism

Domestic tourism currently accounts for 80% of UK tourism's value (Culture, Media & Sport Committee 2008). Though it has been in decline over the last decade, largely due to the growth in low cost flights (*ibid.*), this could be set to change. Whilst concerns over climate change may not yet have caused any significant reduction in holidaying abroad, during 2008 peak oil and the economic downturn combined to cause alarm to the aviation industry.

Metz (2008) emphasises quality over quantity of travel which chimes with Krippendorf's plea over two decades ago to "[e]xercise moderation in travel: less far... – less often - stay at home from time to time" (1987, p.135). Indeed, 2008 saw the appearance of a new Americanism to describe stay-at-home-holidays: the 'staycation'. According to Snyder (In: Solnit 2008), staying at home could be one of the most radical things people could do to save the world.

Local distinctiveness

If people start holidaying closer to home, the notion of local distinctiveness becomes increasingly relevant. The term was coined by Common Ground in 1983² and much discussed since, including its relation to tourism.

Chester City Council is thought to be the first local authority in England to produce a Local Distinctiveness Strategy (Chester City Council 2002). Tourism was one of seven areas scrutinized and, importantly, the research found that whilst local distinctiveness is not generally the prime reason for visitors choosing to visit a place, it is the critical factor, other aspects being equal. Kingsnorth, in 'Real England' (2008) highlights the Norfolk town of Sheringham as being "*one of the least cloned, and most individual, towns in the whole of England*" (p.114), with a strong sense of place and identity, manifested by the range of independent shops, which local people recognise as an important visitor attraction.

Linked to the concept of local distinctiveness is a focus on localisation, with the increasing realisation that multinational businesses and foreign goods are not sustainable. Whilst local distinctiveness has wider benefits than attracting visitors, tourism can play a role in preserving England's cultural landscape and heritage and provide a way of sustaining local economies through supporting local products and industries. Sustainable community initiatives are well placed to showcase local distinctiveness through their focus on re-localisation.

Community participation in tourism: a 'bottom up' versus 'top down' approach

The community context is of vital importance in tourism since local communities are generally where tourism happens. For this reason, sustaining the community has become an essential element of sustainable tourism: "*without community sustainability, tourism development cannot be expected to be sustainable*" (Hall & Richards 2000, p.1).

Community initiatives such as the Transition movement which have sustainability at their core should therefore be well positioned to provide sustainable forms of tourism.

Whilst not all tourism writers are proponents of a community approach to tourism, Murphy (1985) wrote: "*the...public has considerable tourism experience, both as hosts and visitors, providing a reservoir of information and enthusiasm if properly tapped*" (p.171) - supporting Seekings' view that "*Tourism has become too important to be left to tourism experts*" (1980,

² <<http://www.commonground.org.uk/>> [Accessed 30/9/09].

p.253 In: Murphy 1985, p.172). The public, 'non-experts', may possess other relevant knowledge and perspectives, for example on sustainability matters. Furthermore, a community approach to tourism may be the helping hand the industry requires in order to meet the extreme challenges of today's global issues.

Relevant recent legislation

The 1992 Rio Earth Summit concluded that as well as the national Agenda 21 sustainable development strategies, Local Agenda 21 (LA21) ambitions would be implemented at local level and through local government, with a strong emphasis on an inclusive approach. From a tourism perspective, the hope was that LA21 would help catalyse the implementation of the principles of sustainable development within tourism development planning and management (Hall & Richards, 2000). However, Williams (2002) refers to LA21 as 'over-optimistic' and argues that "*[t]he response of local councils has proved to be very patchy and in general mostly ineffective.*"

The (UK) Local Government Act 2000 placed an obligation on local authorities to produce Community Strategies which have generally heralded the demise of LA21 strategies (Williams 2002). Following the Egan Review of 'Skills for Sustainable Communities' (2004) they were redefined as Sustainable Community Strategies (SCSs), the aim of which is to:

"enhance the quality of life of local communities and contribute to the achievement of sustainable development in the UK through action to improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of the area and its inhabitants." (Darlow et al 2008, p.19).

SCSs are usually produced under a Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), bringing together councils and key local partners³. In most local authorities, SCSs have become the overarching strategy, providing a framework for linking other local plans, such as tourism policies. According to Williams (2002), (Sustainable) Community Strategies represent "*a very significant opportunity in the history of sustainable development within local government.*" (p.198). A key requirement is consultation with local stakeholders and this research aimed to examine whether SCSs and, by association LSPs, provide a means by which sustainable community initiatives, such as Transition groups, can influence local government policy.

The aim of the Sustainable Communities Act (2007) is to provide a channel for communities, and local authorities, to request central government's help in taking action on sustainability. Local authorities must choose whether to 'opt in' to the Act. Local Works believe this could prove to be a truly 'bottom up' form of government⁴ and according to Hazel Blears (CLG Minister) it is about "*turning assumptions about power upside down*" (CLG 2008). The newness and low level of coverage of this legislation meant that it was picked up only part way through the research. However, opinions were sought latterly from Transition Initiative members.

The Transition Movement and tourism

Whilst Kinsale's Energy Descent Action Plan (Hopkins 2005) includes tourism as a key theme, from the limited existing Transition literature this appears to be one of the few mentions of tourism's relevance to Transition. No research to date has linked the two issues. Interestingly, whilst the Transition movement may be a new phenomenon, the research question posed in this report was one Murphy raised over two decades ago:

³ <<http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=7890619>> [Accessed 29/9/09].

⁴ <<http://www.localworks.org/>> [Accessed 26/9/09].

“Public participation as a form of political action has modified existing institutions and planning procedures to affect social change and environmental preservation, so its extension to tourism (an activity so interwoven into community life) becomes inevitable. Tourism development is a local issue because that is the level where the action takes place...The question remains whether these same people are willing or able to become involved with tourism development decisions and how effective this is likely to be.” (1985 p.172).

SUMMARY OF SURVEY RESULTS

Of the 58 Transition Initiatives contacted, 28 returned surveys. Of these 28, 12 Initiatives responded that they were considering tourism (even if only at the discussion stage).

Surveys returned	
Group A (considering tourism)	Group B (not considering tourism)
Canterbury (Kent)	Bristol (Bristol)
Forest of Dean (Gloucestershire)	Bro Ddyfi (Powys, Wales)
Glastonbury (Somerset)	Crediton (Devon)
Isle of Man (Self-governing UK Crown dependency)	Forest Row (E.Sussex)
Isles of Scilly (Isles of Scilly)	Frome (Somerset)
Kinsale (Co. Cork, Ireland)	Leicester (Leicestershire)
Leek (Staffordshire)	Llandeilo (Dyfed, Wales)
Lewes (E. Sussex)	Lostwithiel (Cornwall)
Rhayader (Powys, Wales)	Market Harborough (Leicestershire)
Totnes (Devon)	Marsden&Slaithwaite (W. Yorkshire)
Tring (Hertfordshire)	Mayfield (E. Sussex)
West Kirby (Merseyside)	North Howe (Peterhead, Scotland)
	Seaton (Devon)
	Stroud (Gloucestershire)
	Torbay (Devon)
	Wroughton (Somerset)

Figure 3

Group A represents a mix as to the length of time the group has been running and how reliant the local economy is on tourism (or, at least, of the respondent’s perception of this). It is not necessarily only the more established groups or those perceived as popular visitor destinations which are considering tourism. For most groups there is a correlation between the amount of tourism perceived to be in the area and how interested the group is in tourism, but this is not always the case. Strikingly, no Initiative responded that their local economy was “not at all” reliant on tourism.

All respondents were asked to give details on whether their Transition Initiative had considered, or was planning to consider, the following areas of activity, which were chosen as potentially relating to tourism:

- A. Transport (to locality/within locality)
- B. Local food
- C. Responsible/ethical business practices amongst tourism businesses
- D. Locally produced crafts/souvenirs
- E. Other

The following statements summarise the comparison between Group A and B for each area of activity:

- Transport to locality is more of a priority amongst groups considering tourism (92% compared to 63% amongst groups not considering tourism).
- ALL groups considering tourism are looking at transport within the locality, whilst three quarters of the Initiatives not considering tourism are.
- Local food is very high on the agenda for ALL Initiatives surveyed.
- Over half the Initiatives considering tourism are looking at responsible/ethical businesses practices; roughly a third of groups not considering tourism are.
- Similarly, whilst almost half the Initiatives considering tourism are looking at locally produced crafts/souvenirs, almost a third of those not considering tourism are.

The data shows that activities being undertaken by Transition Initiatives within each of the categories (A-E) are remarkably similar across both groups. This suggests that much of what the Initiatives not currently addressing tourism are doing could have relevance for tourism if only the connection was made. Indeed, those groups not currently considering tourism need not necessarily diversify their current activities significantly in order for their agenda to address tourism issues.

In order to gauge the extent to which a connection is being made between encouraging behaviour change amongst residents and the inherent impact for visitors, one of the survey questions asked whether any key areas of the Initiative's work related to tourism without a specific focus on tourism itself. A couple of respondents expressed the point exactly: "You could say that we have a transport group and a business & economy group and that these would rather pick up tourism issues also" (Transition Forest Row); a Transition Scilly member commented that he plans to integrate tourism across the Initiative's existing working groups: "otherwise it's just an add-on". However, overall few respondents in Group B agreed that other key areas of the Initiative's work incorporated tourism. Strikingly, the Transition Torbay respondent explained that:

"The focus of Transition is the community; tourism, even where the local economy is heavily reliant upon it, is a secondary function of the community... Tourism will undergo a transition as the community adopts a post-Transition paradigm."

...suggesting that tourism taking place in a 'Transitioned' community will become sustainable by default – which touches on a fundamental point and opens up a whole new area for debate. This does raise questions, however, as to how local tourism businesses will be engaged in the process.

Examples of other interesting cases include:

- The Transition Crediton respondent believes there is little tourism in the area, does not consider tourism to be important, does not think any other areas of the group's work relates to tourism and yet, according to the town's official website:

"Nestled between Dartmoor and Exmoor, and close to the city of Exeter, the town of Crediton is located in an area of outstanding natural beauty. It is the ideal centre for west country holidays in Devon." (www.crediton.co.uk)

Listed under their current 'transport' activity are: looking at public transport to and from Exeter, looking at public transport around Crediton and encouraging cycling; all of these could have relevance for visitors.

- Though the Transition Mayfield respondent acknowledged there is tourism in the area, there is a lack of interest in the subject, tourism is not on the future agenda and the group does not consider that other areas of their work relate to tourism. However, virtually all the group's activities planned or underway have a bearing on tourism: better bus services; bike lanes; re-opening local train station; promoting local food producers; trying to feed the community from local farms, which, it is noted *"the pubs & restaurants would benefit from too"*; and promoting local artists.

Notably, most of the activity reported is aspiration rather than achievement to date, but this is a young movement: the vast majority of Initiatives had been in operation for less than 15 months at the time of surveying.

The majority of respondents have local authority support of some kind and reported awareness of their local authorities' Sustainable Community Strategy, with 47% of all respondents having an input.

SUMMARY OF CASE STUDY RESULTS

Transition Glastonbury & Tourism

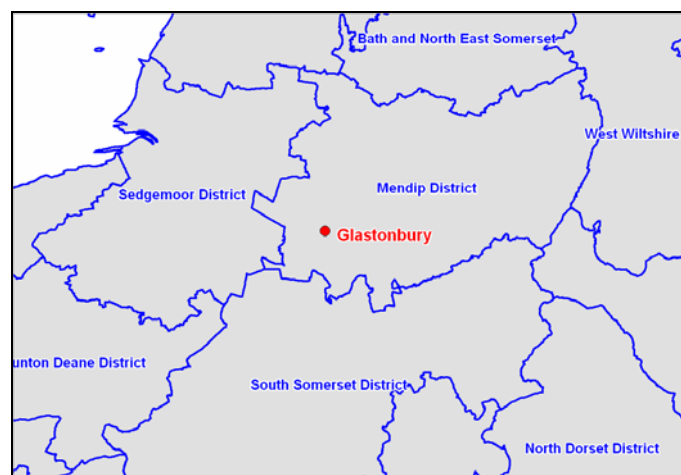


Figure 4

Given the town's dependency on tourism, Transition Glastonbury's co-founder believes that the group must address tourism as an integral aspect of building local resilience and sustainability: how will the local economy fare in the face of climate change and peak oil?

Transition Glastonbury (TG) was selected for this research as one of the UK Transition Initiatives demonstrating the most tourism-related activity. Even so, tourism has not yet

been a major focus for the group; they do not have a separate working group dedicated to tourism. However, several initiatives instigated by the group have relevance to tourism:

A '**Glastonbury bag**' range has been produced (in partnership), available for sale in local retailers. Made to a high standard from ethical materials, the aim is for them to appeal to visitors as souvenirs and to reduce plastic bag usage.

In line with their desire to promote local food, TG has recently produced (again, in partnership) a '**Glastonbury Food Lovers Guide**'. Presented in the form of a small, good quality booklet, it contains contributions from local food projects and artists and will be widely distributed locally, including to the Tourist Information Office (TIC). The food group member interviewed agreed that Glastonbury could re-invent itself around local food if people come forward with the skills and capacity to facilitate it.

A new **bike hire, repair and rickshaw service** has recently been set up by a member of the newly formed TG transport group. This is Glastonbury's first bike shop; the owner is keen to raise the profile of responsible tourism and increase levels of cycling in the town amongst residents and visitors alike.

The newly opened Pilgrim Reception Centre, managed by a TG member, is promoting responsible tourism. Their website includes '**green**' pages, inviting visitors to feel part of the local community by acting responsibly and asking questions of their hosts (about local food sourcing, for example).

A couple of Transition Glastonbury members suggested that tourism could be of greater benefit to the local community if the town re-invented itself around 'eco retreat' breaks and/or local food; the former would engage visitors with the sustainability agenda and reduce their environmental impact locally; the latter would support local food supply chains, reduce food miles and strengthen local resilience. A TG member argued that Glastonbury has the local food producers, the delivery and distribution infrastructure and, crucially, a willing market. Given the ever growing popularity of local, organic produce in the UK; that there is strong awareness of food locally; and that the promotion of local food is on the agendas of both the district and county councils, this would seem an excellent way for the group to prove its ability to help others reach their own targets – for which TG could expect local authority support and recognition.

Transition Town Totnes & tourism



Figure 5

The relationship between Transition Town Totnes (TTT) and tourism is somewhat ambiguous and, as in Glastonbury, it relies on the conviction of particular individuals within TTT that tourism must be integrated with the Transition model. A key TTT member expressed uncertainty over how to develop tourism, agreeing that tourism has relevance across many of TTT's existing working groups: *"There's a point at which they all mesh together and tourism is a good crossover...It's hard to separate tourism initiatives from other TTT work areas"* and therefore questioning whether a tourism sub-group is the answer.

Several informants agreed that local distinctiveness would become an increasingly important marketing tool with one TTT member commenting: *"people like variety and a community makes that variety happen."*

There was general agreement amongst TTT informants that the group has overlooked tourism so far. However, whilst tourism has not been a significant area of TTT activity to date, several initiatives have relevance to tourism:

Transition Glastonbury's 'Food Lovers' Guide' was inspired by '**A celebration of local food**' produced by TTT in June 2008. It contains information about local food producers and the businesses supporting them, including accommodation providers. Selling outlets include the Elizabethan Museum and the TIC.

The second main tourism-related TTT initiative, one which ties in with the local food guide, is the **Totnes Pound** – an experimental local currency introduced in March 2007. According to TTT's website, one of its benefits is *"to encourage tourists to use local businesses"*. However, whilst it was reported that visitors have not been explicitly targeted, a leaflet has been produced asking visitors to change money. Some leakage has occurred with visitors keeping notes as souvenirs.

A member of TTT's transport group has plans which could have huge significance for tourism. Having set up the Totnes Rickshaw Company he plans to use motorised **rickshaw taxis** run on recycled cooking oil to transport people around town. The initiative has great local support, with offers from local hotels to supply used cooking oil in return for advertising space on the rickshaws. The company's main aspiration is to acquire enough vehicles to meet customers disembarking from the River Link boats and transport them to the top of the High Street, encouraging them to explore the shops on their way back to the boat by foot.

At the time of writing, the rickshaw taxi project was on hold because of vehicle licensing issues with the district council. However, in September 2008, TTT held a one-off '**Tudor Town Totnes Special**' event, substituting the rickshaws for a free shuttle bus from the quay to the market square. As the TTT organiser expressed: *"In the case of tourism, it makes sense to tighten the relationship with the high volume operators such as River Link and promote the diversity of our fabulous High Street"* (Totnes Times 2008).

Another TTT member who has been involved in running '**Transition tours**' of the town for visiting groups, researchers etc. has set up a company to extend this approach to 'mainstream' visitors - explaining the concept of Transition during an historical walk through the town (see www.dartvalley.org).

Totnes' year-round vibrant atmosphere has perhaps served to mask the importance of tourism to the wider community as well as to the Transition group. Despite issues around tourists keeping notes as souvenirs, a local currency would seem to be an excellent way of maximising local economic benefits by reducing economic leakage – one of the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)'s Indicators of Sustainable Development for Tourism Destinations (UNWTO 2004) and a principle of the Cape Town Declaration on

Responsible Tourism⁵ (ICRT 2002). The rickshaw scheme has strong support from all key informants, bar the district council, and the 'Tudor Town Totnes Special' event strongly connects with responsible tourism's ethos of targeting mainstream, high volume operators. Its focus on economic sustainability demonstrates TTT's breadth of concern and aligns with another principle of the Cape Town Declaration by providing support to small businesses. The 'Totnes Town Special' tours, by aiming to engage tourists in the process of Transition, "*provide more enjoyable experiences for tourists through more meaningful connections with local people, and a greater understanding of local cultural, social and environmental issues*" (Cape Town Declaration).

Unlike TG, TTT has not thought about re-marketing the town, but given that tourist activity centres on the independent shops, the group's focus on ways to increase benefits from 'more of the same' tourism might be a sensible priority. The 'Totnes Town Special' tours encourage a form of tourism beneficial to the community by disseminating the Transition message and raising awareness.

Relations with the tourism industry

Most industry representatives interviewed were generally supportive of the Transition Initiatives, or showed signs that they would be with a better understanding. However, it appears that neither Transition Glastonbury nor Transition Town Totnes has yet attempted to engage with accommodation providers, or indeed with local attractions managers in Glastonbury's case, though there were signs that engagement may be fruitful. For example, a Totnes B&B owner's attitude towards TTT shifted completely during the course of the interview: he does not sell TTT's local food guide or exchange Totnes Pounds though he reflected that he could easily do both, suggesting there may be an untapped audience within the town. For TG, which is struggling to connect with the TIC, engaging directly with tourism businesses may provide an alternative route.

Both Glastonbury and Totnes Chambers of Commerce key informants interviewed were supportive of their local Transition group although both admitted they have little involvement.

To date, neither Initiative has made contact with their local Destination Management Organisation (DMO)⁶ - the Somerset Tourism Partnership or Destination Devon respectively - though both DMOs have only recently formed.

Relations with local authorities

The Cape Town Declaration on Responsible Tourism asserts that "*[l]ocal authorities have a central role to play in achieving responsible tourism*" (ICRT 2002). There is general recognition within the Transition movement that support from above is necessary. However, frustration with local government was a general theme of this research. Community groups seeking to influence policy, especially in a cross-departmental area such as tourism, will probably require a working relationship with all levels of local government (parish, town, district, county/unitary). However, politics can be contradictory across the different tiers, highlighted in Glastonbury's case by a Mendip District Council officer admitting his lack of engagement with Glastonbury's Town Plan (2006), and in Totnes' case by the perception locally that the district council has not acknowledged the town's

⁵ <<http://www.icrtourism.org/Capetown.shtml>> [Accessed 28/9/09].

⁶ <http://www.swtourism.org.uk/marketing-your-business/destination-marketing/> [Accessed 30/9/09].

Community Plan (2005): even if a Transition Initiative is successful in influencing their community plan, it may then be ignored by the next tier of government.

On a more positive note, in Totnes, the Town Council Tourism Champion is keen to engage with TTT and could provide a new approach to the Town Council. Similarly, South Hams District Council's Sustainable Tourism Officer stated she sees potential for collaboration with TTT and may prove to be a key ally - and with the Town Council Tourism Champion keen to open a dialogue with her as well, there is potential for three-way collaboration.

For TG, networking with other Transition groups across the county may prove critical in making all levels of local government more receptive, especially given the added momentum of Somerset County Council seeking to become the UK's first 'Transition Local Authority'. It is too early to know what this will mean in practice, but it seems to have provided a blueprint, Leicestershire County Council having adopted a similar motion⁷. Furthermore, survey data show that very few Transition Initiatives are aware of other Initiatives or other sustainable communities looking at tourism: networking with other community initiatives who may be involved in tourism-related activity may yield useful information.

Local Strategic Partnerships

The suggestion that Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) - where the local council is 'diluted' by a wide range of representatives from the public, private and voluntary sectors - may hold potential for Transition Initiatives to disseminate policy and that they should aim to engage with all the different partners received a mixed response (though there is evidence of success elsewhere with Transition Forest of Dean having being invited by the RDA to work together with the LSP⁸).

A member of the Mendip Strategic Partnership (MSP) believes LSPs are potentially useful vehicles for disseminating and adopting Transition policy, but to influence a LSP a community group must influence the bodies represented on it (which Transition Initiatives were well-positioned to do):

"Policy formation is all about persuasion so the secret of success will lie in how effectively [Transition Initiatives] work together, and in how many of their policies are adopted by others, rather than what bodies they sit on."

He suggested that sustainable community initiatives such the Transition movement have a key role to play in influencing individual lifestyle changes, which will ultimately determine governmental policy.

A South Hams District Council informant admitted that *"the LSP is supposed to be a link between the community and local government, but if I'm absolutely frank it's difficult for community groups to influence local government policy."* The Totnes Strategy Group informant was equally sceptical about the amount of influence the Transition group could have via the LSP:

⁷ <<http://transitionleicester.wordpress.com/2008/12/03/leicestershire-county-council-declares-support-for-transition/#more-28>> [Accessed 27/9/09].

⁸ <<http://transitionculture.org/2008/04/14/funders-tell-transition-forest-of-dean-and-local-authority-you-need-to-work-together/>> [Accessed 28/9/09].

"It's a very good place for agencies to come together to try to integrate plans but not good for the community to play a part in...There is not enough representation from the community and voluntary sectors or a cascading process for the 'bottom' to inform decision makers."

According to the MSP representative, the LSP's important and overarching Sustainable Community Strategies (SCSs) have huge relevance for community groups such as Transition Initiatives. As a TG informant pointed out, many of MSP's priorities for the next 20 years set out in the district's SCS ('A Community Strategy for Mendip', 2005) mirror those of the Transition movement, and have relevance for responsible tourism.

However, Transition informants expressed scepticism as to whether consultation on the strategy actually led to results, tentatively supporting Chapman's (2008) findings that despite high level engagement with local authorities, Transition Initiatives feel they have little influence over policy development. It is too early to tell whether the strategies will live up to the high expectation that has been placed on them.

Sustainable Communities Act

Similarly, it is impossible to know what impact the Sustainable Communities Act will have for community responses - whether it will signal a genuinely 'bottom up' approach to policy making. However, one Totnes resident expressed her concern that although there are a number of groups across the district, including TTT, working together to put pressure on the district council to opt in, she feels there is insufficient interest in sustainability issues at district level, and at town level, where there is huge concern, Totnes gets "drowned out". There was more optimism from a TG informant who believed the council would have little choice if all local communities worked together to apply pressure.

Understanding the three tiers of local government in England and their respective roles and responsibilities concerning tourism has proved one of the greatest challenges of this research. Furthermore, the coordination of tourism in the south west has undergone significant change in recent times (as in most other English regions), and the current state of flux presented an additional challenge in trying to establish how tourism 'works' in the region, particularly because of the resulting lack of ownership of tourism. Many Totnes interviewees, for example, expressed deep concern over local government conceding the promotion of tourism to the new South Devon Area Tourism Partnership (ATP). As Vernon et al. (2005) point out, the question arises as to how these public-partnerships can act as 'change agents' for greater sustainability if their main ambition is marketing; similarly, Hall (2008) asks how promotion can be seen to be set within sustainable tourism goals if promotion and policy are separated. With so new a system it is impossible to make any assessment of the significance of the changes for Transition Initiatives wishing to influence local tourism policy, but it would certainly not appear to have made the situation any easier.

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

Case study informants generally agreed that tourism has to be addressed as part of efforts to increase the community's sustainability and resiliency, but a significant finding is that Transition Initiatives are not sure how to incorporate tourism into the Transition model. A TTT member, as well as several survey respondents, commented on the overlap between

tourism and many of the group's existing areas of work. Integrating tourism into existing working groups, rather than forming a separate sub-group, would seem to facilitate a more holistic approach to tourism development.

Transition's focus on re-localisation fits well with a responsible tourism approach. Transition Initiatives are prioritising local food production and could place more emphasis on using local food and drink to "sell" local distinctiveness if more tourism-related businesses were involved. Only two respondents (Transition Leek and Transition Stroud) mentioned plans for a local 'Made in ...' brand and only the latter has considered opening local art studios to the public. There would appear to be potential for more activity around locally produced crafts and souvenirs: to "*[d]evelop quality products that reflect, complement, and enhance the destination*" (Cape Town Declaration), as campaigned for by Common Ground (Common Ground 2007). Encouraging tourism businesses to source and promote local goods is one of central Government's aims in developing a more sustainable approach to tourism, recognising that "*tourism helps to maintain local culture and diversity*" (DCMS 1999, p.6); chiming with another of UNWTO's Indicators of Sustainable Development for Tourism Destinations - the extent of agreement amongst local community members that their local culture, its integrity and authenticity are being retained (UNWTO 2004).

Virtually all the tourism-related activity within TG and TTT represents examples of good practice, fulfilling many of the principles set out in the Cape Town Declaration as well as certain sustainable tourism policy objectives underlined in the government's tourism strategy and UNWTO's Indicators for Sustainable Development in Tourism Destinations. Although local circumstances are clearly a key factor in determining the feasibility and priority of activities, and the notion of local distinctiveness is, by definition, pertinent to a particular place, some schemes have already been replicated elsewhere, e.g. the local food directories, local currencies and cycle hire schemes.

CONCLUSIONS

Although 12 out of the 28 survey respondents reported that their Transition Initiative is considering tourism, findings suggest that tourism is not a major focus for activity. This is surprising given that that no Initiatives responded that their local economy was "not at all" reliant on tourism and some communities perceived their local economy to be significantly reliant on tourism. Furthermore, many of their current areas of activity have relevance to tourism. However, most of those surveyed are still at the awareness-raising stage; it is unrealistic to expect significant progress yet.

It has been argued here that the basic principles of the Transition movement are strongly aligned to those of responsible tourism. There is evidence that Transition Initiatives could offer an holistic approach to tourism and that tourism could play a key role in linking the different core elements of sustainability within Initiatives (and sustainable communities more widely) to drive change and promote sustainable development. However, whilst Transition Initiatives appear to be well placed to consider tourism within several of their current working groups, the issue is generally being overlooked. Nevertheless, the movement is barely two years old and most groups are in their infancy. Time is clearly against us, but the movement is growing at impressive speed: at the time of writing (September 2009) there are 133 official UK Transition Initiatives – almost 2.5 times the number at the start of the research in June 2008.

The Cape Town Declaration emphasises tourism's role in creating better places for local communities, *"recognising that this can only be achieved by government, local communities and business cooperating on practical initiatives in destinations."* Central government cannot make tourism responsible or sustainable – it has to be done at local level, where tourism happens. It is complicated by confusion over who has ownership of tourism in the UK; it spans many activities and sectors and is overseen by a mosaic of public agencies, private firms and public-private partnerships. Town councils have limited influence; local authorities are outsourcing areas of responsibility to the private sector. Some council officers are interested in sustainability issues, but generally local government is considered to be holding back the willing, suggesting that community groups are only going to be as influential as local government allows. This makes it a complex arena for non-tourism experts. But there is urgency about the need to change our lifestyles and, according to the Government's own Homes & Communities Academy⁹, *"it is the community and individual lifestyle choices that will make the real difference in responding to climate change"*.

Enter Transition Initiatives, who have a critical role to play in alerting government to issues and in engaging the general public in politics, in addition to instigating practical initiatives. However, there is perhaps a tension between the effectiveness of a pressure group and the power to be found in mainstream politics: the pressure group may remain marginalised and the politicians shackled by realpolitik. The movement is new and experimental and it may be that the most effective strategy for Transition Initiatives lies in education, and that by influencing the opinion of the electorate they will eventually achieve a real political impact. Meanwhile, some Transition Initiative members are Councillors and some in local government are engaging with the movement. Two case studies do not provide a basis for robust conclusions; further research is required. Findings suggest that Transition Initiatives plan to just get on and do it, with or without local government support, and it is hoped that this report makes at least some small contribution towards supporting their effort to incorporate tourism into their mission.

⁹ <<http://climatechange.hcaacademy.co.uk/strategic-responses/community-engagement>> [Accessed 30/9/09].

Recommendations

For Transition Initiatives:

- Tourism might be best integrated into the Transition model by incorporating it as part of existing working groups, rather than as a separate sub-group, allowing for a more integrated approach, though there is a danger of the issue getting 'lost'.
- Capitalise on Transition's emphasis on re-localisation by using local distinctiveness as a market advantage in attracting tourists as well as bringing economic benefits to local businesses;
- Engage tourism businesses, particularly accommodation providers and local attractions managers: spread the message as widely as possible;
- Maximise impact by targeting mainstream, high volume tourism businesses where possible;
- Network amongst other Transition Initiatives and other sustainable community initiatives across the county;
- Contact all partners of your Local Strategic Partnership;
- Approach district and county tourism officers, ATP and DMO coordinators;
- Engage with your local Sustainable Community Strategy; submit a response during consultation periods;
- Put pressure on your local authority to 'opt in' to the Sustainable Communities Act;
- Engage with the willing and identify allies;
- Share information across the Transition Network/Low Carbon Communities Network about including tourism on your agenda - perhaps via a posting on the respective websites;
- Make contact with VisitBritain and/or the Tourism Society to alert them to the work/aims of the Transition movement; give a presentation?

For the tourism industry:

- Find out about your local group!
- Try to engage in the Transition process; making an impact may not require much time (e.g. stocking the food directory; offering to exchange local currency etc.);
- Recognise the market advantage in promoting local distinctiveness;
- VisitBritain and the Tourism Society - make contact with the Transition Network to learn about Transition; invite a member to give a presentation.

For local authorities:

- Recognise that the presence of a Transition Initiative can act as a visitor attraction in its own right;
- Consider becoming a 'Transition Local Authority';
- Arrange a meeting with your local Transition group;
- 'Opt in' to the Sustainable Communities Act;
- Invite Transition groups to submit a response to Sustainable Community Strategy consultations;
- Read the Transition Handbook.

For central government:

- Require district councils/unitary authorities to attach more weight to town/parish plans to allow local communities and town/parish councils greater influence and facilitate a 'bottom up' approach;
- Read the Transition Handbook.

Avenues for further consideration

There are various avenues relating to this piece of research which could be explored in the future:

- The effect of the Sustainable Communities Act on sustainable community initiatives;
- Whether community consultation on the Sustainable Community Strategy yields positive results;
- The significance of 'Transition Local Authorities';
- Whether Transition Initiatives look to target tourism businesses as part of their activity, especially accommodation providers and local attractions;
- The extent of Transition groups networking across counties;
- The extent of information sharing over tourism activity;
- The impacts of DMOs and ATPs across the south west on sustainable tourism;
- Further exploration of the connections between Transition Initiatives and the power structure.

An additional piece of useful research would be to look at other existing community tourism projects around the UK to see what lessons the Transition movement (and other sustainable community initiatives) may be able to learn from these, and vice versa.

It would be interesting to repeat the research set out in this report in one/two years' time to evaluate progress. By that time there is likely to be a greater number of Initiatives to choose as potential case studies, as existing Initiatives move beyond the awareness-raising stage to making visible progress on the ground.

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