

Research notes

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Tourism and sustainable land management knowledge assessment

Tourism can provide a special market, within the local area, for the outputs of sustainable land management.

Summary

In 2002, the Countryside Agency appointed The Tourism Company to look at how tourism can influence sustainable land management and to identify gaps in knowledge about this relationship. The concept of sustainable land management recognises that land should be managed not only for the production of food and fibre, but for a range of other benefits, including the maintenance of attractive landscapes and biodiversity and support for local communities and the wider rural economy. Tourism can be a powerful tool in stimulating and supporting this approach. Land managers can be involved in tourism, directly or indirectly, through the provision of tourist facilities on their land, distinctive local produce and an attractive, accessible landscape. A number of local projects have shown how this relationship can be strengthened, but the results need to be better monitored, co-ordinated, and supplemented by additional research on specific topics. There is also a need to increase awareness of the relationship amongst policy makers, advisors, land managers and visitors, through better communication at a national and local level.

Main findings

This report is based on a review of relevant policy documents and consultation with the main agencies concerned with tourism and land management, together with a trawl of relevant local projects across England, which resulted in 26 short case studies. In addition, nine projects in four other European countries were investigated and presented in a companion report.

The relationship between tourism and sustainable land management is relevant to much of the current debate about the future of agriculture and the countryside in England. A central theme of the Countryside Agency's Strategy for Sustainable Land Management¹ is multi-functionality of land and finding new ways of creating a market for alternative forms of land management. The joint rural tourism strategy of the Agency and the English Tourism Council² puts emphasis on maintaining an attractive countryside and adding value locally. The recent government policy commission report on the future of farming and food³ saw tourism as an opportunity for diversification, and the government review of national parks recognised that tourism can play a more significant role in meeting park objectives.

Sustainable land management is brought about by the actions of individual land managers. The nature of ownership has a major influence on it. This study concentrated on ways of influencing private landowners through tourism.

A relationship with 3 pillars

Rural landholdings relate to tourism in three main ways:

1. The provision of tourism facilities. This provides the land manager with a direct commercial stake in tourism. In itself, it is a move towards more sustainable land management, as a form of diversification which also facilitates access to the land and spending in the local economy. The presence of a tourism enterprise may influence other aspects of land management, through altering the economic structure of a holding or through stimulating concern about wildlife and landscape in order to attract visitors.

2. The provision of food and other products purchased by tourists. Potentially this provides larger numbers of land managers with a commercial stake in tourism, although usually an indirect one. Action can be taken to promote more actively to tourists products that are local and based on sustainable production processes.

3. The maintenance of attractive landscapes and access. The critical importance of this to the rural economy was demonstrated by the impact of foot and mouth disease. Yet the benefit gained by land managers from it is limited and currently centres on exchequer payments to them for conserving distinctive landscapes and biodiversity, and in some cases allowing access. This process can be made more transparent and land managers can become more directly conscious of, and involved in, the process of benefiting visitors and tourism in this manner.

The study looked at each of these pillars in turn:

Landholdings with tourism enterprises

Although there have been no comprehensive recent studies in this area, it is estimated that between 15% and 20% of farms in England have some form of income generating tourism enterprise.

Tourism enterprises on farms can encourage a greater interest in sustainable land management, but it is important to ensure quality and avoid over supply.

There has been little research on the effect of tourism enterprises on the profitability and management practices of private landholdings. However, it appears that many farmers with tourism enterprises may be failing to make a connection between this activity and the way they manage their land⁴.

Market research⁵ suggests that the majority of visitors to farms are attracted by the quality of the countryside and many have at least some interest in wildlife and conservation. However, this interest tends to be casual and informal, rather than requiring detailed interpretation and packaging.

The main ways in which land managers with tourism enterprises can be encouraged to pursue sustainable land management practices are through advisory services, targeted financial assistance, marketing initiatives and accreditation schemes. A number of local projects have used one or more of these tools, although most have concentrated either on supporting businesses or on promoting conservation, with not enough integration between the two.

The tourism-produce-land chain

There has been a considerable increase in awareness of the importance of food and drink to tourism, and vice versa, in the last ten years. Expenditure on these items accounts for 46% of visitor spending in the countryside⁶. There are various ways in which tourism can influence sustainable land management through local produce, including:

- tourists visiting and making purchases directly from the landholding;
- visits to local markets, farmers' markets and specialist retailers;
- visits to local production plants ie. cheese or cider makers, or craft workshops;

- promoting mail order opportunities after tourists have returned home;
- purchase by tourism enterprises of produce which may then be specially featured, eg. on menus.

Two thirds of holidaymakers in the UK say they are prepared to pay more for quality food and drink⁷.

Consumer research is encouraging. Tourists may be receptive purchasers. Over one third of tourists knowingly purchase local foods on holiday. A majority of tourists are aware that buying local food helps the local economy and environment. The challenge is to help them make that link and to reinforce messages to them when they are making purchases.

Some local initiatives have made progress through: creating networks of producers with links to tourism enterprises; publishing produce directories and developing thematic promotional campaigns; improving the delivery of products to tourism enterprises; promoting brand labels which embrace environmental criteria; and finding new ways of interesting visitors in farming and production processes. In this respect, far more attention has been paid to food than to other produce of the land.

Landscape and access as a tourism resource

Tourism is estimated to support between 340,000 and 800,000 jobs in the countryside, depending on whether the definition includes rural towns or not⁶. The maintenance of an attractive landscape is vital to these jobs as this is the main reason why people visit the countryside. A study by the National Trust in 1998⁸ found that environmental quality influenced 57% of tourism related employment in Cumbria, that visitors were looking for a well cared for, farmed landscape, and that two thirds of visitors were prepared to pay to support its maintenance.

There is a need for greater transparency and dissemination about the value of rural tourism and its dependency on a quality environment.

Access onto rural land can underpin this appreciation and value generated. Twenty-five percent of UK holidays involve going for walks⁹.

Current policy points to more payments to land managers to be custodians of the rural landscape and biodiversity. It is important that the maximum possible benefit is obtained from this process, and market forces are harnessed where possible, so minimising the gap that payments have to fill. Tourism can play a stronger part in this. This has been demonstrated by some local projects, through:

- strengthening the identity and promotion of destinations, based on environmental images and messages;
- increasing visitor awareness of conservation and land management issues, through interpretation, and involving land managers more in this;
- developing and promoting more public access, such as circular walks on private land, integrated with support for other land management initiatives;
- establishing income opportunities for land managers, such as through car parking and events;
- developing 'visitor payback' schemes to raise funding from visitors and channel it towards sustainable land management initiatives.

An integrated approach

Although the study looked separately at the provision of tourist facilities, produce and landscape/access, it recognised the need for an integrated approach. Some local projects have achieved this at a landholding level, through the provision of co-ordinated advice and finance on business and environmental matters and on tourism and other activities. Other projects have demonstrated integration at a destination level, for example in promoting

tourism enterprises, produce and the area itself through a common brand and in stimulating networking between stakeholders.

Findings from Europe

The study of initiatives in the Netherlands, France, Germany and Austria found:

- similar issues and levels of interest in them;
- more experience and action in promoting speciality local foods to visitors;
- more creative product development and marketing, such as thematic promotions, events and linkages to health tourism;
- less reliance on accommodation, and more on produce and visits, in making farmers and other landholders stakeholders in tourism;
- good experience in developing partnerships and networks at a local level;
- more application of sustainability criteria in relation to networking, branding and accreditation schemes.

In Austria, France and the Netherlands, marketing and accreditation initiatives at a national level create a strong context for local action.

Conclusions

There is considerable interest in strengthening the relationship between tourism and sustainable land management, especially in National Parks and AONBs and among conservation bodies. Various local projects have been addressing different aspects of this, but many have suffered from short term funding, lack of human and financial resources, and poor monitoring.

Knowledge gaps continue to exist regarding:

- market knowledge – greater general understanding of visitor interests in the countryside and of the market for wildlife and conservation based tourism;
- product issues – adding value to tourism enterprises through links to land management; using tourism to support sustainable management of woodlands; opportunities for new forms of land-based tourism enterprise;
- marketing and management issues – developing guidelines for branding of products and destinations; overcoming practical difficulties in promoting and distributing local produce; raising visitor awareness of the issues; improving networking; strengthening visitor payback; securing better use of negotiated access arrangements; developing more integrated advice and support;
- impact issues – understanding the effect of tourism enterprises on the landholding as a whole; gaining more knowledge and awareness of the value of landscapes related to tourism.

In order to address these gaps, it is important to avoid duplication with existing and previous work. Opportunities to pursue include:

- getting more out of existing projects, with better monitoring and dissemination of results;
- undertaking further, focused research;
- influencing initiatives of other agencies and organisations;
- establishing a fund to support a clear set of practical marketing and product development initiatives;
- establishing one, fully integrated demonstration project;
- raising the profile of the link between tourism and sustainable land management at a national level.

Further reading

¹ *A strategy for sustainable land management in England*. Countryside Agency, 2001

² *Working for the Countryside: A strategy for rural tourism in England 2001-2005*. Countryside Agency and English Tourism Council, 2001

³ *Farming and Food: A sustainable future*. Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food, 2002

⁴ *West Country Farm Tourism Study*. The Tourism Company, 1990

⁵ *The Farm Tourism Market*. The Tourism Company 1993, Report for the Countryside Commission, Rural Development Commission et al.

⁶ *The Economic Impact of Recreation and Tourism in the English Countryside, 2001*. The Countryside Agency research note.

⁷ *Tourist Attitudes Towards Regional and Local Foods*. Report by Entelica for the Countryside Agency and MAFF, 2001.

⁸ *Valuing our Environment: A study of the economic impact of conserved landscapes and of the National Trust in the South West 1998*. National Trust, 1999

⁹ *The United Kingdom Tourism Survey*. English Tourism Council, 2001.

Countryside Agency Research Notes can also be viewed on our website:
www.countryside.gov.uk