**TOURISM DEVELOPMENT THROUGH THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FUNDING SCHEME WITHIN THE BRECON BEACONS NATIONAL PARK**

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**ABSTRACT**

This research article explores the role of public funded schemes within the Brecon Beacons National Park that strive to encourage community driven sustainability initiatives, whilst assessing the relevance of tourism to such schemes. The National Park provide funding for community led sustainability programmes, known as the Sustainable Development Fund, the examination of this funding led to findings which challenge the common assumption that funding for community led schemes will be of net benefit at the local level. Through the examination of the theoretical rhetoric and the empirical findings via the use of focus groups it was observed that certain components reflected in most rural development programmes such as the integration of tourism and participation are still barriers to rural development and continue to hamper the effectiveness of not only the Sustainable Development Funding (SDF) schemes, but the communities striving for sustainability.

Keywords: Tourism, Sustainability, National Parks and public funding.

**INTRODUCTION**

There is little empirical work providing insight and in-depth analysis of publicly funded development programmes such as the SDF scheme. The SDF scheme was established and managed by National Parks in the UK since 2001. This scheme funds rural communities that want to undertake a sustainability initiative that helps to create a sustainable community. Strzelecka and Wicks (2010) identified that there are roles for development agencies in assisting rural regions to transform themselves, often using tourism as a tool of transformation. However, there is a gap in the academic literature as to how publicly funded schemes, such as the SDF, contribute to creating a sustainable rural community where tourism is not the primary concern of the scheme, but where tourism is required to sustain the scheme. The increasing number of publicly funded schemes aimed at developing sustainable communities, particularly in rural areas means that this research will be of relevance to National Park Authorities, local communities and councils that seek to utilise public funding to further their sustainable development initiatives. This paper, therefore, investigates the application of the sustainable development fund within the Brecon Beacons National Park and clarifies how tourism is used within the Park and how it has been viewed by the local residents. It will conclude that for greater success in furthering sustainability initiatives which use funding and rely on tourism, there needs to be a more cohesive strategy and integration of these publicly funded schemes within the overall tourism strategy.

**THEORETICAL CONTEXT**

Rural areas support human existence both in terms of their capacity to supply the resources necessary to support life, but also in their capacity to absorb the impacts of human activity (Jackson, 2009). However, the relationship between individuals and the natural environment upon which they depend is thought to be weakening, as traditional rural industries decline and populations move to urban areas (Chambers, 2008). Therefore, the ongoing health and vitality of rural communities has been bought into question and has given rise to the rural sustainability debate.

The ambitions of rural sustainable development policy are far-reaching (Baldock *et al*, 2001). These may focus on diversifying the agricultural base (Hjalager, 2002) or finding different functions for agriculture by improving the social, environmental or cultural purposes of agriculture (Morgan *et al,* 2010). For Mistry and Garg (2017) sustainability issues were concerned with improving prospects for better investment and generating higher levels of output or production. The need to create jobs and generate income streams is cited by Khuntia and Mishra (2016). While Ray (2018) considered the conservation of natural as well as environmental, social and cultural resources as desired outputs of sustainability. However, the binding outcome of all these ambitions is to create a cohesive, interconnected and stable rural community that possess viable economies and communities. In doing so, rural areas seek to be in a position to entice and preserve a capable workforce who have the skills and knowledge to contribute to its growth and development (Bello e*t al,* 2018).

Sustainable development is generally characterised as having greater focus on understanding and achieving the environmental and economic aspects of sustainability rather than the social aspect (Akgun et al, 2015). Arguably, this stems from the fact that sustainable development has predominantly been applied within either an environmental or a business context, where there is evidence that bias exists towards either environmental or economic interests respectively (McKenzie-Mohr, 2004). However, there is now recognition of the role that social factors play in achieving sustainable development outcomes. In addition to addressing environmental concerns, sustainable development:

*“…is also about the pursuit of fundamental social, economic and cultural objectives. These objectives include the need to secure basic human needs, equity, social justice and cultural diversity”* (Barker, 2005 p.12).

Akgun *et al.* (2015) argued that the reason for such divergent views on sustainable development is that in its attempts to reconcile the imperatives of growth and development with sustainability, 'sustainable development' is, essentially, a contradiction in terms. When applied within a business or government context, there is an inherent assumption that the notion of 'sustainable development' incorporates sustained economic growth, whilst within an academic context, human development is not necessarily considered to be coupled only to an increasing Gross Domestic Product (Robinson, 2004). The past two decades have, therefore, seen numerous attempts at establishing an improved expression of the meanings of 'sustainable development' and 'sustainability' in various contexts. For example, Ingold (1992) referred to the “use-value” of the physical environment and noted the dichotomy of the relationship between consumption and production in rural areas. More recently, Bansal *et al.* (2018) noted that sustainable development could refer to improving the identity of a destination. However, the prevailing result of these efforts has been to substantiate the view that the notion of sustainability itself – rather than the Brundtland definition per se – is inexplicit and pluralistic. The inherent degree of subjectivity in individuals' perceptions resulting from their own system of societal values and the cultural contexts they inhabit (Clifton, 2010) means that sustainability is an intrinsically “*slippery concept*” (Eden, 2000 p. 111), which will unavoidably be translated differently by different people (Johnson, 2010).

In response to these criticisms of the vagueness of sustainability, it can be argued that it is, in fact, this flexibility of meaning that makes sustainability such a powerful and popular concept. As Parris and Kates (2003) stated, “*the oxymoron-like character of sustainable development can be so inclusive must surely lie in its inherent ambiguity…”* (p.560). Being open to a degree of interpretation, the fundamental notion of 'sustainability' is accessible to all actors at all levels in society, from individuals and communities, to businesses and governments. Sustainable development is a global-level concept (Adamson and Bromiley, 2013). It cannot be, nor does it profess to be, a 'one- size-fits-all' or 'silver bullet' solution to all global problems. Instead, the fundamental basis of sustainable development – that future development needs to integrate long-term environmental, social, and economic concerns – can provide flexible guiding principles within which action can be tailored to the parameters of specific context in which it occurs (Kemp and Martens, 2007; Robinson, 2004). Therefore, embedded within the overarching global concept of sustainable development, increasingly bespoke interpretations can be made as the scale of operation reduces, for example, from global to national, to regional to local and to individual. As such, sustainable development has been embraced by policymakers across the world, arguably pioneered by successive UK governments (Carson *et al*, 2014). However, the vagueness of the definition also means that it is a highly contested and political concept as opposing parties (e.g. business versus environmental groups) seek to argue for their favoured balance between the economic, social and environmental aspects of sustainability.

**THE BRECON BEACONS NATIONAL PARK**

The Brecon Beacon National Park located in Wales, was established in 1957 (Morgan, 2015). With its designation as a UK National Park, the Brecon Beacons joined a growing international family of protected areas. Protected areas fall into two general categories: those designated for the strict protection of the natural world and those designated for the purposes of maintaining sustainable relationships between humans and nature. National Parks of the UK belong to the latter category and also differ from National Parks in other parts of the world because they are largely privately owned whilst many parks in other nations are owned primarily by the State. (Morgan, 2015).

Figure 1: Map of Brecon Beacons National Park, *Source:* <http://www.brecon-beacons.com/how-to-get-here.htm>

The Brecon Beacons was the tenth National Park in Wales and England to be designated under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act of 1949. This action confirmed its importance nationally, conferring the UK's highest status for conservation of landscape and natural beauty. The Welsh Assembly has further emphasised the Park's importance in the national context through its Vision for the Welsh National Parks in the 21st century:

“*The Welsh National Parks are protected landscapes of international importance which capture much of what is distinct and special about rural Wales.... They are places that experiment with new approaches in sustainable development and environmental conservation, providing exemplars of best practice for wider Wales, and helping to shape and lead future rural policy and practice*.” Welsh Assembly Government (2008).

In 2016 the Brecon Beacons Sustainable Tourism Partnership approved a Sustainable Tourism Strategy for the park. The strategy was based on the sustainable management of the destination as a whole - not just the development of tourism as such but the management of that tourism and the impacts it has so as to protect the environment on which it is based and equally important the communities that live within it.

**TOURISM WITHIN THE BRECON BEACONS NATIONAL PARK**

In the 1960s the tourism industry was largely viewed as an economic panacea and with little impacts deriving from it (Butler, 1993). It was often termed a “smokeless” industry distancing itself from the polluting factories of the time (Dicks, 2000). However, as Stankovic (1979, p.25) noted:

*“It is a characteristic of tourism that it can, more than many other activities, use and valorise such parts and elements of nature as are of almost no value for other economic branches and activities”.*

The entwining of sustainable development and sustainable tourism literature seemed inevitable given that both concepts came to the academic arena at the same time and this has created confusion in the various definitions of sustainable tourism. It was Garrod & Fyall (1998, p. 199) who stated that “*defining sustainable development in the context of tourism has become something of a cottage industry in the academic literature*” and they had a desire to move arguments of sustainable tourism away from sustainable development ideology. Butler (1993, p.29) defined sustainable tourism as “*tourism which is in a form which can maintain its viability in an area for an indefinite period of time*”. Baker (2001) goes on to suggest that sustainable development in this context is:

 “*tourism which is developed and maintained in an area in such a manner and at such a scale that it remains viable over an indefinite period and does not degrade or alter the environment (human and physical) in which it exists to such a degree that it prohibits the successful development and well-being of other activities and processes*” (Baker, 2001, p.29).

The World Tourism Organisation (1995, p.30) used a similar definition which refers to sustainable tourism development as tourism that:

“*meets the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future. It is envisaged as leading to the management of all resources in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life support systems”.*

This definition of sustainable tourism development perceives it as a force that contributes to sustainable development rather than as a standalone process that is responsible for all development in an area. The tourism industry has been seen as a “soft option” that delivers much at the expense of little (Wahab & Pigram, 1997). The decline of traditional industries and agriculture has forced many rural areas to turn to tourism given the wealth of opportunities leading to economic growth and diversification promised by such a strategy (Hall,2005). Blackstock (2005) suggested that as a result, tourism is now one of the target industries for communities of all sizes wishing to integrate into their overall comprehensive planning strategy. Although rural tourism development is not a panacea to all the ailments of rural destination, it has great potential when integrated into broader community development efforts. Hanna (2008, p.150) suggested that sustainable tourism could be interpreted as “*an emerging form of ethical consumption as it adopts social, environmental and economic concerns which are also expressed through the form of consumption*”. Consequently, the diversification of such an economic base provides opportunities for social, economic, environmental and cultural development whilst also ensuring greater security for the community (Murphy 1985).

Over three and a half million tourists a year come to the Brecon Beacons (<http://www.beacons-npa.gov.uk/communities/tourism/tourism-facts-and-figures-1/>). The mountains, uplands and valleys are considered to be good walking terrain. Visitors and residents participate in numerous activities such as horse riding, cycling, mountain biking, fishing, kayaking and other water-based activities. The major tourist attractions such as the Dan yr og of Show caves, and festivals such as the Brecon Jazz Festival, the Green Man Festival and the Hay Festival of Literature.

**SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FUNDING**

The SDF is a grant scheme that supports new ways of living and working within National Parks in a sustainable manner. The funding is provided by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and is managed by the National Park Authorities. Sustainable development encompasses projects that can demonstrate social, economic and environmental development.

The aim of the programme is to provide a flexible and non-bureaucratic means of funding projects to “*aid the achievement of National Park purposes by encouraging individuals, community groups and businesses to develop practical sustainable solutions to the management of their activities*”. (Brecon Beacon National Park Management Plan, 2009, p.18). Innovation and originality are as much features of SDF delivery mechanisms as are the local initiatives that the funding is intended to foster.

The past seventeen years has seen a variety of activities in the Brecon Beacons National Park for the SDF schemes. Recent initiatives in 2016 include:

* The Black Mountain Centre in Brynaman was given £5,000 of grant funding award to create a Tourist Information point and arts and crafts selling area.
* The Canal and River Trust was awarded £15,000to support the 'Waterway Trail' interpretation along the Brecknock and Monmouth Canal between Goytre Wharf and the Brecon Basin.
* St Mary's Church, Brecon was awarded £15,000 to fund elements of a wider heritage restoration project, including increased accessibility and a braille table top trail map and audio commentary as part of the Heritage Timeline and Discovery Trail.
* The Inspironment Project was awarded funding to help develop a number of mapped walks in the Brecon Beacon National Park. The project aimed to inspire those who are unsure how to access the park or what is available for them to become regular visitors, more active and to enjoy its special environment.
* Abergavenny Tourist Information Centre operating from the Tithe Barn in Abergavenny received £7,500 towards the operation of tourist services from this location.

The sustainable development funds are utilised in the United Kingdom by other National Parks to stimulate sustainability initiatives. For example, in the Yorkshire Dales the fund has given out £2.67 million to 336 projects over the last 15 years (<http://www.yorkshiredales.org.uk/living-and-working/sdf/projects-funded-to-date>). Other regions have also adopted and adapted this funding scheme, such as Hong Kong in 2007, New Zealand in 2010.

This paper has highlighted the central themes connected to the SDF scheme, namely, the issue of development, sustainability and tourism for rural areas. The SDF is one tactic employed to engage communities in addressing rural sustainability and their development. The SDF seeks to encourage communities to obtain funding to further community initiatives that sustain and enhance their existence. The changing nature of the economics and demographics of the National Park indicate that the growth of tourism as a regeneration tool is being utilised by the Brecon Beacon National Park Authority. Having established the practices and elements of the dynamics of rural sustainability within the Brecon Beacon National Park, attention must turn to how the residents of the park stimulate the rhetoric into reality.

**RESEARCH METHODS**

One of the primary reasons for conducting focus groups was to gain an insight into people’s experiences and understanding of issues. Saunders described the information gleaned from focus groups as that “*based on meanings expressed in words*” (Saunders *et al*, 2003, p.78). As a qualitative technique focus groups established procedures for exploring complex and diverse patterns of behaviour. Focus groups were conducted in the summer of 2015 in three different locations within the Brecon Beacon National Park, Brecon, Pencelli and Bwlch. The focus group participants were either involved with a SDF scheme or had knowledge of the development of such a scheme in their geographic area. The themes and topics of the questions employed in the focus groups were originally derived from a comprehensive review of existing research literature (Putnam, 1993; McKenzie-Mohr, 2004; Ledwith, 2005; Jackson, 2008; Clark, 2010; Key and Kerr, 2011). A short introduction explained the focus of the questions in order to make the respondents feel at ease. Respondents were informed of the objectives of the research, and why the respondent was chosen to participate, and for what purposes the results would be used. Profile of participants would remain confidential and anonymous. Focus groups were conducted by the researcher and the sessions were audio recorded. The focus groups were designed to study involvement or participation in the community. In other words, these research methods were to analyse and evaluate the variables of, and attitudes towards, sustainability, tourism, participation, and the SDF by the members of the local community. The analysis considers whether there is anything distinctive about those who take a relatively active role in community life (Howe *et al,* 2004).

The aim of focus groups was not to lead participants but to facilitate the articulation of their ideas and thoughts through focused discussion. It can be argued that this approach is better suited than interviews as it replicates social processes (through group interaction) where knowledge is constructed and through which ideas such as sustainability and business practices are diffused (Kitzinger, 2004). However, there were certain themes that had to be teased out of the focus group sessions, consequently table 1 highlights the structure of focus group sessions.

Table 1: Questions asked to Focus Group Participants, *Source:* Author

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| No. | Question | Notes |
|  | Introductions | Each member of the group was asked to introduce themselves, to state where they lived and what it was about the local area that was important to them. The purpose was to create a sharing and hospitable environment for focus group members. |
| Q1 | What you understand by the term “sustainability”? | This question was asked to see how the concept of sustainability would be interpreted by the focus group members. |
| Q2 | What does sustainable development mean to you? | Following on from the previous question participants were asked this question to see if they could discern the difference between sustainability and sustainable development. |
| Q3 | What do you understand by the term “sustainable community”? | This question was used to move the discussion into the area of sustainability and community which allowed for other probing questions to generate discussion including:* What is a community?
* Who do you think is in your community?
* How do you define your community?
 |
| Q4 | What does community development mean to you? | This question purposely focused on building from the previous question whereby having established what a community is discussions around development could take place. |
| Q5 | What are the barriers that prevent people from getting involved in community development activities? | Following on from the previous questions, this question attempted to elicit what would stop people from engaging in community development activities. |
| Q6 | What does the term “tourism” mean to you? | This question was intended to determine the level of understanding that local people have about the tourism industry and led to the following questions:* Who are the tourists visiting the area?
* Where do you see tourists?
* Who (in the focus group) is involved in tourism?
* What local businesses are involved in tourism?
 |
| Q7 | What role does the Sustainable Development Funding play in community development? | This question was asked to see how if participants could identify the relationship between community development and the funded schemes. |
| Q8 | What is the relationship between tourism and Sustainable Development Funded projects? | This question was asked to see what linkages participants could see between tourism and the funded projects |
| Q9 | Summary and close | Each group member was asked to highlight the most poignant issue for them that was raised during the focus group meeting and bought about closure of the proceedings. |

Questions asked about sustainability (Q1 to Q3) stemmed from the literature of Kemp and Martens (2007); Pender *et al.* (2014) who contended that the interpretation of sustainability by residents was key to their active participation and involvement in the development of sustainable initiatives. Questions with regards to community participation (Q4 and Q5) were drawn from the work of Shorthall and Shucksmith (2001); Day (2006); McAreavey (2009) who suggested that the barriers to community involvement were linked to the involvement of communities in their own development. The question asking about tourism (Q6) were based upon the work of Blackstock (2005); Carson and Carson (2014) who contended that the understanding of tourism was correlated to the involvement of community members in tourism development. Questions about the SDF (Q7 and Q8) were drawn from the research of Zito *et al* (2003); and Alcock (2012) who suggested that the role of public funding related to sustainability initiatives were reliant upon the understanding and involvement of the community within which the initiative was being implemented.

**DATA ANALYSIS**

Focus group sessions were transcribed, coded and analysed using the data display technique. The method chosen was that of Miles and Huberman (1994). This involved developing a set of data displays, in which themes from the focus groups were displayed against concepts identified in the literature and which emerged from the focus group sessions themselves. The display is a visual format, which presents information systematically, so the user can draw valid conclusions.

**EMPIRICAL FINDINGS**

The main outcomes of the focus groups have been summarised under the key themes derived from this research which are for: Sustainability, Participation, and Tourism.

*Sustainability*: Focus group members put forward various definitions as to what they believe sustainability referred to. Most of these definitions focused around the economy indicating a link between economy and sustainability.

*This is about thinking about tomorrow making sure that were all able to survive and prosper in the future.* (Respondent FG 26)

*Is this making sure we all have jobs tomorrow?* (Respondent FG 8)

*I know that sustainability is really important thing for the National Park. I never really considered the idea that our community or tourism can be linked to sustainability and at the moment I am struggling to make ends meet so thinking about the future in terms of a community-based sustainability project or creating links to tourism projects is a little far-fetched* (Respondent FG 2)

Such comments as noted above illustrate that the respondents could identify that sustainability is a concept which can be visualised and explained but also as the last comment noted a concept that is hard for participants to actualise and make tangible. The notion of sustainability as noted in the literature suggested that the complexity and subjectivity of this concept has made it hard for all those concerned with it to define and apply it in a practical sense. The findings here echo such research.

*Participation*: Focus group respondents outlined various examples of their involvement within the community with regards to sustainable development funded projects and activities within community associations such as the Women’s Institute. Several of the respondents voiced their concern over the level of involvement that was expected from them. These respondents believed that it was the responsibility of the local council or National Park Authority to establish and deliver various community projects absolving them from any form of participation.

*It's a process where members of the community come together to take some form of collective action and try and sort out problems that have some sort of outcome such as economic or environmental*. (Respondent FG 14)

*It's a grassroots process where people try to organise themselves and try and take responsibility for their own behaviour. Communities then try to develop plans or options that try to benefit the community*. (Respondent FG 21)

The extent of participation that is desirable is the subject of ongoing debate. For example, Hayward *et al.* (2004) developed the notion of non-participation (or peripheral participation). Whereby they challenged the assumption that “*broad-based participation is always a social good*” (2004, p.96). Hayward *et al.* (2004) noted that communities have a saturation point for community-based activities and so full participation may not necessarily be the optimum position for community regeneration. Possibly, it may be more appropriate to consider participation that is relevant and inclusive. Consequently, rather than considering the level of participation it may be wise to examine the notion of representation within participation. Sood *et al.* (2017) suggested that the examination of whose interests are being represented a more valid consideration than the volume of participation from community.

Table 2 identifies the main barriers to participation in SDF schemes that the focus group respondents noted. These ideas were generated through a focused discussion within the focus groups as to how community members not only viewed these barriers but suggested ideas as to how these barriers could be overcome.

Table 2: Focus Groups Ideas to overcome barriers to community participation

*Barriers to involvement Focus groups ideas for overcoming the barriers*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Not wanting to be involved | This is down to personal motivation so perhaps the National Park Authority could create some stimulus that would create a desire for people to become involved |
| Not knowing you could be involved | There needs to be a more expansive marketing program that lets local people know what is going on and how they could become involved |
| Lack of time/resources/expertise to get involved | Providing knowledge and resources (not necessarily financial but technical and expert knowledge would be beneficial).  |
| Lack of understanding what is required when being involved | Clear guidelines could be provided on the roles and responsibilities of the people getting involved |
| Not approving of the proposed development | Providing a persuasive argument for the proposed development |
| Lack of mobility | Providing transportation |
| Lack of interest/effort | This is down to personal motivation so perhaps the National Parks Authority could create some stimulus that would create a desire for people to become involved |
| Not understanding what personal gain can be obtained from getting involved | Providing a clear and identifiable benefit that people can understand they will get from becoming involved |

*Source:* Author

In order for communities to get involved in development programmes a great deal of time and effort is required for which the opportunity costs of such involvement is very high, given the current economic pressures and considerations in today’s modern world. Traditionally, getting involved in some form of development was “complicated” and “time-consuming” often with participants feeling that their views are not being taken into account or limited resources available for the programme which compounds the feeling of frustration of the participants of such a development programme. Which, as noted by Kala and Bagri (2018) may discourage residents to participate in decision making in the future.

*Tourism:* Focus group members were able to provide numerous examples of how tourism impacted their community. Only a minority of participants illustrated an understanding that there was a relationship between the tourism industry and sustainable development funded schemes.

*I can see the development of new recreational facilities aimed at local people, but I am not sure how these developments are trying to improve community sustainability………. After all the community is what you make of it which in my case involves me embedding myself with my neighbours*? (Respondent FG 28)

*We cannot afford to reduce the number of people coming into the area. The number of people who are coming into the area is less than it was twenty years ago, and they need people. It is no good talking about environmental issues if you haven't got the people coming down, because the area would just... (Bwlch) just wouldn't exist, because it relies so much on tourism.* (Respondent FG 7)

The relative contribution of tourism and the different ways in which it manifests was picked up by many members of the focus groups. It appeared that respondents who owned businesses although would consider the environmental implications of their businesses had not given much consideration to the social impacts their businesses may have (particularly with regards to community sustainability). Many responded defensively by emphasising the positive benefits of tourism to the area or suggesting that any negative impacts were negligible because of the small size of businesses and in comparison to other industries. Significantly, most suggestions attributed the detrimental community impacts of the industry to the activities of tourists rather than the local community (e. g. congestion, crowds). When discussing the potential effects of tourist activities on the area it was almost accepted that any negative social costs were just par for the course. For example, the issue of seasonality with regards to employing local people seemed to be an acceptable part of what the tourism industry entails.

**DISCUSSION**

The findings indicate that the use of tourism as part of a rural development strategy is not sufficiently substituted or integrated into the SDF schemes. If one considers that it is communities that should be sustained to support tourism rather than the creation of “sustainable tourism” then local change requires that stakeholders participate in local development and pursue social capital in different social areas. According to this study, SDF schemes are not sustainability for the wider geographic community, only those residents involved in a funding scheme. The impact of SDF initiatives often do little to increase the economic vitality of an overall community in which the project has developed. Members of the wider community might feel alienated from the SDF development process resulting in the perception that the opportunities in the area are somewhat limited. Therefore, arguably there is no incentive for inspiring local people to work collaboratively in the benefit of their community or encouraging them to take and engage in positive action connected to tourism development.

The research findings illustrate that there are obstacles to overcome in involving communities with SDF schemes. One of the main problems discovered is with initiating and sustaining participation. Given that participation is key to the development of the community and of their social capital, the National Park Authority must address this issue to bring about meaningful community development.

**MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The use of a holistic masterplan might be beneficial for the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority in the management of the SDF scheme. A conservative and realistic business plan (or masterplan) illustrates a proven, reliable ability on the ground to make the plan happen and, even more importantly, to manage, tweak and recreate the plan as circumstances change. This will provide a framework which would allow the actual implementers not only understand the plan but change it into other feasible plans as circumstances unfold. As it stands, the vast majority of viable Sustainable development funded schemes were created without any kind of cohesive business plan and it is mostly the knowledge and leadership of a few persistent members of the community that have bought about the implementation of this scheme.

The funding from the European Regional Development Fund between 1991 and 1995 (part of the Leader programme) initiated a funding programme aimed at promoting innovation for rural undeveloped areas in the European Union. This scheme illustrated the use of tourism and its potential as a planning strategy, based on the entrepreneurial instinct of people living in those areas who require new economic opportunities to cope with price and production reductions within the agricultural markets. Arguably, rural tourism has proven its power to balance those fragile economies. The notable parts of this scheme was that every entrepreneur who obtained a grant was obliged, by contract, to attend compulsory training in rural tourism management issues: feasibility studies, pricing, operation, marketing and promotion. Although this arguably led to rural tourism in some areas becoming a “mass product” due to the unrestricted policies of local governments, this scheme demonstrated the ability to use tourism as a means of complementing existing economies. The SDF schemes could follow a similar process in order to provide the skills required to those who wish to engage with the funding process.

**CONCLUSIONS**

The interplay between the SDF scheme policy outputs and the reality of community development within the National Park is crucial, because understanding reasons for participation can provide a structure that offers a reason for communities to take part in community development schemes. This is not only important for securing initial participation from the wider geographic community but in sustaining that participation. Therefore, using techniques to ignite people's feelings to their rural surroundings may be a sound starting point for the potential of SDF schemes.

Rasoolimanesh *et al.* (2017) indicated that resident involvement early in tourism planning processes before key and often irreversible decisions are made is required. Furthermore, Lin and Simmons (2017) argued that for sustainable rural development to occur within a community setting, a clear strategy involving the roles and responsibilities of the actors and outlining the objectives and players is necessary. Consequently, local people should be consulted and accordingly tourism policies should be reconsidered. The implementation of tourism cannot succeed without community members being involved and consultation taking place with such people. If communities can share responsibilities for finding solutions to local development problems these would probably be more effective than imposed solutions. Tourism development by the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority is, as Dargan and Shucksmith (2008) noted, a top-down approach utilising public funds. SDF participants demonstrated that their programmes generated participation, but only by a few key members of the community who managed to organise themselves with many of the schemes involving visitors and consequently tourism. Arguably, residents expect the National Park Authority to attract tourists to the area, what the tourists should be doing in the area also seems to rely heavily on what the National Park Authority can offer them. This thought process requires rethinking by local communities so that they can build their local assets into more viable and accessible products for consumption.

Word Count: 5203

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