

QualityCoast – Piloting of a Sustainable Tourism Programme in Cork Harbour, Ireland

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Abstract

The development of a transparent international quality programme for sustainable coastal tourism destinations - *QualityCoast* - is currently underway through the Coastal Practice Network (CoPraNet), an INTERREG IIC network project. The *QualityCoast* programme for tourism destinations aims to reflect the willingness of a region to highlight nature and landscape, carrying capacity, cultural heritage and aspects of sustainable tourism in its marketing programme targeting domestic or international visitors. The implementation of the *QualityCoast* programme is determined using a series of Tourism Quality Milestones (TQMs), which indicate the quality of information available to visitors. A provisional list of 30 TQMs was selected, and these TQMs were grouped into the thematic areas: nature; carrying capacity; water and environmental quality; and socio-economics. A category entitled 'other' is also incorporated to allow the inclusion of criteria relevant to specific areas not covered by the four primary themes. The focus of *QualityCoast* is on the information and data made available to visitors to allow them to assess the quality of the environment as opposed to a direct measurement of environmental quality. In doing so, the *QualityCoast* programme aims to address the lack of a sustainable information strategy for visitors of coastal destinations.

Conscious that data availability underpins many indicator based assessments, a number of pilot exercises were undertaken across Europe to assess the feasibility of making the programme operational and to investigate opportunities, obstacles and site-specific data requirements for implementation. In undertaking a pilot exercise to test the *QualityCoast* programme, data requirements and availability for the implementation of a subset of TQMs were assessed for Cork Harbour on the south coast of Ireland. This paper introduces the CoPraNet project and *QualityCoast* programme. This paper also outlines current tourism activity in Cork Harbour, the challenges associated with applying the TQM methodology in Cork Harbour and discusses the outcomes of the pilot exercise. The key issue in taking TQMs forward as operational tools for coastal management relates to access to relevant data at the local level. Where data gaps exist, this paper shows that it is possible to obtain information by undertaking standard, repeatable and cost effective local surveys. A series of guiding principles are proposed for coastal practitioners and tourism managers interested in using the TQM concept. The issues of data, cost effectiveness and scale emerge as key principles for consideration in the development of sustainable tourism information programmes for coastal sites in EU Member States.

Keywords: sustainable tourism, information, indicators, data availability.

Introduction

Tourism is now one of the global engines of development (World Tourism Organisation, 2004; Budeanu, 2005) and a fundamental component of many nations Gross National Product (GNP) (McCool *et al*, 1998). Although, the industry is not dissimilar to other industries in that it is susceptible to the vagaries of the global economy, it has experienced continued growth over the last decade (Dunne and Leslie, 2000; McCool and Lime, 2001; Christ *et al*, 2003). Every year, more people are in motion than ever before in history (World Tourism Organisation, 2004).

With good planning and management, tourism can be a positive influence, bringing benefits to destinations and communities. However, if poorly planned and managed, tourism can be a catalyst for environmental degradation and deterioration in the quality of life of coastal communities (Dunne and Leslie, 2000; Garcia and Servera, 2003; Tzatzanis *et al*, 2003; Davenport and Davenport, 2005). It is clearly in the interest of the tourism sector to maintain and sustain the basis for its prosperity, the tourism destinations.

Considering the potential impact – social, environmental and economic – of the tourism industry, the sector has become the focus of discourse on sustainability and methodologies of implementing and measuring sustainable practices. The term 'sustainable tourism' is derived from the more general concept of 'sustainable development', and relates to the application of sustainable development principles in the context of tourism (Garrod and Fyall, 1998). And although the tourism sector was not addressed in Agenda 21, its growing economic significance and associated impacts have placed it on the international sustainable development agenda (Neto, 2003).

Both the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) and the World Tourism Organisation (WTO) have worked to develop guidelines for sustainable practices in tourism. Sustainable tourism development guidelines and management practices are applicable to all forms of tourism in all types of destinations, including mass tourism and the various niche tourism segments (World Tourism Organisation, 2004). Sustainability principles refer to the environmental, economic and socio-cultural aspects of tourism development, and a suitable balance must be established between these three dimensions to guarantee its long-term sustainability (World Tourism Organisation, 2004).

Sustainable tourism development requires the informed participation of all relevant stakeholders, as well as strong political leadership to ensure wide participation and consensus building (Dalal-Clayton and Bass, 2002; World Tourism Organisation, 2004). Achieving sustainable tourism is a continuous process and it requires constant monitoring of impacts and the introduction of required preventive and/or corrective measures whenever necessary. Thus, the role of information is central to both the implementation and monitoring of sustainable tourism. This poses an issue for those practitioners seeking to progress sustainable tourism, in that for a number of locations certain datasets for measuring sustainable tourism are unavailable, or data are used whose original purpose was not to meet the needs of measuring sustainable tourism (UNCSD, 1999).

A number of tools are available to sustainable tourism practitioners: land-use planning (Godfrey, 1998); identification of tourism limits (Ahn *et al*, 2002); legislative and regulatory options; voluntary certification (Yunis, 2004; Tepelus and Córdoba, 2005); and indicators. At a global level and within Europe, a number of initiatives employed the use of indicators as a means to measure sustainable tourism at coastal locations (European Communities, 2000; Farsari and Prastacos, 2000; Sardá *et al*, 2005). However, common standards to monitor performance and delivery of information in sustainable tourism development in coastal destinations remain elusive. Meeting this goal was one of the primary objectives of the Coastal Practice Network (CoPraNet) project.

Measuring the impact and sustainability of the tourism sector requires quantitative and qualitative indicators, and as much information as possible should be gathered by those tasked with monitoring obligations (European Communities, 2000). Thus, the success of any indicator-based assessment is reliant on data quality and availability. Coupled with the need to collect as much information as possible the tourism sector is encouraged to use new information and communication technologies to disseminate trends to both visitors and practitioners (European Communities, 2000).

Coastal Practice Network and Sustainable Tourism

The Coastal Practice Network (CoPraNet) is an INTERREG IIC network project that aims to promote an integrative approach to the management of coastal areas through better exchange of practical experience between planners, managers and researchers (Ferreira *et al*, 2005). The overall aim of CoPraNet is two-fold:

1. To develop a network of coastal stakeholders to exchange information and examples of best practice, this will support local and regional efforts for integrated planning of coastal areas. This network must bridge the gap between planners, managers and the research community throughout Europe;
2. To support inter-regional exchange of information on best practice in sustainable tourism, and coastal erosion and beach management through an integrated approach.

For *sustainable tourism* this entails:

- Supporting the inter-regional exchange and sharing of good practices in developing guidelines for tourism quality milestones (TQMs) and sustainability in coastal regions and towns, including islands and seaside resorts;
- Identifying principles, guidelines and operational milestones for quality and sustainability of tourism and recreation in coastal regions and towns;
- Developing an inter-regional and transparent benchmarking programme based upon the above milestones; and
- Preparing the introduction of a transparent international *QualityCoast* programme for tourism destinations and sustainability of coastal destinations.

The *QualityCoast* programme is defined as the willingness of a municipality, county, or region to highlight nature and landscape, carrying capacity, cultural heritage and aspects of sustainable development of tourism in its marketing programme targeting domestic (non-local) or international visitors. Thus, the main goal of the *QualityCoast* programme is to address the lack of information strategies on sustainable management for visitors of coastal destinations, by providing improved **communication and information** in a clear and objective format. *QualityCoast* aims to ensure that a visitor will:

- Be well informed about the social, natural and economic aspects of the communities they will visit;
- Support and value the integrity of the local culture by choosing businesses that conserve natural and cultural heritage;
- Support local economy by purchasing local goods and participating with small, local businesses;
- Conserve resources by seeking out businesses that are environmentally conscious, and by using the lowest possible amount of non-renewable resources.

With these objectives in mind, a selection of tourism quality milestones (TQMs), which indicate the quality of information available to visitors, has been developed. A provisional list of 30 TQMs was selected to cover the thematic areas of nature, carrying capacity, water and environmental quality, and socio-economics. A final category entitled "other" is also incorporated to allow the inclusion of criteria relevant to particular areas, which are not covered by the four primary themes. The selection of quality milestones was based on the following criteria:

- High efficiency in relation to sustainable development;
- High impact on consumer perception;
- Data availability; and
- Comparability

CoPraNet partners representing different tourism destinations agreed to contribute to the validation and testing of the list of TQMs - related activities took place during Spring and Summer in 2005 and 2006. Parallel to the pilot study of Cork Harbour (Ireland) presented in this paper, the municipalities of Zandvoort (the Netherlands), Calvia (Spain), Aveiro (Portugal), Down (Northern Ireland), Sefton (England), Stepnica (Poland), Island of Usedom, Schleswig-Holstein (Germany) are currently testing and implementing the *QualityCoast* programme. Activities aimed at validation and testing comprise: a) use of visitor surveys to identify what information visitors are interested in, b) develop operational definitions for the milestones at the level of coastal destinations, c) collection of information to make milestones operational, and d) consideration of the development of a communication and dissemination tool (e.g. via internet).

By participating in the *QualityCoast* programme, a municipality or region is committing to offer objective and truthful information, via the use of the TQM approach, on selected issues to its potential visitors and interested parties. Also a participating municipality may agree to prepare a policy plan to improve and/or maintain the quality or performance of less well scoring aspects (as indicated by the information conveyed by the TQMs) over a period of time, short-term (3 years) and long-term (10 years). By joining the *QualityCoast* programme, a municipality or region will achieve international recognition in striving to obtain the highest quality in visitor and environmental friendly tourism. This can be included within, and disseminated as part of, their communication and marketing strategy for tourism in their area.

CoPraNet Rationale and Progress

For the purposes of effective project management the activities of CoPraNet have been split into three components. The first component represents the overall management of the project. Component 2 aims to promote integrated approaches to coastal management and planning, with a special focus on sustainable tourism, and coastal erosion and beach management. Component 3 is an ICZM Clearing House aiming to disseminate as widely as possible the results of the project so that they may be practically used. The multilingual website and electronic newsletters, both key elements of the network Clearing House, may be accessed at <http://www.coastalpractice.net>. The website and newsletter are inter-linked since information generated in one will be fed into the other. The project's key activities are a series of events organised as forums for presentations and inter-regional discussions. To date, two conferences and 11 thematic workshops, together with exchange visits between partners, have been held.

CoPraNet is contributing to the establishment of a truly European coastal practitioner network in accordance with the EC Strategy on ICZM (European Commission, 2002) by facilitating the sharing of expertise and the exchange of data and information across Europe. The CoPraNet partnership is continually working to expand the current network and to support a number of new initiatives (e.g. ENCORA - European platform for sharing knowledge and experience in coastal science and policy is a recently launched Coordination Action co-funded by the 6th EU Framework Programme) which contribute to: increasing practitioner involvement in the development of sustainable tourism and beach management practices in Europe; the introduction of better coastal management practices; and the improvement of information flow to coastal stakeholders.

The ongoing activities in Cork Harbour and the emerging recommendations will feed into the continual refinement of CoPraNet outputs, particularly in relation to the exchange of expertise and sharing of experience developed within the *QualityCoast* programme. It is envisaged that the lessons learnt from the Cork Harbour exercise will be of value to coastal practitioners in other European Member States and vice versa. As part of the continuing development of the *QualityCoast* programme, the CoPraNet partnership is exploring collaboration with other programmes such as the FEE / Blue Flag (EUCC, 2006). The CoPraNet model acts as an effective tool for disseminating methodologies, results, recommendations and concepts to European coastal practitioners.

Study Area - Cork Harbour

The pilot area discussed in this paper is Cork Harbour and surrounding hinterland (Irish National Grid coordinates: 166482 – 74264; 190039 – 74264; 166482 – 55974 and 190039 – 55974). Cork Harbour is one of the largest coastal water bodies in Ireland and the most industrialised estuary in the Irish State (Johnson *et al*, 2002). Cork Harbour extends a distance of approximately 25km from the quays of Cork City to the harbour mouth at Roches Point. The harbour is bordered by the towns of Passage West, Cobh, Crosshaven and Monkstown, each of which has a population of between 1,500 and 6,500. The towns of Carrigtwohill, Midleton and Carrigaline are situated in the immediate hinterland. Smaller settlements along the harbour's shores include Whitegate, Aghada, East Ferry and Ringaskiddy, all of which contain < 800 inhabitants. Fig. 1 shows the settlement pattern and spatial extent of Cork Harbour.

Cork Harbour is analogous with many other coastal locations in that it is a multi-resource and multi-use environment. The level and diversity of activities operating within the confines of the harbour is exemplified by the presence of numerous sectors (of regional and national importance) and their associated infrastructure (Cummins and O'Mahony, 2005; Cummins *et al*, 2006). Cork Harbour is the location for the headquarters of the Irish Naval Service, situated on Haulbowline Island and the National Maritime College of Ireland. The harbour also contains a substantial pharmaceutical industry with over 30 companies having operations located along the shores. Cork Harbour is also home to Whitegate, - Ireland's only oil refinery.



Figure 1: Aerial photograph showing key urban centres and spatial extent of Cork Harbour.

Visitor Attractions and Tourism in Cork Harbour

Cork Harbour is acknowledged as being an area of significant ecological importance and is currently designated as an NATURA 2000 site and a wetland site of international importance under the Ramsar Convention (Gittings, 2004). In terms of habitat type, the primary reason for the ecological importance of Cork Harbour is the presence of intertidal mud and sand flats and estuarine salt meadows, which comprise 88% of land cover within the NATURA 2000 site (NATURA Data Form IE0001058 2000). At a species level Cork Harbour is a site of high ornithological international importance for wintering waterfowl (Smiddy *et al*, 1995). The East Cork Eco and Bird Trail provides visitors with a route to explore and witness the bird life of Cork Harbour. The trail is illustrated by a series of information boards providing details on the birds and their habitats. An online bird atlas for Cork Harbour has been developed - <http://corkharbourbirds.ucc.ie>, this resource provides ornithologists access to relevant information on key species found within the harbour environment. The harbour is also bordered by a network of coastal walks which provide visitors the opportunity to experience the surrounding activities and scenery.

Although tourism is not the primary activity within the harbour, the sector does make an important contribution, both socially and economically, to the Cork Harbour area. Primary water-based activities comprise boating, angling charters and yachting. Crosshaven situated on the western shores of the harbour is home to the Royal Cork Yacht Club, the oldest sailing club in the world, originally founded in Cobh in 1720. The harbour hosts the International Deep Sea Angling Festival and the bi-annual Cork Week. The latter is one of the highlights of the Irish sailing calendar and is a significant economic contributor to the local economy (Shields *et al*, 1997).

Port of Cork has come to specialise in the provision of facilities to cruise liner traffic, deep water berthing facilities at Cobh and Ringaskiddy can accommodate large liners. Cork Harbour's location makes it an attractive port of call for cruises from the Baltic, Mediterranean and Caribbean as well as trans-Atlantic cruise traffic (Moloney and O'Sullivan, 2004). On arrival, up to two-thirds of the passengers embark on organised full-day or half-day shore excursions by coach to the surrounding region - including visits to Cork City, Midleton and further a field to Killarney, Co. Kerry (Moloney, 2004). In 2003, 22,973 cruise ship passengers visited Cork Harbour, spending a total of €19.79 million (Moloney and O'Sullivan, 2004).

Cork Harbour is also important in terms of military history. The harbour entrance is flanked by Camden Fort on the west side of the harbour and Carlisle Fort to the east. These forts and other installations on Haulbowline Island, Spike Island and Rocky Island provide an insight into the British military presence that shaped the harbour until final withdrawal in 1938 (Cummins and O'Donnell, 2005). In terms of heritage much of the information made available to visitors centres on the *Titanic*, which made its last stop at Cobh before departing on its ill-fated voyage across the Atlantic. Similarly, visitors are also provided with historical information on the World War II sinking of the Cunard liner *Lusitania*, including the rescue effort and subsequent accommodation of survivors at Cobh. Other attractions of note include the Midleton Distillery where Jameson whiskey has been produced for over 150 years; and Fota House and Wildlife Park. Cobh Heritage Centre, Midleton Distillery and Fota Island and House attracted 109,000, 100,000 and 290,000 visitors respectively for the year 2003 (Moloney and O'Sullivan, 2004).

Methodology

In undertaking pilot activities for the *QualityCoast* programme, data requirements and availability for a subset of ten tourism quality milestones (TQMs) were assessed for Cork Harbour. In an effort to optimise the feedback from the exercise, TQMs were chosen from each thematic area (nature, carrying capacity, water and environmental quality, socio-economic, and other). Additionally, all of the chosen TQMs were selected from the defined set as agreed by all CoPraNet partners, the current list of TQMs can be accessed at <http://www.coastalpractice.net>. Table 1 shows the TQMs for each thematic area that were tested as part of the Cork Harbour exercise, methods of measurement employed during the exercise are also detailed for each TQM.

Tourism Quality Milestone	Measurement(s)
Thematic area - Nature	
Information on nature experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No. of information boards per km of walking trails • No. of hides, viewing points per area • Presence of interpretative centres
Rich biodiversity, nature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No. of protected species and habitats present • Area of land under agri-environment agreement
Balance between built versus unbuilt and conservation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baseline information on categories of land-use and land cover • Area converted from non-developed to developed land-use
Thematic area – Carrying Capacity	
Ratio of overnight to day visitors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visitor statistics per annum
Thematic area – Water and Environmental Quality	
Water quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drinking water quality for public and group water schemes
Thematic area – Socio Economics	
Safety and security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Casualties due to operations, traffic and hydro-speeds
Good waste collection, management and recycling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring of litter • Capacity of recycle services / population • No. of recycle points per area km²
Visitor and local satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Results of survey or interviews
Other	
High quality and access to information on eco-label accommodation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No. accommodation providers subject to an officially recognised eco-label
High quality and access to information on public transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Private vehicle ownership • Percentage of bus stops that display a current and clearly readable timetable for bus services stopping there

Table 1: CoPraNet tourism quality milestones and the measurement criteria used in the Cork Harbour piloting exercise.

For the chosen sub-set of TQMs, efforts were made during the pilot exercise to collect the information necessary to make the TQMs operational. By operational we mean ready for use by tourism agencies and/or local authorities and that the TQMs would be a functional tool used within planning and management for coastal tourism. Each TQM was assigned an operational definition, which outlined its scope. This was a vital initial step as a clear definition enables all users to have an unambiguous impression of what the TQM in question represents and how it is being utilised in the context of Cork Harbour. For example, the TQM - information on nature experience was defined as *information sources and facilities that promote interaction with the local natural environment and are located within the natural areas of interest.*

Once the TQM was defined it was then possible to investigate potential methods of measurement. As can be seen from Table 1, certain TQMs were measured using a number of criteria, e.g. those focused on waste and biodiversity, whereas others were measured using a single criterion, e.g. safety and security. As the purpose of the exercise was to identify data sources for the measurement and implementation of the *QualityCoast* programme all potentially realistic options for measurement were included. Methods of measurement used over the course of the pilot exercise ranged from surveys (including those conducted as part of the pilot exercise and those conducted for other purposes), analysis of public data sets collated by the local and regional offices of statutory and regulatory agencies to European data sets.

Results and Discussion

Operationality and Data Issues

For Cork Harbour the availability and accessibility of data is crucial to the operational potential of the *QualityCoast* programme. The piloting of the CoPraNet TQMs for Cork Harbour revealed potential for certain indicators, i.e. TQMs, to be taken forward as operational tools. In general these TQMs are those whose measurement criteria are linked to reporting for various European Directives. For example the TQM - water quality, can be measured using the data collected as part of the EU Drinking Water Directive (80/778/EEC) and the EU Bathing Water Directive (76/160/EEC). Similarly the data collected in response to obligations set out in the EU Birds Directive (79/409/EEC) and EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) can be used for TQMs within the “nature” thematic area. Additionally, certain subjects will have associated regulatory procedures in place for monitoring that feed into national reporting but are also monitored by business groups or community groups due to their topicality, e.g. waste management and collection.

The difficulty in obtaining data at a local level, i.e. for Cork Harbour, hinders the operational use of particular TQMs – ratio of overnight to day visitors, and high quality and access of information on eco-label accommodation are two such examples. The absence of data at a local level is due to the data either not being recorded in the first instance or as a result of the regional amalgamation of datasets whereby the local identity is lost. If we take visitor statistics as an example, statistical data on numbers of tourists visiting Ireland are typically available at national and regional levels. However, tourism data is fragmented and dispersed and statistics for certain aspects of tourism are only partially available at national regional and local level (Moloney and O’Sullivan, 2004). Cork Kerry Tourism is the regional authority responsible for County Cork. However, since 1997, there has been no breakdown of the 'component regions' in Cork (i.e. North Cork, East Cork, West Cork and Cork City) and Kerry (M. Mulcahy, East Cork Tourism, pers. comm.).

In Cork Harbour, certain visitor attractions actively monitor and publish their numbers. Fáilte Ireland, (the National Tourism Development Authority) also monitor movements and expenditure, however as with the regional scenario, no 'component' area information is available. Attempts to aggregate numbers of visitors from various attractions around the harbour are hindered by the infrequent and fragmented supply of numbers from tourism providers.

In certain instances, data sets are ostensibly available and accessible, in that public bodies collate them, but analysis of the data for specific research purposes is difficult due to resource constraints. Much of the data on Cork Harbour is freely available from local government offices but only through direct contact with individuals and not via a more accessible forum such as websites or web GIS (Geographical Information System). One possible measure to overcome this obstacle would be greater liaison between local authorities and research institutions to optimise information that can be gleaned from existing data

sets - the online bird atlas developed for Cork Harbour is one example of a valuable initiative made possible by inter-agency collaboration at the local level. Practitioner oriented networks such as CoPraNet are an effective means to bring about such collaboration. However, as revealed in the piloting exercise, where data gaps exist, it is possible to obtain information by undertaking standard, repeatable and cost effective surveys. This was certainly the case for the TQMs - high quality and access to information on public transport, and visitor and local satisfaction.

Guidance for Use of QualityCoast

Issues relating to scale (temporal and spatial) need to be considered when formulating an indicator-based assessment, particularly for pan-European application, as is the case with the *QualityCoast* programme. The quality of indicators relies on the scale, both spatial and temporal, which they represent (Stein *et al*, 2001). The spatial extent of the study area, i.e. Cork Harbour, is well defined for the purposes of the piloting exercise, however, it should be noted that the study area does not correspond to any formal jurisdictional boundary within the Irish planning and legislative system. In Ireland, this further exacerbates the issue of obtaining data, as outlined in the previous section, at a level as local as Cork Harbour.

Assessment of progress toward sustainability should adopt a time horizon sufficient to capture both anthropogenic and ecosystem time scales thus responding to needs of future generations as well as those current to short-term decision making (Narodoslawsky 1997). Therefore, when coastal practitioners use indicators, such as the TQM approach, as means to communicate with stakeholders it is important that the scale of the indicator being used is clearly defined. During the Cork Harbour exercise the datasets used to measure sustainability vary from short time series (1-2 years) to medium time series (10 + years). If the information contained within TQM measurements indicate favourable or unfavourable progress towards sustainability it must come with the caveat that this assessment is based on a recent data set or a longer-term data set. This will also enable practitioners to better judge appropriate management actions in the short- and long-term.

A further issue relates to that of participation and the need to involve all relevant stakeholders in the TQM process. As revealed through the pilot exercise a considerable number of agencies and organisations (e.g. port authority, local authority, government departments, business interest groups, non-government organisations, specialist groups) hold information of direct and indirect importance to the tourism activities of Cork Harbour. Involvement of stakeholders, be they residents, representatives from the public or private organisations or a combination of both is essential to the success of such initiatives and is commensurate with contemporary best practice (Hasse, 2003; Godfrey, 1998; Din, 1996). While representatives from numerous relevant organisations, e.g. local authority, government departments, tourism groups and port authority, contributed information to the Cork Harbour exercise, the testing of the TQMs was undertaken solely on an academic basis. In order to progress the *QualityCoast* concept to the point of implementation and operational status it will be necessary to ensure the active participation of the local authority and the tourism sector, and possibly other agencies. In doing so, progress towards sustainable tourism in Cork Harbour will advance concurrently with overall sustainable development for the harbour, possibly within a strategic planning framework for the harbour as a single entity, which is currently lacking (Cummins *et al*, 2006). The progress achieved in implementing the *QualityCoast* programme in Zandvoort (Netherlands) provides an example of what can be achieved in implementing *QualityCoast* (EUCC, 2006). While it may not be possible to export this model of implementation to other European destinations, valuable lessons can certainly be learned.

Integrating and involving tourism product and service providers within *QualityCoast* will ensure greater legitimacy and acceptance, which in turn may lead to greater uptake of the concept. The tourism sector must view any sustainability orientated initiative as an opportunity and not as a burden (administrative or otherwise). A further argument for increased participation from a greater number of stakeholders is the ability to meet the resource demands (human, financial, technical) in delivering and maintaining an initiative such as *QualityCoast*. In terms of data, the Cork Harbour exercise showed that for many of the TQMs sufficient data was available to communicate the level of sustainable tourism practice to visitors but it was not held centrally or collated in any co-ordinated manner. Thus, many of the components are in place but the framework to bring them together to benefit the tourism sector is lacking.

On the issue of increasing integration and participation amongst stakeholders to implement *QualityCoast* it would be worth considering further refinement of the *QualityCoast* concept to simultaneously address

information requirements for community services. In other words, information that is deemed to be of value to a visitor in choosing a location would also be valuable to a resident in measuring their quality of life and standard of local services. This would require little alteration to the criteria used (TQMs) and information gathered (e.g. water quality, public transport, biodiversity, safety, waste management) rather a more robust dissemination strategy that targeted the local populace of an area, as well as the visitors.

Conclusion

As one of the world's largest and fastest growing economic activities, international tourism continues to grow and place increasing stress on coastal environments. Sustainable tourism is a growing area of interest that is relevant to coastal management in many regions globally. Sustainable tourist destinations face many responsibilities in reducing the impact of tourism on their communities and environment. Bearing this obligation in mind, it is recognised that efforts can be made to better inform visitors with a view to maintaining or improving the quality of the destination and visitor experience (European Communities, 2000). This is the main goal of the *QualityCoast* programme - to address lack of information strategies on sustainable management for visitors of coastal destinations, by providing better communication and information in a clear and objective way to visitors of coastal destinations. In meeting this objective *Quality Coast* will provide truthful information centred on a range of key criteria and use this information to raise awareness of the importance of sustainability in coastal tourism destinations.

The lessons learned in Cork show that a number of issues (data availability, increased participation of stakeholders and further refinement of the TQM concept) need to be considered and tackled before *QualityCoast* can become truly operational. These lessons emerging from Cork Harbour will be combined with those from other *QualityCoast* pilot areas (Zandvoort - the Netherlands, Calvia -Spain, Aveiro - Portugal, Down - Northern Ireland, Sefton - England, Stepnica - Poland, and the Island of Usedom, Schleswig-Holstein - Germany) in order to identify the best way forward for *QualityCoast*. By evaluating the results from the various tests of the *QualityCoast* and TQM concept, the CoPraNet partnership will be able to identify the best way forward for the *QualityCoast* programme.

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