

# **Developing Cultural Tourism through Cross-Sector Co-Operation: Evidence from the West of Ireland**

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## **Abstract**

Studies of co-operative activity in the tourism literature focus largely on linkages between tourism firms and little has been done to examine co-operation between tourism firms and those in other sectors. Yet the inter-dependency that exists between tourism and other sectors in product development is clearly apparent. One such example is in the production of cultural tourism where co-operation between the cultural and tourism sectors is a necessity. This paper reports on the findings of a project undertaken in regions in the west of Ireland. The research, identifies that while not without its challenges, there is a strong willingness for cross-sector co-operation by both sectors. It highlights the importance of a shared vision and notes the need for a leader to 'champion' the idea of co-operating with another sector. The findings have implications for both the sectors and policymakers and for informing discussions on how to harness linkages between tourism and other sectors.

**Keywords:** Co-operation; cultural tourism; Ireland; cross- sectoral co-operation.

## **Introduction**

Co-operation is a well-studied concept in the tourism literature. However, the research focus to date has been almost entirely on tourism firms co-operating with each other. This does not capture the full complexity of how the extensive contemporary array of tourism products, experiences and destinations are produced. In reality, many tourism firms co-operate with non-tourism firms in order to create and supply a product or service. In many sub-sectors of tourism, cultural tourism being a case in point, co-operation of some shape or form is a necessity. Yet researchers have been slow to specifically investigate co-operative activity involving tourism firms interacting with firms/agencies/actors in other productive sectors. It is this cross-sectoral nature of co-operation that is of concern here.

In order to investigate cross-sectoral co-operation, the paper reports the findings of a study of tourism firms inter-relating with firms and organizations engaged in cultural activities. The decision to select culture as the second sector for analysis stems from the fact that cultural tourism has become such an extensive area of tourism activity. Internationally, cultural tourism is now an enormously important market segment accounting for some 360 million international trips a year or some 40% of global tourism (OECD, 2009). In recent years, national, city and regional destinations across the world have been re-positioning and re-visioning their destination images through cultural lenses. The rise of cultural tourism has been fuelled by a series of factors including the growth of what Pine & Gilmore (1999) have called the experience economy, a development manifest in tourism terms in the evident

increased demand for experiential tourism, with mere products and services are no longer enough to satisfy the needs of sophisticated and mature consumers. With the huge expansion of cultural tourism has come significant growth in research into aspects of cultural tourism. However, relatively little attention has focused on questions relating to the production of cultural tourism products or the nature of connectivity between tourism and cultural producers. That is the focus of this paper. It asks questions about how products, activities and experiences that originate in the 'cultural' sector become integrated into the workings of tourism production. Specifically it asks: what factors motivate tourism and culture firms to co-operate? What types of co-operation do they engage in? Are there barriers to firms from the tourism sector co-operating with cultural organizations and how might these be overcome? The paper begins by reviewing literature on participatory and co-operative approaches to developing tourism destinations before going on to briefly contextualize recent developments in cultural tourism. Empirically, it draws on the findings of a study undertaken in 2012 in two rural destinations in one of the most westerly parts of Europe: Galway/Connemara and Westport/Clew Bay in the west of Ireland. Following a discussion of the findings, academic and policy implications are drawn.

## **Developing tourism supply through co-operation**

Butler (1999) argued that ever since tourism became a popular activity, there has been a well-established pattern of integration in terms of developing tourism supply. Initially, most attention focused on planning contexts (Panyik, Costa & Ratz 2011) but of late, growing attention has been paid to the multitude of ways in which diverse stakeholders within a destination can interact, partner and network to create new products and approaches to developing tourism (Mackellar 2006, Hjalager 2009). By 2000, Tosun (2000) was arguing that the participatory approach to tourism development was being perceived as the norm. Now, there is a clear consensus about the importance of co-operation in enhancing tourism supply, offering a high-quality experiences and aiding the sustainability of destinations (Hall, 2004, Ewen et al 2007, Zemla, 2014, Viren et al, 2015). Hall (2004), for example, highlighted the potential for co-operative behaviour to be a primary economic driver, where community embedded business networks can underpin successful control over a destination's development (Tinsley & Lynch, 2007). Similarly, Romeiro and Costa (2010) noted that the positive effects of networks can permeate beyond the tourism industry, enabling a more coordinated and sustainable management of natural resources, helping maximize the sustainability of employment and stimulating processes of social innovation. Similarly, Zemla (2014) has noted the importance of inter-destination co-operation in enabling participating destinations to enhance their competitive advantage. While the benefits have been highlighted in many studies, it is also noted that such networks and clusters are extremely complex (Cawley, 2008) and Novelli et al (2006) argue that 'consideration should be given to the process rather than to the outcomes'. From a policy and management perspective issues around the formation, implementation and development of such co-operation and networks are of particular interest.

The networks and co-operative practices referred to above can be divided into two broad categories: institutionalized networks that have a formal structure, hierarchy and objectives and; non-institutionalized networks that are informal, abstract in nature, complex and to some extent invisible. Formal, contract-based co-operation originates in the institutional and professional contexts in which individuals and organizations operate, and its outcomes relate not just to the results of co-operative activity but also to the governance of relationships established through the course of the co-operative process (Beritelli, 2011). Informal co-operation, in contrast, can be serendipitous, as Ziakaset. al. (2011, 142) explain, there may in fact be 'no awareness by the agencies involved that they operate as a network and instead ... interactions take place based on an understanding of "who can do what" and

“who has what”. Such networks have a decentralized structure with no single leader and behaviour is linked to personal interests that are built on personal trust (Ziakas & Costa, 2011), they can be flexible in nature and quite open to new partners (Zemla, 2014). The type of links between organizations in the same destination are often practical in nature, as Romeiro and Costa (2010:85) show in their case study where 98.3% of contact is made 'for the resolution of problems or specific necessities'. While co-operative behaviour within tourism communities tends to distinguish itself less by formal rules and norms and more by autonomous approaches, there may be evidence of both formal and in-formal co-operative activities (Beritelli, 2011). On the one hand, co-operation may be supported by professional acquaintance and institutional/organizational connections, while on the other, actors may co-operate if they trust and understand each other, sometimes independently from their organizational connection. Trust, is at the basis of this form of co-operation and has been found to be important in both inter-organizational and inter-personal relationships (Wang et al. 2014). The importance of both formal and informal co-operative practices in achieving development objectives is clearly recognized by Johns and Mattson (2005) and Beritelli (2011) amongst others. The significance of co-operation is clearly apparent, but two key questions that are fundamental to an understanding of co-operation; what drives co-operation and what leads to successful co-operation are also addressed in the literature.

### ***What drives co-operation?***

Much research suggests that co-operation is often initiated by a third party, often in the guise of a public sector agency like a rural development company or a tourism authority. For example, in the case of the Hungarian Rural Tourism Days initiative, Panyiket al (2011: 1353) discuss how this 'event was “top down”, initiated by the Hungarian LEADER Centre and resulted in the largest countryside tourism event in Hungary'. The objective of this initiative was to encourage tourism operators to co-operate to offer discounts on a particular day in the off-season in order to promote traditional Hungarian customs, attract visitors to remote rural areas and increase tourist numbers in the off season. Similarly, Bhat and Milne (2008) report on the New Zealand Tourism Board's destination website which necessitated the co-operation and effective establishment of a network of tourism businesses. Studies like this point to the complexity of such arrangements, with important issues being the centrality of certain businesses in the network, the extent of actual co-operation, and the role played by the embedded and informal relationships between businesses to niche tourists. Chell and Baines (2000: 195) also note the difficulties that economic development agencies have in 'reaching out to the micro businesses'.

Equally, co-operation can be seen to be initiated by the actions of entrepreneurs. In fact the importance of entrepreneurs in terms of destination development has been noted by Ryan et al (2012) and Komppula (2014). A growing literature has examined the motivations of entrepreneurs who engage in co-operation as well as the effects of their co-operative actions. Greve and Salaff (2003) suggest that entrepreneurs create or use established networks in order to develop their access to necessary resources, competencies, opportunities and various kinds of supports. In tourism, the businesses at issue are generally small or medium sized (Mykletun & Gyimóthy, 2010). Entrepreneurs often involve their families in their businesses and motivations can be driven by lifestyle interests (Getz and Carlsen, 2005). All of these factors encourage the likelihood that entrepreneurs will seek to extend their social or business contacts and networks to generate gains for their business. The small and medium-sized nature of most tourism businesses provides what Wanhill (2000) has referred to as the community underpinnings for entrepreneurship and job creation. This links to Bosworth and Farrell's (2011:91) comment about rural entrepreneurs being embedded in their local areas. Acknowledging this, they argue, encourages a move away 'from a single minded view of profit-driven entrepreneurship' and brings 'the important features of networks, community and embeddedness more centrally into our understanding

### ***What factors contribute to the successful development of co-operation?***

A variety of factors are identified in the literature as being important in terms of sustaining co-operation. According to Mykletun and Gyimothy (2010), in order for a network or co-operative activities to succeed, certain qualities such as mutual goals, common interests or passion, altruism and mutual trust are required. Jamal & Getz (1995) note factors such as: stakeholder recognition of their interdependence, perception that benefits will accrue to all co-operative partners, utilization of the skills of a strong convener, and possession and monitoring of a strategic plan. While operational and organizational factors are recognized, other more personal characteristics also play a fundamental role. These can include: strong leadership, common identity, vision, honesty and openness, active listening and the ability to adjust to new situations (Selin and Chavez, 1995). Corte et al (2014:13) argue that the focus in the literature on trust has negated the importance of individual contribution and conclude that 'the personal attitudes and previous experience can not only impact a network's creation but also its eventual success'. This key role of the co-ordinator in managing tourism business networks is similarly raised by Lemmetyinen and Go (2009).

As is evident in the factors discussed above and in the earlier discussion about motives underpinning co-operation, the social context in which this business action is undertaken needs to be acknowledged. As Czernek (2013: 99) notes 'the willingness to co-operate is determined not only by economic factors and a simple calculation of costs and benefits (although it is essential, especially at the beginning to start co-operation)' it seems to be that 'social and cultural determinants' are also fundamental to its success. Of particular significance is the fact that co-operation according to Nee (1998: 87) is 'produced spontaneously in the course of social interactions in networks of personal relations'. Therefore co-operative behaviour between '... groups in tourism destinations is an interpersonal business' that does not necessarily follow 'rational' principles (Beritelli, 2011: 623). As such, fundamental to its success is the recognition and encouragement of the development of these interpersonal factors. Czernek for example, argues that in promoting co-operative initiatives, policymakers need to go beyond economic growth and activity and pay special attention to these 'qualitative factors, particularly those improving human and social capital' (2013: 100).

## **Co-operation and cultural tourism development**

Given the marked rise of cultural tourism in recent decades, investigating cross-sectoral co-operation between tourism and culture seems a useful exercise. The potentially symbiotic relationship between culture and tourism has been acknowledged by both practitioners and academics since at least the late 1970s (Tighe 1986). Recent decades have seen a growing awareness of the importance of arts and culture as attractions and motivators for tourism as well as a growing use of culture as a mechanism for signalling destination distinctiveness. Essentially, culture and tourism have come to be viewed as powerful agents of economic growth and as vehicles for fostering appreciation of regional diversity (Europa Nostra, 2006). Increasingly affordable and flexible transport options, the rise of short-breaks, the advent of multiple annual holiday taking and the attendant rise of cities as favoured tourism destinations have all stimulated the rise of cultural tourism.

In line with the growth of cultural tourism activity has been a substantial increase in the literature on the topic. Some of this has examined the role that cultural tourism plays in destination repositioning and urban regeneration (Loukaitou-Sideris and Soureil 2012, Evans 2005). A great deal has focused on the consumption of cultural tourism products and the role that cultural motivations play in driving participation in tourism activity. Efforts have been made to conceptualize, inter alia, the tourist who engages in cultural tourism, their

modes of engagement, underpinning motives and ensuing behaviours (McKercher 2002). Smith's (2009:3) definition of cultural tourism reflects this emphasis in the literature, suggesting that it can be usefully thought of as a 'passive, active and interactive engagement with culture(s) and communities, whereby the visitor gains new experiences of an educational, creative and/or entertaining nature'. There has also been research interest in problematizing the union of culture and tourism. Russo (2002), for example, problematizes the 'success' of cultural tourism, outlining the 'vicious circle' that can threaten heritage cities dependent on what can effectively become mass flows of cultural tourists. More generally, researchers highlight the dangers of conceptualizing culture primarily as a commodity, pointing to the losses that can ensue with respect to meaning and value (Cohen 1988). There has also been stern criticism of city decision-makers who adopt the 'add culture and stir' approach (Gibson and Stevenson 2004): those who invest in cultural tourism strategies based on the idea that because the festival / cultural quarter/ iconic building / cultural trail seems to have worked elsewhere, then it can work in their destination.

Surprisingly, what passes for cultural tourism production remains relatively under researched in the meantime. Certainly the growth of cultural tourism production and the extremely diverse nature of supply have been noted (Smith, MacLeod & Robertson 2010). Equally, researchers like Hughes (1996) and Smith (2003) have suggested ways of classifying production into sectors like arts tourism, theatre tourism or creative tourism. More recently, Hughes and Allen (2010) have examined how entertainment fits into the broader tourism supply; however, they do so from a consumer perspective. Thus, much scope exists for furthering understandings of how, and through what business actions, production activities normatively associated with cultural producers, be they in performing arts, crafts, festivals, literature, come to be produced, packaged and distributed to visiting tourist audiences.

## **Methods**

This study adopts a case study approach to investigating cross-sectoral co-operation between the tourism and cultural sectors and draws on research that focused on three adjacent destinations in the west of Ireland: Galway, Connemara and Westport/Clew Bay. These rural areas are sparsely populated except for a handful of small urban centres, and stretch along an extensive, indented coastline. The choice of areas for study was purposeful (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). They are recognized as key tourism areas in a national context. The west of Ireland is recognized as 'an iconic region of Ireland, due to the perception of the rugged Atlantic Coast, the wilds of Connemara, the culture and heritage of the islands and the attractions of Galway' (West Tourism Development Plan, 2008-2010) and the areas of Galway, Connemara and Westport/Clew Bay are major destinations within this region. In addition to the natural beauty referred to in the quote, the region has a vibrant, well established and well recognised cultural sector encompassing a range of activities including theatre, crafts, visual arts, film, performing arts and arts festivals. Ireland is no exception in the international preoccupation with developing cultural tourism. Culture has been key to Ireland's tourism attractiveness for centuries and cultural tourism has been a key strategic pillar of Irish tourism policy since the mid-2000s (Fáilte Ireland, 2007). Notwithstanding the wealth of tourism and cultural activities in the region, however, the development of cultural tourism as a concept, product and brand has been hampered to date by poor connectivity between the two sectors. The study was interested to investigate why this might be the case and how better connectivity might be fostered.

The study data were gathered in 2012 using a mixed methods approach that involved in-depth interviews and an online survey. Forty three key informant interviews were conducted with representatives from both public and private sectors working in a range of tourism and cultural fields and with local, regional and national responsibilities. Interview

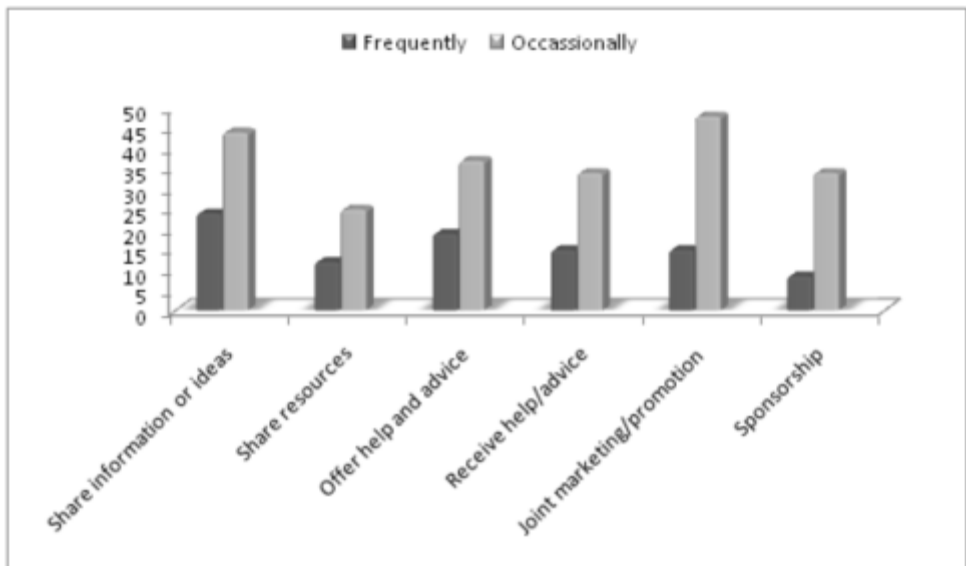
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respondents were selected using both purposeful and snowball sampling, enabling the researchers to locate information rich key informants (Patton, 2002). Designed as 'guided conversations' (Johns & Lee-Ross, 1998), the interviews were loosely structured and undertaken in a manner that enabled the researchers to steer the respondents around specific topic areas, in whatever order seemed appropriate at the time. The interviews were recorded and typically lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. They were subsequently transcribed and thematically coded. An online survey was administered to a broad spectrum of tourism and cultural organizations in the two study areas. A number of national and county-based public organizations in both the tourism and culture sectors made their relevant databases available and circulated the survey on behalf of the researchers. One hundred and forty survey responses were collected, 75 from the tourism sector and 65 from cultural organizations. An overwhelming majority of the entities surveyed can be classified as micro enterprises. With the exception of those operating in Galway city (population of 75, 529 in 2011, Census of Ireland 2011), they function in a very rural context: 64.9% of the population in the Western region live outside of towns with 1,500 residents (Western Development Commission 2012). The survey used a mixture of question types including closed, open ended and likert scale questions.

### The extent and nature of cross-sectoral co-operation

To begin, the study asked participants to focus on current levels of co-operation. It found that while 70% of respondents engaged in co-operation generally, just 40% said that they engage in cross-sectoral co-operation (this didn't differ significantly between sectors with 43% of tourism and 37% of arts and culture respondents engaging in cross-sectoral co-operation). As figure 5.1 shows, this cross-sectoral co-operation took a variety of forms but tended to be mostly informal in nature, occurring only occasionally.

**Figure 5.1: Types of cross-sectoral co-operation (N = 56)**



The types of co-operation reported stemmed largely from personal interest and knowledge and from a variety of connections which individuals involved in one sector have with the other sector. As one key informant explained, a lot of these connections would be 'personal', while another clarified how '... a very close working relationship' and the fact that they 'know

*{them} very well'* underpin the kind of co-operative activity they engage in. While collaboration was found to have emerged from both reactive responses and proactive approaches, whereby individuals initiated projects, it can also be seen to have come about almost by accident as a result of modest, individual activities, or to have gradually emerged as an idea. Thus, the findings suggest that modest efforts 'on the ground' that encourage dialogue, build connections and develop small scale co-operative initiatives can be scaled upwards as activities snowball and grow, gradually involving more people and resulting in more frequent co-operation. This was particularly evident in the case of the Greenway Artists Initiative that has developed along the Great Western Greenway, (a recently developed walking and cycling trail built along a disused coastal railway line and the Irish winner of the European Destination of Excellence Network award 2012). This was developed by a local artist and a hotel that together began to stage exhibitions of local artists' work. This initiative, as one key informant explained '*... fell into place really... it was basically an idea that sprang from one exhibition ... and I thought why not have the exhibition along the Greenway itself. So I did and it went incredibly well so I approached the hotel and asked them if they would be interested ... and they were*'.

Specifically, the types of informal co-operation identified were classified under six headings, mirroring the work of Ziakis et al (2011), as illustrated in Figure 5.1. Joint marketing/promotion and sharing information/ideas were the two most frequently cited. Examples of the former included: making accommodation or food & beverage referrals; providing 'what's on' information; bundling theatre/performance/visit/entertainment tickets with accommodation; recommending itineraries; selling tickets on behalf of another supplier; displaying promotional materials. Co-operating through sharing information/ideas involved activities like sharing expertise about such issues as health and safety, fund-raising and dealing with public agencies. Respondents spoke of a range of co-operative activities that included sharing physical spaces (e.g. hosting an art exhibition in a hotel lobby), purchasing services (e.g. employing local creative producers to create marketing material, engaging local musicians to perform in visitor attractions) and in-kind sponsorship (providing accommodation /catering for visiting artists at discounted rates). Some examples of more formalised types of arrangements were also identified. Sometimes these involved suppliers coming together to bundle their products into a package which is then sold to the tourist. The development of walking holidays in Clifden was one such example. Such types of co-operation are more formalised in that they require quite a lot of communicating, sharing and negotiating to select, and package products that complement and enhance the final tourist offering. However, they do not involve formal contracts or strategic alliances but rather rely on social norms and trust to ensure that such arrangements occur and benefit all concerned.

As a consequence of all of the co-operation between tourist firms and providers in the cultural sector, packaged cultural experiences are now extensively promoted and distributed to tourists visiting the study areas. The experiences in question extend through both day-time (e.g. festivals, museums, art galleries, crafts trails, heritage tours and guided walks, language classes, food and drink, lunch-time concerts) and night-time offerings (festivals, traditional music, concerts, theatre, dance, film, food and drink). At one extreme, the co-operation at issue is the simple advertising of a cultural event on a tourism premise, at the other it is an over-haul or re-invention of a cultural offering specifically with a tourist audience in mind.

### ***What are the motives for cross-sectoral co-operation?***

To identify what factors motivated the cross-sectoral co-operation identified, respondents were offered a list of possible factors and asked to tick as many as appropriate. The list included raising their profile or gaining exposure, increasing audiences or visitors, increasing profits, helping develop their local area and 'other'. The results are listed in Figure

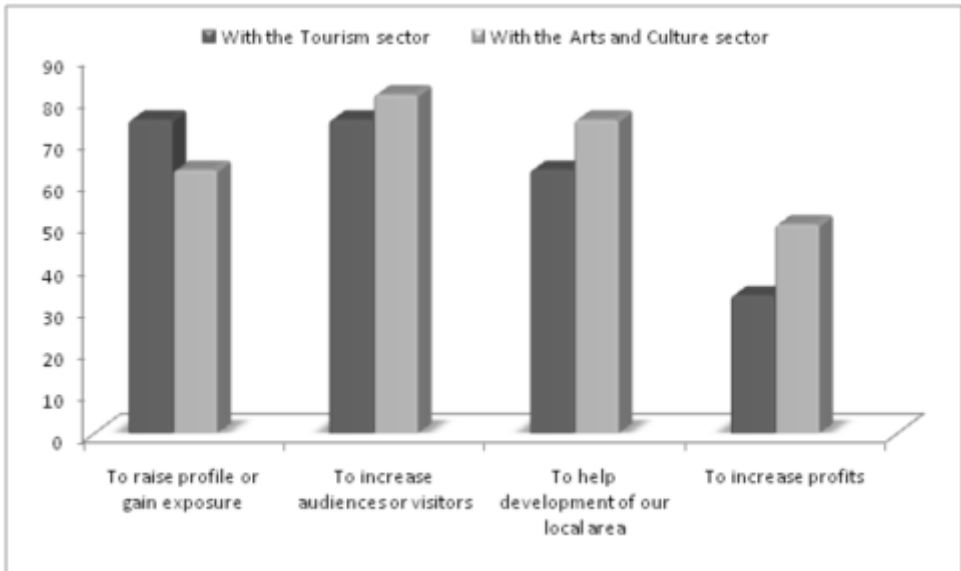
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5.2. As might be anticipated, increasing audience or visitor numbers was the most important reason, while raising profile was also important. More surprising, perhaps, is the fact that approximately 70% of respondents said that they engage in cross-co-operative activity because it helps the development of their local area. Survey respondents explained that *'the more we help each other the more people we attract to our area, and '... if this can help the wider community then all the better'*. As one survey respondent put it, *'more integration between arts and culture, arts and tourism could bring more tourists to the West of Ireland'* while another explained that they believed it to be *'beneficial to our country and specifically our town to work together'*

This awareness of the broader impact of co-operation was also apparent in the key informant interview data where Galway respondents spoke of co-operation as a *'kind of promotion of Galway as an area'*; recognizing that they are *'all together in it ... and whatever they're doing is good for the city'*. Closely related to the strong emphasis on working together to benefit the local area is the related concern to strengthen the area's brand, image and reputation. As one key informant explained, *'we see it as being an experience. What we do is we promote the experience of the city ... As a collective we can, and the advantage to us is we bring people in, we give them reasons to come'*. In Westport, respondents spoke of *'a realisation ... that everybody has to really work together'*; that *'it's not down to one segment or one sector ... trying to promote the town that everybody works together ... (that) is the secret'*. The data show a clear realisation that working together promotes the area and also the experience for the tourist.

**Figure 5.2:**

**Reasons for working with individuals or organizations in the 'other' sector N = 56**



The potential benefits that can accrue when tourism and culture organizations work together were readily acknowledged in a number of the key informant interviews. Some focused on the advantages it brought for their own business or sector: for example one respondent explained that because of co-operation *'the business comes to town and everybody will get a spin-off of it'*, another noted that *'co-operation means we raise the quality of the art and possibly the reach, audience wise'*, and another said that *'it might increase the profile of, and funding for, the festival'*. Others focused on the advantages from the perspective of the town or destination, with one tourism respondent noting that *'everybody pulls together to further the town really'* and another culture respondent saying that they would be happy to promote



any business as *'the more you have to offer in a place, the better it is overall'*.

### ***Factors underpinning successful co-operation***

While the study did not specifically set out to investigate what constituted successful cross-sectoral co-operation, the findings suggest that two factors are particularly important in this regard: a common vision with a shared goal and the existence of a leader figure. Key informants spoke of the value of working with *'like-minded people'*, where everybody understands and works towards shared goals. Multiple respondents echoed this. One respondent explained that they co-operated because they *'wanted to develop relationships with other local businesses so we could create a symbiotic relationship in which we are all going for the same goal'*. Another stated *'what we do is promote the experience of the city. As a collective we can, and the advantage to us is we bring people in, we give them reasons to come'*. Given the challenges stemming from the differences in the focus and value orientations of the sectors (to be discussed below), the need for a common vision and shared goals is very apparent. Equally, given the number and range of stakeholders involved, it is important that the engagement of as many stakeholders as possible be encouraged, as community groups, businesses, public organizations and agencies all play vital roles. In light of the key finding that study participants were united in their desire that their business activities would benefit their local area, the development and sustainability of the area or town would seem to represent an obvious basis upon which to build a shared common vision.

Numerous key informants spoke of how leadership, either from an individual champion or from an agency like a local authority or a Town Council, combined with a *'long term vision'* was important to successful co-operation. Both key informants and survey respondents referred to the need for *'strong leadership'*, *'someone with a big vision who can bring arts, crafts and tourism together'* (Survey Respondent), while key informants noted the need for *'a culture and arts Tsar ... who will hold clout with them ... someone that can pull the thing together'* noting how *'you need a leader and if you have that leader you have no problem'*. One commented how in Westport a strong Town Council is *'brilliant'* as it provides *'leadership'* to the area. Others referred to the influence of one individual in developing the Clifden Arts Festival, noting how *'... one man, one individual who pulled the whole thing together ...'* while another spoke of the respect that people in the area have for this individual and how he is *'the cog in the wheel, he's the axle, and then everyone comes around him'* and how, because he is so well respected for his work and the fact that *'everybody gets treated the same, ... the entire community gets behind it'*.

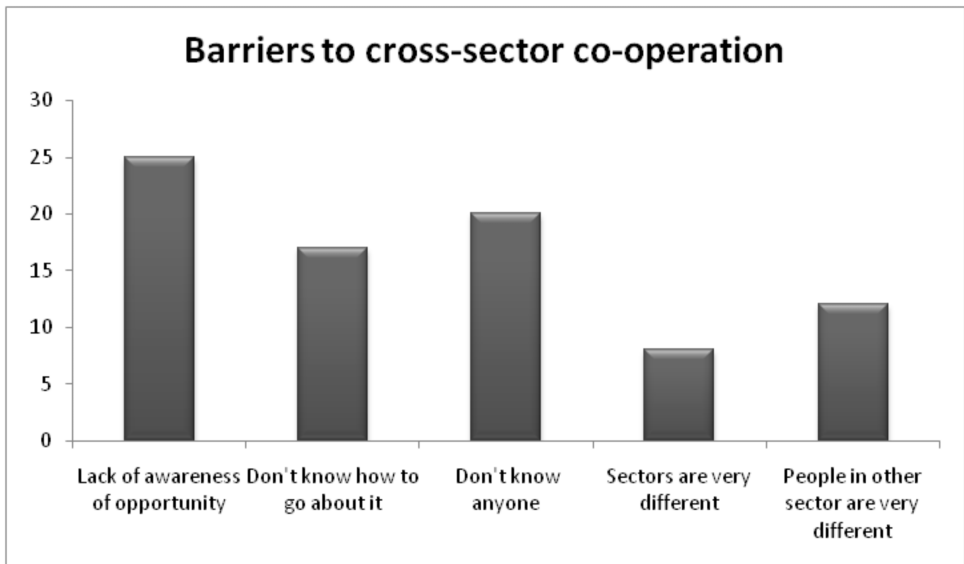
### ***Are there barriers to co-operation and how might these be overcome?***

It is notable that 60% of respondents don't engage in cross-sectoral and co-operation, and particularly interesting is the fact that although 70% of respondents engaged in co-operation within their own sectors, indicating a willingness to participate in co-operation in principal, only 40% did so cross-sectorally. Thus rather than co-operation being the issue, it was clear from both key informant interviews and survey data that actors in both the tourism and cultural sectors recognise that working cross-sectorally differs quite substantially from working within their own sector. Respondents were asked whether they perceived any barriers to co-operation and 71% believe that some exist. Foremost among the barriers identified were: a lack of awareness of opportunities to co-operate, not knowing anyone in the 'other' sector; and not knowing how to set about co-operating (Figure 5.3). In this context, it is not surprising that a certain degree of scepticism was identified, and among respondents, there was a sense that the sectors are quite different from each other. This difference was founded in the first instance in what might be described as value orientation. While tourism firms were confident of the strong business acumen and commercial focus that underpinned their modus operandi, they sometimes believed this to be lacking among cultural producers. Thus respondents commented that *'people involved in the arts are not necessarily business*

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people ... the business side is just not what they are into ... they see it as an unnecessary tack on to their actual job of providing an art experience'. The data contain much descriptive commentary on the 'artistic temperament', and 'quirkiness' of those in the cultural sector. Cultural respondents, meanwhile, mentioned concerns such as when it comes to tourism 'it's.. about bed nights, and it's always about bed nights' another said in relation to their artistic endeavours that 'there's a concern that maybe if the commercial entities get their hands on it they might run away with it' and that 'opening up to tourism may have a negative impact on artistic vision, integrity and quality, thus compromising the quality, integrity and authenticity of the cultural form'. One respondent summed it up in stating: 'the biggest barrier [to cross-sectoralco-operation] is understanding, lack of awareness and trust—the arts and culture sector view the tourism sector as being like second-hand car salesmen, and the tourism sector think of those in arts and culture as having their heads in the clouds'.

**Figure 5.3: Barriers to Cross-Sectoral Co-Operation (N = 56)**



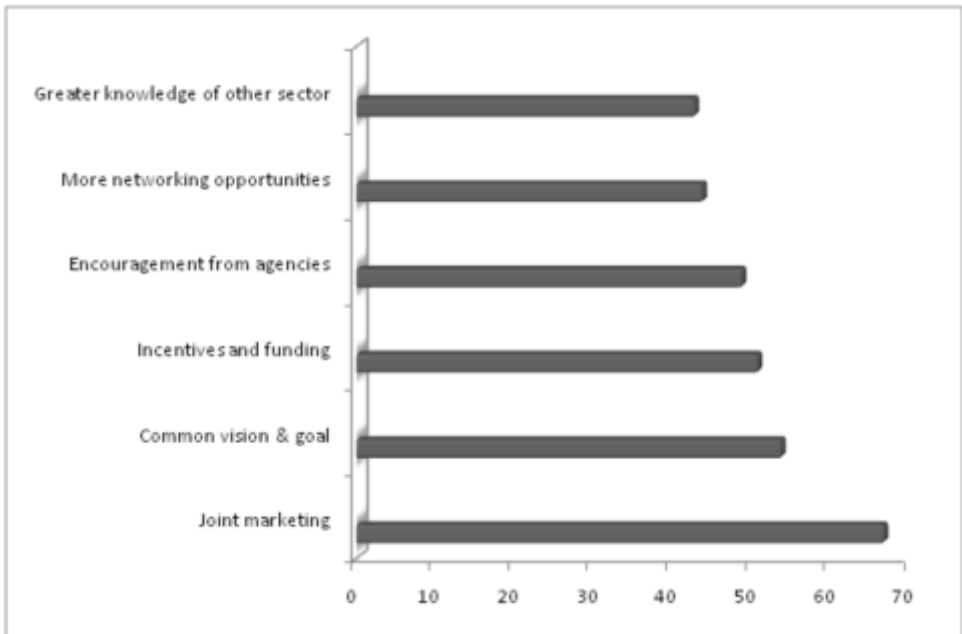
The data show that perceived differences between the two sectors went beyond commercial matters to the nature of working practices in the two sectors. These differences are manifold and are shaped by factors which range from the nature of the creative process to the financial uncertainties that characterize the arts and culture sector on the one hand and the tight time-lines, packaged, and sometimes reductionist nature of tourism activity on the other. Several very practical examples of these differences came through in the research. Referring to the need for the tourism sector to adopt a sizeable lead-in time to marketing their services, one key informant spoke about how tourism actors need to know what the 'product' is in order to sell/promote it, while arts and culture actors may be simply unable to pre-define what the creative form will be, given the need to wait and see what it turns out to be. Other respondents highlighted operational issues from the perspective of offering visitor experiences. For example, while craft producers may be happy for tourists to come and visit their workshop (and purchase their crafts), tourist opening hours must be scheduled such that they do not disrupt the working routine of the crafts person concerned. This can be difficult for tourism providers who may believe that viable tourism offerings must operate on a highly scheduled, routinized basis.

Notwithstanding these barriers, the findings revealed that attitudes to both the prospect and experience of cross-sectoralco-operation are very positive. The survey findings

show that 97% of respondents are very open or somewhat open to greater levels of co-operation between the sectors. As one key informant explained *'I'd be delighted to support anything to do with arts and culture, or arts, or music'*. This positivity was also reflected in the survey findings, as respondents claimed *'if something were to happen to promote the closer co-operation of tourism and arts businesses in the West I would feel it would be of huge benefit ... to my business'*. This is clearly an important finding that augurs well for future development. Key interviewees were positively disposed towards the idea of co-operation and readily identified a range of benefits for each sector. Some respondents clarified that they *'wanted to develop relationships with other local businesses so we could create a symbiotic relationship in which we are all going for the same goal'* while another claimed that they *'believe that the different sectors can prove to be mutually beneficial to each other's success'*. The general positivity to the idea of further co-operation between the sectors was further manifest in the diverse range of suggestions that respondents made as to how barriers to co-operation might be overcome and levels of co-operation increased (Figure 5.4).

**Figure 5.4**

**What factors would encourage more co-operation across the sectors?(N=56)**



In some of these suggestions, respondents saw their businesses having key roles to play in e.g. more joint promotion & marketing initiatives and more networking opportunities. In others, respondents clearly saw the need for 'third party' stakeholders, most notably local authorities, public tourism agencies and industry associations to proactively promote co-operative practices by providing forms of encouragement, incentives, funding, mentoring and support. The role that such agencies have to play in shaping a common goal or vision for bringing the two sectors together and in advocating and encouraging leadership in the area was also recognised by respondents. Indeed, the study found several examples where public agencies are playing key roles in driving cross-sectoral co-operation. The Crafts Council of Ireland's development of a 'Craft Trail' is one example. This initiative seeks to open up the craft sector to tourists, allowing them to see craftspeople at work and to purchase their crafts. Údarásna Gaeltachta, the public development agency for the Gaelic speaking Gaeltacht areas in Ireland introduced a criteria into its festival funding scheme which requires all

tourist-oriented festivals to include a cultural element into its programming. The intervention of Fáilte Ireland, the national tourism development agency, is also very apparent through a number of initiatives. It introduced *Blaiseadh Gaeltachta*, for example, as a classification/labeling system to allow B&Bs to indicate to tourists that they can provide an Irish language experience. It also operates a mentoring scheme whereby mentors experienced in developing and marketing tourism products are allocated to cultural organizations as a means of enhancing their effectiveness in accessing tourism markets.

## **Discussion**

The clear finding of the research is that organizations are interested in cross-sectoral co-operation with 97% of respondents, and almost all interviewees indicating that they are open to greater levels of co-operation between the sectors. However, the fact is that only 40% of the respondents engage in such co-operation and cross-sectoral co-operation was much less common than co-operation more generally. For the 40% of the survey sample actively engaged in cross-sectoral co-operation, the symbiotic relationship between tourism and culture is acknowledged and valued. The types of co-operation identified were found to involve largely informal, occasional activities that relied on personal knowledge, networks and associations. Sometimes, a third party public agency like a tourism or a cultural development agency was involved, thus adding a degree of formality, but most commonly it was a matter of individuals and firms connecting individually. In this, the study's findings support extant research as to the importance of informal connections (Beritelli 2011, Ziakas and Costa 2011, Zemla, 2014).

Overall, the findings clearly show that for a whole series of reasons, these organizations have much to gain by aligning their activities more closely. Yet, the inclination to engage in cross-sectoral co-operation was tempered by the existence of a series of barriers to co-operation, both perceived and real. This notwithstanding, the data identified a number of suggestions as to how these might be overcome, all of which advocated initiating some form of dialogue / engagement / networking in the apparent belief that co-operative engagement would develop from that initial communication. The matter of stimulating engagement seemed to be influenced by a number of drivers. In the first instance, the findings show that an important driver is clearly the individual entrepreneur (reflecting the work of Ryan et al (2012) and Kompuala (2014)). Much of the data points to individual tourism entrepreneurs taking the initiative to engage with an actor in the cultural sector. Entrepreneurs engage in co-operation because of the benefits that they believe will accrue, most notably in terms of increasing consumption of their service/product, but also because of the benefits that they believe will be generated for the destination more broadly, in line with the work of Greve and Salaff (2003) and Bosworth and Farrell (2011). Thus, for example, one Westport hotel began exhibiting art as a way of attracting customers. Over time, this began to function as an attraction in itself and the hotel developed the idea significantly such that now the hotel atrium is used as a space in which art and crafts are displayed on a monthly rotating basis. Another hotel located on the Great Western Greenway capitalised on the opportunity offered by the trail to develop the 'Gourmet Greenway'. It worked in conjunction with food producers in County Mayo to devise a food trail that would showcase artisan food in the locale. In a similar vein, one of Connemara's main tourist attractions, Kylemore Abbey, decided to engage local musicians as part of their showcasing / promotional activities. The success of this initiative inspired them to include musical performances into their routine tourist offerings as a means of enhancing the visitor experience and of providing an indoor alternative to the largely weather dependent experience offered at their attraction. While these examples show the importance of entrepreneurial initiative, they also point to the snowball effect that individual instances of co-operation can have. As such examples are noted by the broader community it may be that they encourage others to think about co-

operating, thus helping co-operative practices to become normalized.

Researchers such as Panyik (et al 2011) Bhat and Milne (2008) highlight the important role of public bodies in initiating and developing co-operation. This study concurs in finding that public agencies like tourism development boards, cultural agencies and regional development organizations have an important role to play in fostering co-operative activity. As discussed in the findings, the varied interventions of public agencies operating at both national and local levels acted to encourage and facilitate tourism firms working with the cultural sector. It is notable that none of this intervention was formal. Neither were they particularly strategic in that the public sector bodies were working largely independently of each other even though they were all trying to achieve broadly similar aims. What was particularly interesting, however, was the fact that some of the most successful examples of co-operation identified were ones where individuals, businesses, or communities supported the efforts of the public agency, saw the value in their initiatives, and drove them forward. A good example of this is the Great Western Greenway in the Westport/Clew Bay area. Here, combined public leadership at national and county level led to the development of the Greenway trail itself, but it is the work of local businesses, artists and community groups working in tandem that has built upon the initiative and realized further tourism initiatives including the Gourmet Greenway, the Greenway artists Initiative, the Greenway Sculpture and Greenway Adventures. Several public agency key informants interviewed reported running networking events in other areas with no long-term impact after the event was over. Thus, while it is clear that public agencies have an important role to play in fostering co-operative activity, these findings suggest that the attitude and disposition of members of the community and businesses is equally as important, and it is only if they think that something is a worthwhile effort that real connectivity will emerge.

To date, much of the literature focuses on businesses being motivated to engage in co-operation in order to leverage greater access to resources, markets, supports or profits and so the focus is on how co-operation can bring benefits to the firm. To an extent, the findings generated here support this focus. They show that the key motive expressed by tourism firms in initiating co-operative activities was an interest in boosting tourist numbers and audience numbers. However, this study has also highlighted the importance of other motivations. Most notably, they show that study participants were also motivated to co-operate because they perceive it to be a means of advancing the development of their local area. This came through very strongly in both the survey and the interview findings. Some of the stated reasons for the openness to future co-operation identified, for example, included '*[I] believe in co-operation for mutual benefit and the greater good*', '*it is good for the area*' '*arts and culture are integral parts of tourism*' and '*sectors are intertwined and [there are] clear interdependencies – it makes sense*'. In line with extant research, the study found that strong personal and professional relations and the existence of networking were key contexts underpinning co-operation. The firms studied were predominantly SME's and the locations in which they were operating were small towns or rural in nature and this may be significant: as discussed earlier, the small-scale nature of tourism activity in these areas makes personal contact easier. These findings support Wanhill's (2000) ideas about the community underpinnings of entrepreneurial activity. They equally reinforce Czernek's (2013) observation that social and cultural determinants can often be as important as economic factors and Bosworth and Farrelly's (2011) comment about the extent to which rural entrepreneurs are embedded in their local areas. The current findings broaden our understanding of embeddedness as what is shown is not only that small tourism firms are tied to the place in which they are located, they are acutely aware of this fact and take it into account when making decisions about engaging in co-operation.

Czernek (2013) differentiates between exogenous and endogenous factors that explain differing levels of co-operation in tourist regions and this is relevant here. What this study has identified is that as well as being motivated by endogenous considerations such as

profits and increased visitor numbers these businesses are also motivated by the desire to benefit the local area. This consideration could be thought exogenous as there may be no direct impact on the business. So is this an altruistic, corporate responsibility type of action? The answer is of course different for different businesses. For some, there is recognition that improving the destination will have a positive effect on their business. For others, this recognition may be less definite, yet there is an awareness of how the development of both the destination and the business is entwined, and so the objective of improving the destination becomes something of an internal objective of the individual tourism business.

As discussed in the literature, there are a wide range of factors associated with successful co-operation. This study has highlighted two factors which have led to the successful development of cross-sectoral co-operation in these areas; a shared goal and the important role of a leader. Mykletun and Gyimothy (2010) have outlined the importance of 'mutual goals, common interest or passion', in underpinning effective co-operation. In this study, a key commonly shared interest was a commitment to the development of the local area. This emerged as a key shared goal binding those who co-operate together. Multiple respondents spoke of this shared goal. One respondent explained that they co-operated because they *'wanted to develop relationships with other local businesses so we could create a symbiotic relationship in which we are all going for the same goal'*. Another stated *'what we do is promote the experience of the city. As a collective we can, and the advantage to us is we bring people in, we give them reasons to come'*. This finding raises important questions about how such shared goals can be developed. Are some places and communities more likely to be able to develop mutual goals or is this something that can be 'created'? How can the difficulties of creating shared visions and goals between different sectors be overcome? There is an important role here for a 'leader' who as Corte et al (2014) state plays a role not only in the creation of a network or instigation of co-operation but also in its eventual success. This leader uses the shared goal or vision to unite the parties and encourage the strategy of co-operation.

## **Conclusion**

Increasingly, tourism has been highlighted as an experiential service (Andersson 2007). Yet in spite of the fact that tourists choose places in terms of the multi-dimensional experiences that they can offer (Rustichini&Siconolfi 2004), much of our understanding about the tourism offering focuses on individual products and individual firms. While the tourism literature provides insights about co-operation generally, the focus is on co-operation between tourism firms. Given the increasing interactions between tourism firms and providers in other sectors, this appears to represent a gap in knowledge. Tourists are attracted to places for the experiences they can gain there and their evaluation of destinations is determined by the experience of their visit. This focus on experience requires us to adjust our research lens when evaluating tourism provision. It is not about the tourist attractions that are available, the accommodation stock that exists, or even the events that are offered, it is a combination of all of these things that creates the tourist experience. As tourists seek experiences they are often seeking something that is not provided by the tourist sector alone. Rather, they are attracted, for example, by the allure of historical sites, theatrical performances, cultural events, opportunities to learn new skills or taste new foods.

Cognizant of this, the paper deals with the important issue of cross-sectoral co-operation. As destinations seek to stand out in a crowded market-place and re-invent themselves to become more sustainable they are increasingly looking at what new products and experiences can be offered. This necessitates a cross-sectoral approach. This paper has shown that cross-sectoral co-operation is not without its challenges. Tourism firms may not have a well-developed awareness of the opportunities that exist in the cultural sector and vice versa. Skill sets, working practices, norms and values differ between the two sectors while perceptions held by actors in the different sectors concerning such issues as quality,

ownership and control may be contentious. However, these study findings show a strong willingness to overcome these potentially problematic issues and to seek common ground. In this context, a key research finding emerging from the study is that common ground can lie in a shared commitment and interest in the local area. On the basis of this finding, the paper argues that an effective basis for cross-sectoral co-operation can be found by putting the destination to the fore and developing a shared vision that aims to make the destination as a whole more attractive for tourists. Implicit in such an approach is a need for tourism businesses to move away from focusing on their business activities as independent entities to understanding how their offerings fit with those of the destination more widely. From a policy perspective, the study findings suggest that if strategies are to effectively encourage cross-sectoral co-operation they must root themselves in a shared vision that is underpinned by mutual respect for both sector's core activities and values. This shared vision can be found in the common desire to enhance the well being of the destination as a whole for the benefit of all concerned.

Another critical finding to emerge from the study was the undoubted need for a leader to 'champion' the idea of co-operating with another sector. Leaders seem to be very important in negotiating common ground between the two sectors, in advocating lateral thinking and in ironing out the complexities that arise in co-operating cross-sectorally. This leadership role can be supplied by an individual entrepreneur, a community activist or it can come from a third party in the private (e.g. an industry association of chamber of commerce) or public arena (e.g. regional development body, tourism agency). In cases where a third party agency are actively involved in seeking to promote co-operation, the findings suggest that interventions will only work if there is 'buy-in' from the array of concerned stakeholders.

Given the small-scale nature of the study reported here, there is further need for research to investigate whether in fact these findings are in any way representative of cross-sectoral co-operation involving other sectoral actors (e.g. food, eco, adventure tourism) or operating in other geographical areas. With the focus on tourism as an experience it is vital that we examine the tourism product from this perspective too, and this necessitates focussing on the cross-sectoral relationship between tourism and a variety of other sectors. Cross-sectoral co-operation is likely to be fundamental to the development and sustainability of tourism destinations of the future and this is why research like this is so important for policy makers and academics alike.

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