Membership of the New Forest Green Leaf Tourism Scheme:

An exploration of the commercial and environmental motivations among tourism and hospitality micro-SMEs

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the commercial and environmental motivations of the owner-managers of tourism and hospitality micro-SMEs[1], which underpin their membership of the Green Leaf Tourism Scheme (GLTS) in the New Forest, Hampshire, U.K. Previous studies indicate companies engage in corporate social responsibility (CSR) for a variety of reasons. These include opportunities for reducing operating costs, the ability to claim competitive advantage from an enhanced reputation, and to increase employee motivation (Jahdi and Acikdilli, 2009; Kitchin, 2003; Middlemiss, 2003; Steger *et al.*, 2007). The majority of research into corporate environmental practices has focused on the activities of large, transnational organisations whose individual activities may have significant impact (see for example, Ayuso, 2007; Duarte, 2010; Fassin *et al.*, 2011; Godos-Díez *et al.*, 2010; Inoue and Lee, 2011). However, it is also important to know more about the environmental strategies of SMEs because, while they may have relatively minor importance individually, collectively their impact is much greater (Lawrence *et al.*, 2006). Indeed, SMEs represent 99% of all business in the U.K., and are reported to be responsible for 60% of British carbon dioxide emissions (Parker *et al.*, 2009). Despite their being a dominant form of business set-up, SMEs remain relatively under-researched (Thomas *et al.*, 2011), especially with regard to their CSR and corporate greening activity (Fassin *et al.*, 2011; Jarvis and Pulido Ortega, 2010). Recently, calls have been made for additional research on the strategic decisions of micro-SMEs, not least because they are heterogeneous and their behaviour is impacted by a variety of structural and personal agency factors (Thomas *et al.*, 2011).

In his seminal paper, Mintzberg (1983) argued it was unclear whether pro-environmental corporate behaviour was driven by altruistic values or for 'enlightened self-interest'. Research focusing on why tourism and hospitality SMEs 'go green' (see Carlsen *et al.*, 2001; Horobin and Long, 1996; Tzschentke *et al.*, 2008) indicate the key drivers include the promise of reduced costs from lower energy, water and waste bills (Tzschentke *et al.*, 2004), increased customer loyalty (Hartmann and Ibáñez, 2006) improved marketing and PR opportunities (Harris, 2007; Lynes and Andrachuk, 2008) and a decline in

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[1] According to the European Commission (2005), a micro-SME is defined as an enterprise comprising fewer than ten employees, and turnover of less than €2 million [see SME definition. Available at http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/sme/facts-figures-analysis/sme-definition/index_en.htm]. Thomas *et al.* (2011) also acknowledge the complexity of defining small businesses within the tourism and hospitality sectors.

environmental impact (Haaland and Aas, 2010; Jarvis *et al.*, 2010; Tzschentke *et al.*, 2004; 2008). The barriers to adopting environmental practices include owner-managers not believing they have a significant impact on the environment (Lawrence *et al.*, 2006; Parker *et al.*, 2009), a lack of expertise in adopting pro-environmental measures, and the high cost of investing in green technology with little perceived financial benefit (Lawrence *et al.*, 2006). Additional challenges facing businesses keen to incorporate environmental practices include consumer confusion and/or scepticism over 'green wash' (Font, 2002; Miller *et al.*, 2010), high levels of bureaucracy (Jarvis *et al.*, 2010), the importance of quality, choice and price over a company's green credentials in consumer decision-making (Bramwell and Alletorp, 2001; Weeden, 2005), and a seeming hesitancy by some businesses to promote their sustainable activity, also known as 'green muting' (Makower, 2009).

Whilst the greening of tourism and hospitality SMEs has been the subject of some academic interest, little is known about the personal motivations of owner-managers operating in the U.K. who have adopted environmental practices. Largely, research has explored the role of values and lifestyle orientation among tourism and hospitality entrepreneurs in Australia and New Zealand with regard to their business motivations (see for example, Ateljevic and Doorne, 2000; Carlsen *et al.*, 2008; Thomas *et al.*, 2011). In this instance, lifestyle means small business tourism entrepreneurs' desire to live and work in a particular location due to an emphasis on quality of life, and adherence to a "broader ideological context of sustainability" (Ateljevic and Doorne, 2000:379). However, it is not clear from the literature whether U.K.-based micro-SMEs' corporate decisions are driven more by commercial imperatives than environmental values, or vice versa. Significantly, there has been a recent call for research into the environmental beliefs of managers and the extent to which these are instrumental for SMEs seeking to increase their green commitment (see El Dief and Font, 2012). In other words, to what extent are the pro-environmental beliefs of these owner-managers important in their business activity? Such issues are the focus of this chapter, which reports the findings of an exploratory study of tourism and hospitality micro-SME owner-managers' decisions to join an environmental certification scheme in the New Forest. Management implications of the findings, and recommendations for further research are discussed at the end of the chapter.

Environmental certification schemes

Black and Crabtree (2007:502) define certification as,

> [a] voluntary procedure, that sets, assesses, monitors, and gives written assurance that a product, process, service, or management system conforms to specific requirements and norms. A certification/awarding body gives written assurance to the consumer and the industry in general. The outcome of certification is a certificate and usually the use of an ecolabel.

In the U.K., voluntary tourism certification schemes have developed largely within the hospitality sector, mostly because these organisations are more easily defined (Bendell and Font, 2004). The scheme at the

heart of this paper is the Green Leaf Tourism Scheme (GLTS), a certification programme operated and validated by the New Forest District Council (NFDC) and situated in Hampshire. Tourism is a key economic driver for the New Forest National Park, and it attracts 13.5 million visitors per year, generating more than £400 million per annum, and creating almost 8,000 jobs (NFDC, 2011). The GLTS was originally developed in 2006 as a (free) certification scheme and currently has 160 members, chiefly accommodation providers, with a minority of members operating local shops and visitor attractions. The scheme highlights the importance of caring for and protecting the New Forest environment, largely through objectives aimed at reducing car usage, promoting local produce and artisan skills, encouraging wildlife and native plants, minimising waste, protecting valuable natural resources, and promoting responsible tourist behaviour and the wider benefits of community tourism. Significantly, there is no mention of the commercial advantages associated with sustainability. Whilst Tourism South East (2007; 2010) in England investigated visitor attitudes towards environmental concerns and certification schemes, this largely revealed information about logo recognition, and there is currently no evidence of research into the motivations of owner-managers for joining the Green Leaf Tourism Scheme.

Personal motivations for adopting pro-environmental business measures

While much of the academic research into SME decision-making has identified an emphasis on the entrepreneurial quest for profit, it is important to consider that additional motivations may be at play, particularly when seeking to understand how small business owner-managers implement CSR and other ethics-related decisions (see Fassin *et al.*, 2011). As noted earlier, the promoted benefits of joining a green certification scheme derive from a reduction in running costs (for example, water, waste and energy), marketing and PR gains, and a chance to decrease the environmental impact of the business. In addition, membership can help businesses to become more environmentally aware (Russillo *et al.*, 2008). However, whilst it is possible to accurately validate a reduction in resource usage, the proclaimed marketing advantage is somewhat contested, not least because consumers do not always consider environmental certification in their accommodation choice decisions even when they say they do (see Jones and Weeden, 2011). Additional constraints for SME owner-managers include the perceived high financial cost of complying with schemes' environmental standards, the onerous amount of bureaucracy attached to membership, owner-managers' limited knowledge and awareness of available schemes, and little personal expertise in pro-environmental measures (see Carlsen *et al.*, 2001; Font and Buckley, 2001; Jarvis *et al.*, 2010; Vernon *et al.*, 2003). In addition to their lack of awareness regarding available schemes, research indicates SME owner-managers have low levels of eco-literacy (Tilley, 2000), and little knowledge about the environmental impact of their business activities (Horobin and Long, 1996; Jarvis and Pulido Ortega, 2010).

Previous research indicates socially responsible managers are key drivers for incorporating CSR policies in business (Godos-Díez *et al.*, 2010; Jones and Weeden, 2011). However, micro-SME owner-managers,

by the very nature of their occupation, spend a great deal of their time and often-limited resources on generating income. Consequently, even if they are interested in incorporating environmental measures into their business activity, they may have little time to research how to effectively achieve such an objective. Likewise, eco-oriented managers are essential for the successful adoption and implementation of environmental management practices (El Dief and Font, 2012). Notably, when seeking to understand small-business owners' environmental commitment, desire to achieve a sustainable business will also vary according to the strength of an individual's ethical belief system and the perceived importance of the ethical issue (Haines *et al.*, 2008). Indeed, the extent to which an individual believes it important to conduct business in accordance with their environmental beliefs will also depend on the level of involvement they have with the issue and the extent to which they feel a sense of personal moral obligation, or responsibility, to protect the environment.

Involvement is a key variable in understanding both consumers and business decision-making and can be explained as "the importance a specific act or behaviour has to the individual" (Haines *et al.*, 2008:390). Involvement is of particular interest to this study because the more important a decision becomes to an individual, the more likely he/she will spend time and effort over the decision. Similarly, in a situation involving an ethical issue (such as reducing the environmental impact of a business), the higher the level of moral involvement, the more likely individuals will overcome any perceived hindrances preventing them from making an ethical judgement. However, the perception that signing up to an environmental certification scheme incurs an onerous level of bureaucracy (as just one example) may deter even a highly motivated individual with strong environmental beliefs.

In tourism and hospitality SMEs, research indicates environmental motivations were revealed to originate from owner-managers' personal beliefs that it is morally right to be sustainable in business (Tzschentke *et al.*, 2004), and protecting the environment is a crucial part of the social responsibility of any business activity (Rivera and De Leon, 2005). Arguably, if protecting the environment is of key importance to the owner-manager of a tourism or hospitality SME then he/she is more likely to make the effort to join a certification scheme. On the other hand, those who attach less importance to pro-environmental behaviour and who are attracted to joining such a scheme more for the associated benefits of marketing and PR are arguably less likely to overcome the extra cost, time and effort involved in becoming a member.

A review of the literature has a raised a number of key issues to be examined. As mentioned previously, there is limited research into micro-SME owner-managers' environmental values and whether these are important in joining an environmental scheme (El Dief and Font, 2012; Tzchentke *et al.*, 2004). In addition, further research is needed on the strategic decisions of micro-SMEs (Thomas *et al.*, 2011), the role of environmental motivations (Fassin *et al.*, 2011), and the extent to which membership of eco-certification schemes increases the environmental awareness of owner-managers (Russillo *et al.*, 2008).

This paper thus contributes to an improved understanding of such issues by clarifying to what extent New Forest micro-SME owner-managers are driven by commercial and/or environmental motives, and whether their ethical beliefs underpin their motivations for joining the scheme. All of these points will be examined by exploring their reasons for joining the GLTS, investigating their beliefs regarding membership of the scheme, and revealing whether affiliation to the GLTS has increased their awareness of the environmental impact of their business. Finally, this chapter will offer conclusions on micro-SME owner-managers' experiences of being members of GLTS with regard to some of the challenges this incurs.

Methodology and methods

To explore the above key questions, a positivistic approach was used to study micro-SME members of the New Forest GLTS. While in-depth interviews or focus groups might have been more appropriate to tease out owner-managers' motivations, their environmental awareness and any underlying ethical issues influencing their reasons for joining the scheme, a quantitative method gave all current members the opportunity to contribute to the study. This method also allowed for greater ease of comparison with previous motivation research. For example, El Dief and Font (2012) used questionnaires to investigate the motivations of Red Sea hotels in adopting environmental practices, as did Lawrence *et al.* (2006) in their study of sustainable practices among SMEs in New Zealand. Arguably, neither quantitative nor qualitative approaches are error-proof for studying motivation within tourism research, as each possesses advantages and disadvantages (Hsu and Huang, 2008). As a result, the survey in this study was specifically designed to be brief, not only to minimise respondent fatigue (Bryman and Bell, 2007), but also because in the context of SMEs, often only one person is responsible for a variety of marketing, accounting, and operational tasks. Potential respondents would likely have little time for either in-depth interviews or the completion of long questionnaires (see Fellows and Liu, 2007; Lawrence *et al.*, 2006).

The survey consisted of open ended and closed ended questions. Respondents were firstly asked to reflect on their initial reasons for joining the scheme. They were then prompted to identify their level of agreement with fifteen belief statements regarding their membership of the GLTS. These statements were grounded in the literature and intended to reveal the commercial and environmental drivers behind their decisions to join the scheme. One of the statements specifically addressed the moral imperative associated with membership. Respondents were asked a further open-ended question as to whether the scheme had made them more aware of the environmental impact of their business activities. Finally, the micro-SME representatives were asked to comment on their experiences of being members of the GLTS.

An intern working for the New Forest District Council (NFDC) distributed the survey via email to current members of the GLTS scheme in the New Forest in June 2011. A total of twenty-three out of one hundred and sixty members completed the survey, a 14% response rate. It is possible this response was

due to members' lack of time as the survey was administered during the summer season, and might also indicate the presence of non-response bias, with those not responding potentially holding different views from those who completed the survey. Additional bias may have arisen due to respondents being requested to return questionnaires to the NFDC offices, possibly restricting the openness of their answers. Conversely, several respondents remained anonymous, potentially encouraging greater honesty with regard to their motivations for joining and their beliefs regarding the benefits of membership. There were several limitations associated with this method of data collection. Firstly, respondents could not clarify any of the survey questions, and secondly, it did not allow the opportunity to probe for a deeper understanding of underlying issues (Amaratunga *et al*., 2002; Bryman and Bell, 2007). However, while the sample may not have been representative of all members, and despite some of the associated biases and limitations, the data provide a valuable insight into the key research objectives of this study.

Findings and discussion

Of the twenty-three businesses that completed the questionnaire, eleven were self-catering units, seven were guesthouse B&Bs, two were hotels, two were attractions, and one a charitable trust. Eighteen surveys were completed by owner-managers, four by managers, and one by a marketing officer.

Reasons for joining the GLTS

Table 1 presents the reasons for joining the GLTS were evenly divided between commercial and environmental drivers. Mintzberg (1983) argued it was unclear whether corporate pro-environmental behaviour is driven by enlightened self-interest, (that is, profit-oriented drivers), or altruism (such as environmental motivations) and the responses in this study help support this contention nearly thirty years later. Further evidence of the blurring of motivations is highlighted by some respondents only identifying a commercial objective, others just environmental ones, while a few respondents mentioned both reasons. As Fassin *et al.* (2011) note, there are additional motivations among small business owner-managers other than those simply related to revenue generation. However, while Ateljevic and Doorne (2000) allude to a perceived polarisation of the commercial and non-commercial motives behind small tourism firms' business objectives, the study reported on here highlights the complex and nuanced nature of the motivational continuum displayed by those adopting environmental practices.

Table 1: Reasons for joining the GLTS

Commercial drivers	Environmental drivers
To help promote our green activities of our business (5)	To help the environment/be environmentally friendly (6)
To acquire the green leaf logo on NFTA advertising (3)	To help demonstrate the green credentials of my business (5)
We liked the scheme because it was locally run and that has greater appeal than a national scheme (2)	I am doing some of these environmental things already so why not advertise it
It is a good scheme to be affiliated with	To become more environmentally aware
To be kept updated when new things become available	To promote green living
To get promoted in the New Forest *Where to Stay* guide	To act as an exemplar to the community in fulfilment of our charitable purposes
To find out about other providers in the Forest	To run a holiday accommodation business that fits with the New Forest values
It is cheaper than the Green Tourism Business Scheme	It provides guidance on how to be green
To strengthen our marketing	To encourage recycling
To increase my customer appeal	To help respect nature

Respondents revealed a total of 36 different reasons for joining the GLTS. Of these, nineteen can be categorised as environmentally oriented, with the most commonly cited being to 'help the environment and/or be environmentally friendly.' As one B&B owner stated,

> We have always been concerned about environmental issues and have always practised an environmentally friendly policy in our personal lives. When beginning the Guest House business some 4 years ago, the concern continued through our work and we are keen to encourage guests to adopt similar principles, at least while they stay with us. We feel it's important to set a good example.

This echoes the findings of previous research by Rivera and De Leon (2005), who argue a crucial objective of all business should be to protect the environment. It also recalls the work of Jarvis *et al.* (2010) who noted a key driver for SMEs to go green was to reduce the environmental impact of their business.

Five owner-managers joined the GLTS to 'demonstrate the green credentials' of their business, thus indicating a certain level of pride at running a sustainable business. Their declarations seemed carefully-worded, and their openness runs counter to research which notes some businesses are hesitant to proclaim green credentials, preferring instead to 'mute' such achievements (see Makower, 2009). Promoting the businesses' green activities was the most often mentioned commercial driver, followed by additional marketing benefits such as being able to use the green leaf logo, or to be included in a local guidebook. These improved marketing and PR opportunities findings also confirm previous research (see Harris,

2007; Lynes and Andrachuk, 2008), and the following quote is one example of a marketing oriented objective,

> The right to yet another icon gave us a marketing advantage. Other than that, green doesn't seem much of a factor. I can't say that a business won't find green a marketing advantage. I don't know, but I do know that I haven't seen much … any ... mention of green as a factor in visitors' criteria for praising accommodation on TripAdvisor.

Of particular note is the fact that three respondents joined the GLTS because 'someone from the Council' advised them to become members. This adds additional complexity as this reason lies outside the motivational continuum. In fact, it is rather dispiriting that a few owner-managers of micro-SMEs in the New Forest are failing to acknowledge either the commercial and/or environmental motivations to join the scheme. This is also contrary to the findings of Fassin *et al.* (2011), who argue small business owners increasingly understand the importance of combining CSR activities in their business decisions.

Beliefs relating to GLTS membership

Following the open-ended question related to their reasons for joining the GLTS, respondents were asked their level of agreement regarding membership from a list of beliefs taken from the literature, as shown in Table 2 (see El Dief and Font, 2012; Hartmann and Ibáñez, 2006; Jarvis *et al.*, 2010; Lynes and Andrachuk, 2008; Miller *et al.*, 2010; Rivera and De Leon, 2005; Tzschentke *et al.*, 2008; Weeden, 2005).

Table 2: Beliefs related to membership of the Green Leaf Tourism Scheme (GLTS)

Perception	Agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree	No Opinion
There are clear marketing benefits	29%	66%	0%	5%	0%
GLTS provides my business with a competitive advantage	5%	48%	33%	5%	9%
GLTS helps me build loyalty with my customers	0%	24%	14%	38%	24%
GLTS helps reduce the cost of my water bills	10%	24%	33%	19%	14%
GLTS helps me charge premium prices to environmentally concerned customers	0%	0%	33%	57%	10%
GLTS is simply a public relations marketing exercise	5%	14%	24%	48%	9%
Consumers are increasingly demanding green products and services	19%	52%	10%	14%	5%
Consumers are using such schemes as part of their decision making process	5%	19%	19%	19%	38%

Consumers are more concerned with comfort, quality or price of the product than green schemes such as GLTS	43%	29%	14%	9%	5%
The scheme blurs with other national certification schemes which confuses customers	0%	10%	32%	29%	29%
It is morally right that businesses in the New Forest should become a member of the GLTS	38%	47%	5%	5%	5%
GLTS has made me more aware of environmental impact of running a business	29%	52%	14%	0%	5%
It is important for my business to be part of a scheme such as the GLTS	30%	55%	10%	0%	5%
GLTS helps protect the environment in the New Forest	48%	42%	5%	5%	0%
It helps make the New Forest a sustainable destination	52%	29%	5%	0%	14%

While 95% of respondents generally agreed there were clear marketing benefits from membership of the GLTS, only 53% of them considered this gave their business a competitive advantage, and 38% considered it offered no advantage at all. These conflicting views can be found in many previous studies. For example, research indicates companies join certification schemes because they believe they will receive better promotional opportunities (see Harris, 2007; Jarvis *et al.*, 2010; Tzschentke *et al.*, 2008). Conversely, studies also reveal businesses do not always equate increased promotional prospects with competitive advantage (see Ayuso, 2007; Jones and Weeden, 2011; Weeden, 2005). Twenty-four per cent of those surveyed also thought being a member enabled them to increase customer loyalty, while 52% disagreed, and 24% were undecided. It has been suggested that green brands offer an emotional link for customers thereby increasing loyalty (see Hartmann and Ibáñez, 2006), although it seems the respondents in this survey were unconvinced of this connection.

In terms of resource usage, only 34% of respondents agreed the scheme had helped reduce their water bills, with 52% claiming they had not benefited at all financially. A further 14% were unsure as to whether they had reduced their running costs. This contradicts the work of both Jones and Weeden (2011) and Tzschentke *et al.* (2004), who cite the promise of a reduction in running costs to be a significant factor for membership. Notably, 90% of respondents disagreed membership of the GLTS enabled them to charge higher prices. Miller *et al.* (2010) argue not being able to charge premium prices may be due to certification schemes not being widely known, while other research indicates consumers value quality, price and choice over a company's green credentials (Bramwell and Alletorp, 2001; Weeden, 2005).

Significantly, only 19% of respondents were cynical about the environmental objectives of the GLTS scheme, and the vast majority (75%) did not believe it was simply a marketing and PR exercise. This

suggests they were confident the GLTS scheme was primarily concerned with the promotion of sustainable business practices rather than just being a marketing initiative. Arguably, this is due to the NFDC's emphasis on the environmental objectives when promoting the scheme to the local businesses. Their perceptions about consumer demand were rather mixed. For example, 71% reported consumers were increasingly demanding green products and services, while 72% thought consumers were more interested in the quality, comfort and price of the product than whether they were members of an environmental certification scheme. Such inconsistencies are also evident in the literature, which may be indication of the attitude-behaviour gap (see Miller *et al.*, 2010; Weeden, 2008), whereby consumers say they are interested but in fact are more concerned with price and quality than environmental issues (see also Font and Epler Wood, 2007). Significantly, while the literature indicates consumer confusion over the number and range of certification schemes available (Font, 2002; Haaland and Aas, 2010; Miller *et al.*, 2010), 61% of respondents did not think the GLTS blurred with other national schemes, thus causing confusion, and 29% of respondents were unsure.

Respondents held strong beliefs in relation to their perceptions of the environmental imperatives of GLTS membership. For example, 85% believed it was morally right that businesses in the New Forest should join the GLTS and it was important for their business to be a member. This finding echoes the work of Tzschentke *et al.* (2004) who found a prime motivation for SME hotels to 'go green' were the ethical beliefs of the owner-managers. However they also acknowledged the complexity of ethical motivations, echoing the work of Haines *et al.* (2008) who recognised the varying level of small business owners' moral commitment to protecting the environment.

Looking again at Table 2, 81% thought joining the scheme had increased their personal awareness of the environmental impacts of their business. This finding refutes the work of Jarvis and Pulido Ortega (2010), Lawrence *et al.* (2006), and Parker *et al.* (2009), who argued SMEs did not believe their businesses negatively impacted the environment. Ninety-one per cent of respondents said the scheme enabled them to help protect the environment, and 81% believed it made the New Forest a sustainable destination. Such findings support research by Russillo *et al.* (2008) who noted an increased awareness of environmental impact as a result of certification membership, while Tzschentke *et al.* (2004; 2008), and Haaland and Aas (2010) both reveal the importance of protecting the environment. Arguably, SMEs operating within a national park like the New Forest may be more inclined to actively protect the environment. This may be due to a lifestyle choice associated with operating a micro-SME in a picturesque location (see Ateljevic and Doorne, 2000; Thomas *et al.*, 2011). However, the extent to which this is due to their prioritising environmental values or profit-oriented motivations, is unclear especially as their businesses rely on the New Forest's natural beauty to attract tourists to the area. Whilst not the principal aim of this study, exploring how lifestyle intersects with commercial and environmental motivations would likely yield a more nuanced understanding of these complexities.

The findings presented in Table 2 appear to show respondents hold strong environmental motivations, potentially stemming from the GLTS' apparent emphasis on sustainability. However, the unprompted responses presented in Table 1 present a more accurate picture of their reasons for joining the GLTS, which are more equally split between these and profit-driven motivations. In other words, this study shows pro-environmental behaviour is driven by both altruism and enlightened self-interest.

Extent to which membership of the GLTS increased environmental awareness

Russillo *et al.* (2008) highlight how important certification schemes can be in facilitating business owners' environmental awareness. While one belief statement in Table 2 explored the increase in members' environmental knowledge, it was deemed useful to further probe this point and so respondents were asked their views on whether membership of the GLTS had raised their awareness of the environmental impact of their business. Of the twenty-three respondents, fourteen indicated they were more aware, seven stated they were not, while one respondent was unsure. The following quotes illustrate how two respondents believed their knowledge had grown as a result of membership,

> We are a six-bedroom guesthouse and produce a huge amount of waste and use a tremendous amount of fuel energy …. the GLTS has benefited us because it has helped us to fine tune our operation in favour of the environment … and we now also use a large volume of local produce (Owner, B&B).

> Answering the criteria questions alerts one to additional ways in which one can improve sustainability (Owner, hotel)

However, several respondents did not believe the scheme had added to their understanding. As one owner of a B&B stated,

> Not at all, I use my own initiative.

A further comment came from the owner of a self-catering unit, who asserted,

> Not much, but I am keen to learn more if information was sent out.

A different respondent was unsure as to whether their knowledge had increased but believed they had,

> … learnt some round the edges, some good training, but we doubt we have changed much (Owner, self-catering unit)

The last three quotes may indicate respondents' scepticism about the effectiveness of the scheme to increase their understanding of sustainable operating practices. As noted earlier, micro-SMEs have limited time, due to the nature of their business operations, to pro-actively search for green information. Conversely, it might be the case these respondents already possessed high levels of eco-literacy (see Tilley, 2000) before becoming members.

However, the scheme appeared to have a positive wider influence, with one attraction manager stating,

> … by implementing ideas such as placing stickers near light switches to remind staff to turn off lights and photocopying onto recycled paper, all staff have increased awareness of the need to be responsible and green.

With regard to the GLTS objective of increasing knowledge and understanding of environmental protection, the survey suggests this is not fully achieved. This view is further supported by one self-catering owner who was keen to learn more about sustainability and wanted the NFDC to be more pro-active in distributing relevant information.

Experiences of GLTS membership

When prompted with an open-response question, their experiences were in general fairly positive. For example, one self-catering owner asserted,

> Not only does it help to engender green practices but it also gives opportunities for members to meet other like minded proprietors in a relaxed environment where bonds can be made which helps foster a stronger green community spirit.

While this quote nicely encapsulates what one hopes a certification scheme would achieve, the impact of engendering green practices and community spirit was undermined by different insights from other members. For example, three respondents stressed more focused communication was needed to improve the efficacy of the scheme, and recommended the GLTS use newsletters to update members with regard to new environmental initiatives. This is particularly important for those owner-managers constrained by time. A different respondent, the manager of a charitable trust, suggested an annual update would be helpful, because she thought the scheme had,

> … fallen off the edge of our thinking to the extent that I wasn't sure whether we were still members.

However, the scheme also attracted a certain level of criticism. For example, one self-catering owner thought it was simplistic,

> It does not take into consideration ground heat pumps, solar panels for hot water of solar photovoltaic panels. It is currently fairly easy to be a member – the areas where everyone complies should be removed and new ones put in – raise the barrier!

As Thomas *et al.* (2011) identify, not all micro-SMEs are the same - they are in fact heterogeneous and their reflected experiences of the scheme likely impacted by a variety of internal and external factors.

Finally, one B&B owner offered a candid perspective, arguing that whilst the GLTS had merit, the issue of sustainability went beyond the specific environmental needs of the New Forest. He argued public access to the National Park worked counter to the objectives of the scheme,

> Yes, the Forest itself might be sustainable without cars, but the business that provide revenue and bringing jobs and tourists will not be sustainable without cars or a civilised public transport system…if you cannot produce something creative, entirely visible, so that our visitors can reach these famed sites, you'd best abandon green policies and encourage them to bring cars. Then at least tourists could reach these sites and contribute to our local economy, which would in turn sustain the Forest as a tourist destination.

This last quote illustrates the complexity of encouraging businesses to adopt environmental practices via the use of local certification schemes. Responsibility for protecting the environment clearly rests with a

range of stakeholders at local, national and international levels. Whilst significant, micro-SMEs are but one part of the process towards sustainable tourism planning in the U.K.

Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter has examined the extent to which New Forest micro-SME owner-managers are driven by commercial and/or environmental motives. The results show pro-environmental behaviour is driven by both altruism and enlightened self-interest. They also highlight the complex and nuanced nature of the motivational continuum displayed by those adopting environmental practices. The study also sought to determine whether membership of certification schemes increases environmental awareness. The findings indicate the majority had gained more understanding, although some respondents felt the GLTS objective of increasing knowledge and understanding of environmental protection was not fully achieved. As to their experiences of membership, their views were generally positive although several respondents provided valid recommendations as to how to improve the efficacy of the scheme. Specifically, these centred on the need for more effective communication strategies that would motivate more owner-managers to embed environmental practices in their business operations. Finally, the study attempted to determine whether ethical beliefs underpin motivations for joining a certification scheme; however, this has been difficult to gauge, largely due to the positivistic nature of the research methods employed.

The study has revealed opportunities for future research. Given the limitations of the quantitative methods used, in-depth interviews with owner-managers of micro-SMEs might yield a better understanding of the complex nature of commercial and environmental motivations and how these support their approach to sustainable business practices. Further, the interviews could focus on how lifestyle choice might intersect with corporate decisions, and explore in more detail the balance between ethical values and the commercial demands associated with operating a successful micro-SME in the tourism and hospitality sector. These suggestions for future research can be conducted in the New Forest but also applied to certification schemes in other parts of the U.K.

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