



Journal of Business and Social Science Review
Issue: Vol. 1; No.12; December 2020 pp.54-63
ISSN 2690-0866(Print) 2690-0874 (Online)
Website: www.jbssrnet.com
E-mail: editor@jbssrnet.com
Doi: 10.48150/jbssr.v1no12.2020.a6

Regeneration of the Rural Economy in Northern Ireland through the Development of Agri-Tourism Products

Dr Samantha Rickenstow
Retired Senior Academic
University of Southern Donegal

ABSTRACT

The paper examines the state of agriculture and tourism in Northern Ireland and considers agri-tourism as a strategy for enhancing the rural economy. A few simple examples of developments are described to demonstrate the diversity of approach which currently exists.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Ireland's two outstanding natural resources are, the people and the land. The people are warm hearted, welcoming and hard working; the land is rugged, beautiful and mostly fertile. Both resources are to a great extent unspoilt by economic exploitation. The land and the people give Ireland its two natural industries, tourism and agriculture.

TOURISM IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Ireland saw the 1960's as the pinnacle of its post war tourism prosperity. The great natural beauty of Ireland and the great natural hospitality of the Irish were key factors in helping Ireland to be an attractive tourist destination for primarily the British and secondarily the European and International holidaymaker. The onset of the current phase of political unrest (the "Troubles") in Northern Ireland in the late 1960's brought about a devastating reduction in the numbers of holidaymakers to Ireland, Northern Ireland in particular.

The problems of Northern Ireland have a long history. The circumstances have a long evolution over a number of centuries, much of the truth or reality is shrouded in the folklore of tribalism. Consequently the current situation is extremely complex and defies simple explanation. Few, if any, political analysts are capable of explaining the Troubles. Also it is difficult to attempt to explain the Troubles without appearing excessively arrogant or to take on one or other political viewpoint. Consequently the authors, (who could be perceived as coming from two sides of this complex situation), are neither prepared to give an over-simplistic and potentially meaningless statement nor are they interested in becoming enmeshed in such a debate within this article.

The present political climate (Circa January 1994) which has brought about a strong accord between the British and Irish Governments is a somewhat propitious indicator of the enthusiasm for peace which is coming from all but a few political and terrorist groupings. The authors are representative of the large majority of people in Northern Ireland who have and continue to live and work harmoniously together.

Hoteliers who catered predominantly for holidaymakers suffered a reduction of up to 99% of their total business between 1968 and 1972. The market which was most severely affected by the "Troubles" was that of the casual holidaymaker. Because of their need to visit or their better knowledge regarding the true levels of risk to the individual, the business and VFR visitors continued to visit, albeit at a greatly reduced level. At about the same time Europe was experiencing the package holiday boom which brought about a significant shift in mass tourism from the cold water resorts in the north of Europe to the warm water resorts surrounding the Mediterranean.¹

The history of the "Troubles" and their impact on tourism in Ireland from 1968 onwards is well documented. Research has established that though some of the diminution in tourists to Ireland would have come about because of changes in European and World tourist trends the most significant factor in deterring the tourist has been the "Troubles".

Thomas Reid in his postgraduate dissertation was able to clearly link changes in tourist flows to Northern Ireland with terrorist activity levels. This dissertation examined tourism flows into Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and other North European cold water resort areas over the period 1969-1989. During this period 14.2 million tourists visited NI, however on the basis of this analysis he was able to demonstrate that without terrorist activity Northern Ireland could realistically have experienced a further 20-27 million visitors.²

The real level of risk to the individual in Northern Ireland is small, especially so for the visitor, as most terrorist violence is closely directed towards target groups or individuals. Random crimes of violence against the person are relatively few in Northern Ireland, most major cities in Europe and America are significantly more dangerous places for the casual visitor.

The 1988 *International Victimisation Survey* which was carried out in fourteen countries identified the proportion of the population who had been victims of theft, burglary, robbery or assault. The results shown in Chart 1 indicate that the jaggregate victimisation rate is much less in Northern Ireland than in many other major countries. Figure 1 shows a direct comparison between the United States of America and Northern Ireland, for specific crimes of violence. Tourists have been branded as *legitimate* targets by a number of terrorist organisations. Recent outrages in Egypt demonstrate a chilling example of US tourists being targeted in order to further the political aims of the Islamic fundamentalist Entifada. No North American tourist has experienced any crime against the person during the entire period of the recent troubles (Since 1969). By way of comparison there are 130 tourist muggings in Miami per month compared to single figures, if any, in Northern Ireland per year.

However due to the "newsworthiness" of the "*Troubles*", Northern Ireland is an attractive topic for the world media. Consequently a sectarian murder in Belfast may receive international coverage whilst a random tourist mugging and murder in Glasgow or Paris will only attract local press coverage.

AGRICULTURE IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Much of the land in Northern Ireland is of poor or marginal quality and is referred to as Less Favoured Areas (LFA). The LFA are populated with mainly small units which make up the majority of Northern Ireland's farm holdings.

In the past few years there has been a shift in the employment pattern of workers from full time to part time.³ This may indicate that there is an increase in the number of farms which are less able to support their previous employee base or that many small farmers are seeking alternative full time jobs to supplement their farm income. (A century ago 40 acres was capable of supporting a family of up to 10 people.)

Agriculture within Northern Ireland has experienced a number of changes in recent years due to both external and internal factors. Table 1 shows the decline in small holdings, which are predominant in Northern Ireland over recent years.

Table 1: The number of farm by business size

Business Size	1987	%	1988	%	1991	%
Very Small	18389	100	17412	95	16128	88
Small	9686	100	9709	100	9896	102
Medium	2756	100	2774	101	2925	106
Large	372	100	394	106	414	111
TOTAL	31203	100	30289	97	29363	94

Source: Statistical Review of N I Agriculture 1991 (1992, DANI)

In the period 1987 to 1991 there has been a 7.8% decline in the number of full-time workers. However there was an increase in male part-time workers during this period. A survey of Farm Incomes in the United Kingdom revealed that on average the hours worked per week on NI farms were higher than those for the rest of the United Kingdom. The average for Northern Ireland was 54 hours per week while in England this was 48 hours per week. The hours worked off-farm by farm owners were also higher; 7 hours per week in NI compared to 4 hours in England. (Statistical Review of N I Agriculture 1991. 1992, DANI.)

This data gives an indication of the smaller average farm size in NI and reflects the lower economies of scale. Again this is evidenced by the fact that 30% of Northern Ireland farmers have some income from off-farm employment whereas in England in equivalent figure is 16%.

Northern Ireland has also to contend with the fact that much of the agricultural land is of poor or marginal quality otherwise known as Less Favoured Areas (LFA). 71% of farms (contributing 61% of the Gross Margin) include some LFA with 26% of the population living within this designated area.

Table 3: The distribution of LFA amongst farm size

Size of Farm	Very Small	Small	Medium	Large
LFA %	76	72	53	43

Source: LFA Statistical Review (S.A.E., Magee, 1990)

These points highlight the problem of a poor farm structure and an inherent inadequacy of income which in turn, has led to an increase in part-time farming.

Agriculture has had to face up to many enforced changes. For the United Kingdom as a whole, farming income has fallen from over £2.2 billion in 1984 to just under £1.3 billion in 1990. In concert with this the amount of land in use for agricultural purposes has also fallen from over 46.4 million acres in 1984 to 45.7 million acres in 1990. (Annual Abstract of Statistics, 1992.)

It is likely that another 25% of the agricultural land will be taken out of production over the next 25 years.

The agricultural problems are clearly summarised by a 1992 Brussels report

"In 1992 EC farmers increased production by 2.9% in volume, earnings fell by 3.5% despite a 10.4% rise in subsidies".³

The EC's Agricultural Commissioner, Rene Steicher considers that this is obvious because with conditions of market saturation, an increase in production can only depress prices and farm incomes. It is then hoped by the European Community that the reforms passed on June 3 1993 will reduce the risk of over production.⁴

It is likely that in real terms the effect on individual farmers within Northern Ireland will be to their disadvantage. The advent of the Common Market or European Community has and will increasingly have a negative impact on the viability of the small or marginal farm unit. This problem is recognised by the Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland (DANI) who believe that the matter is not helped by agriculture's greater exposure to market forces and the restructuring of Europe's Common Agriculture Policy (CAP).⁵

THE CHANGING FACE OF TOURISM

In Europe there have been three main phases to the evolution of tourism. The first was the railway phase, when seaside resorts and spas from Cannes to Brighton grew in parallel with the railways to cope with the new industrial masses of the nineteenth century. The Northern Irish equivalent being Bangor, Newcastle (Co Down) and Portrush. This first phase was coupled with the growth of sea carriers to Ireland. The second phase was the mass package era. With this came the diaspora to sun, sand, sea and sangria through mass marketing of airline and hotel packages tours. Coastal areas in Spain, Greece, Turkey and Italy have been altered beyond recognition over the last twenty five years of uncontrolled development. The final stage shows the evolution of cultural tourism. The increasingly sophisticated tourist is becoming bored with concrete strips and sand and wary of the noon day sun. Healthy, active, relaxing and culturally valid experiences are more in demand by busy people who want to escape their crowded and frenetic work life. According to Martin & Mason "It is considered that in the 1990s all types of tourists, both young and old, will be looking for a tourist destination and tourist packages that will offer more than just a chance to enjoy the weather, the surroundings, the view and the company. Activities, experiences, participation and learning will all be key elements in the future of the tourist product."⁶

An increase in European and general world wealth, an increase in discretionary income, more double income households, longer paid leave and earlier retirement have all helped to contribute to the overall growth in the tourism industry.

In relation to tourism, Bernard Lane⁷ believes there is a strong correlation between levels of income and education, and the propensity to seek outdoor rural recreation. It also appears that these income and education levels will grow in the future.

The above factors have led to an increase in the number and duration of holidays. However, this increase in the length of holiday entitlement has led to holidays becoming shorter and more split up. This has resulted in the trend for people to take a number of holidays each year with greater diversity and an increase in leisure time having led to demands for sporting or countryside activities and relaxation. Also there have always been people who have had an aversion for *foreigners, foreign food and too much sun*. Package holidays to the sun have been on the decrease in recent years, Bramwell suggests⁸

"Such discerning tourists want to find something different and learn about the character of a place, its people and traditions.... they can do this in destination areas where tourism draws on and reflects the distinctive local sense of place."

Also, due to economic, social, cultural, demographic and environmental changes more holiday makers appear to be increasingly dissatisfied with the pure sun holiday. Examples of these changes include, an ageing population, more young adults with no children, a general increase in disposable incomes*. An increase in paid holidays and leisure time has also had an effect. For example between 1980 and 1990 leisure spending went up by 36%. These factors along with an increase in environmental awareness and the desire for conservation and preservation of rural societies can all contribute to a demand for forms of holiday other than the lazy, inactive, sun based vacation. It would appear that the *greening* of the tourist is likely to have a significant impact on future tourist patterns. Bernard Lane believes that there is a strong correlation between levels of income and education, and the propensity to seek outdoor rural recreation.¹⁰ These groups are expected to grow in the future as are the members of society that tend to determine the future fashion amongst the whole population.

COMBINED PROBLEMS OF AGRICULTURE AND TOURISM.

Within Northern Ireland's declining agricultural industry, where farm incomes and the labour force are both diminishing (in real terms), small farms are becoming less viable and the majority of holdings are situated on less favoured areas. Such a situation is conducive to generating alternative activity or diversification to ensure viability. These problems being experienced by the marginal farmer coupled with the negative attraction of Northern Ireland to the casual vacationer has led a number of government and private agencies and private individuals to consider that rural or agri-tourism could be a viable strategy for attracting and servicing the new generation of tourist whilst at the same time improving the economic health in the less favoured, rural areas of the province.

RURAL / AGRI-TOURISM

The above factors have all contributed to the desire to examine the potential of rural tourism in Northern Ireland as a means of sustaining viable rural communities yet meeting the desires of the new breed of tourist.

DEFINITION OF RURAL / AGRI-TOURISM

Gilbert defines rural tourism development as

*"The planned use of resource for a countryside area which will lead to an increase in the welfare of the general environment, the community and the visitor."*¹¹

Gilbert & Tung define Rural Tourism as

*"a trip to, or overnight stay, in a countryside area which is either agricultural or natural and has a low density of population".*¹²

The Wales Tourist Board defines Agri-tourism as

*"working farms, irrespective of type or size, where the primary activity is agriculture and where tourism is a supplementary activity. Synonymous with this is good value, friendly hospitality and a foundation for outdoor activities such as fishing, sailing, pony trekking and riding, game shooting, farm trails and country walks."*¹³

An overview of rural tourism in Europe

It must be borne in mind that in Northern Ireland, rural tourism is a relatively new concept compared to many other European countries.

For example, in 1954 the French Ministry of Agriculture introduced the Gites RurauxPrivés to provide financial aid to farmers to utilise redundant farmhouses and buildings as accommodation for holiday makers. The government later established a coordinator to ensure that advice and information were more freely available. The coordinator also helped in the provision of publicity material, a central booking service and a grading system. (To establish, maintain and improve standards.)

Since the 1960s Italy's government has also helped with finance, tax, legislation, publicity and co-ordination to suit each areas needs.

In the Republic of Ireland the concept of rural tourism has been established for over 25 years.

"Initially it was borne from the acute shortage of accommodation experienced during the boom years of Irish tourism in the early 1960s. Farmhouses took in guests, actively encouraged by Bord Failte".¹⁴

THE APPLICATION OF THE CONCEPT IN NORTHERN IRELAND

As long ago as 1947 the Planning and Advisory Board of the Ulster Tourist Development Association stated that

"Ulster is probably as richly endowed by nature as any other area of comparable size in the world. Contained within a relatively small compass, its mountains and moorlands, lakes and rivers, cliffs and strands provide unique attractions and opportunities for enjoyment not only for those whose homes are in the province, but many thousands who yearly visit our shores, many of them in order to find a restfulness and unspoiled charm which are becoming increasingly difficult to discover anywhere."

Northern Ireland's relatively unspoilt natural environment has been and is still one of its greatest assets. Forty seven years on little has changed and the Tourist Board still sees the province's unique cultural heritage and environment as helping to provide major opportunities for attracting the discerning traveller.

World trends are signalling that there is a golden opportunity for Northern Ireland to exploit its resources and attract those travellers who have become disillusioned elsewhere.

Ulster's position on the periphery of Europe and its negative attraction to the casual visitor can now be seen as advantageous. Because of these two factors Northern Ireland has been protected from the ravages of uncontrolled mass tourism and the blight of untrammelled and inappropriate commercial development. Ulster is well placed to take advantage of this trend away from sun based holidays and the move towards activity based and specialist holidays.

Some evidence has already been displayed by the number of visitors stating 'holiday' as their main reason for visiting Northern Ireland. In a turnaround from previous trends these visitors have more than doubled in the last three years and now represent one in five of all visitors compared to one in ten in 1988.¹⁵

NITB predict that there will be a significant increase in holidaymakers sampling the famous hospitality of Ulster.¹⁶ This is based on statistics which show from 1972 until 1992 the number of tourists from Canada and the United States increased from 20,000 to 61,000 while those from Europe increased from 13,000 to 86,000.

Mr Lavery, NITB Marketing Director believes that this growth is largely due to the increasing sophistication of the international market. This again emphasises the move to rewarding, exciting and activity based rural holidays.

As part of their strategy for the future the NITB development priorities include the creation of visitor activity facilities in Fermanagh, South Down, the Glens of Antrim and the Causeway Coast and to help farms to provide self catering and farmhouse accommodation.¹⁷ Also the Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland believes that radical thinking and a fresh new approach is required to utilize the resources available to their full potential. DANI are taking the problems relating to declining farm income, oversupply and CAP seriously. They aim to help farmers realize that there are opportunities in the countryside outside of the constraints of conventional farming. This will not only help maintain rural populations, but may also nurture a more vibrant community spirit in these disadvantaged areas.¹⁸

GRANT AID

In order for some forms of rural tourism, such as agri-tourism to develop and expand to realise its full potential some forms of assistance are usually needed. There is a highly confusing plethora of differing grants available to the potential developer, from a number of interested agencies. In relation to grants, Northern Ireland and the Republic have similarities. The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) offer a capital fund and marketing support scheme; the International Fund for Ireland (IFI) gives aid to border counties and includes the Operational Programme for Rural Development (OPRD) and the Agri-Tourism Scheme. The International Fund for Ireland assists innovative projects which fall outside existing Government and EC support schemes.

As similar funding opportunities are available to both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland this would indicate that the whole of Ireland can work together in relation to rural tourism development. For example the Allied Irish Bank agri-tourism award scheme is open to the whole of Ireland.

In the North of Ireland the Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland DANI and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board NITB provide assistance for the development of agri-tourism. However NITB plays a key role in maintaining standards, coordinating and administering grant aid from the EEC and the IFI.

ADVICE

Grant aid is only available for projects that have been carefully researched and have come up with workable business plan. Such research and planning requires skill and expertise which is not normally available on a small farm. Consequently the relevant agencies and grant bodies also give advice or provide funding to pay for professional advice.

Also there are a number of organisations who, although they can not provide grants, do offer valuable advice and help to develop ideas which can fill potential gaps in the market. For example the Enterprising Northern Ireland Campaign have published a series of *Business Ideas* pamphlets in relation to such areas as tourism and alternative farm enterprises.

Again the range of advice and advisors is somewhat confusing to the uninitiated.

CURRENT PROVISION FOR AGRI-TOURISM

Overall, there are around 700 farmers involved in tourism and recreation in Northern Ireland of which half are believed to provide accommodation.

One noticeable factor that was observed was that diversification tended to be concentrated outside of the LFA's (Less favoured areas). For some reason those most in need of diversification into alternative enterprises are not developing them.¹⁹ However, in relation to the move to rural tourism, Northern Ireland's LFA has much to offer. For example, it is often farms in areas which are most attractive to tourists, that are within LFA and require supplementary income who can benefit from tourists most. (The Mourne and the Glens of Antrim.)

Margaret Bingham from DANI has recognised the importance of this growing sector. Considering the 400 farm and country houses offering Bed, Breakfast and Evening Meal, they generate a gross income of £3m for the NI economy. These types of enterprises also have the advantage of using family labour.

The following are a few examples of recent developments in Northern Ireland.

OPEN FARM AND FARMHOUSE ACCOMMODATION

CASE 1. TULLYHONA FARM GUEST HOUSE. An individual approach.

Tullyhona is situated approximately seven miles south-west of Enniskillen. Tullyhona is owned and managed by Mrs Rosemary Armstrong. The guesthouse is a good base for those visiting Donegal, Tyrone and Fermanagh and is also located near many tourist attractions such as National Trust properties, excellent boating and motor cruising and fishing. The guesthouse is in the near vicinity of both Marble Arch Caves and the National Trust property of Florencecourt.

Like much of the agricultural industry the Armstrong's beef and sheep farm, even though it was relatively large, suffered from a declining income. Mrs Armstrong saw the need to find some other source of income. The interview revealed that if she had not successfully branched into the farm guesthouse business she would have had to branch into some form of catering to help supplement their income. The accommodation has expanded from two to seven bedrooms with four at present being ensuite.

It must be highlighted here that the Armstrong's did not receive any grants from tourism related schemes but just an simple farm development grant to enable them to extend the farmhouse. They also did not receive aid from the IFI because they were located outside the area in which the grants were applicable.

The venture has proven to be successful. The working farm offers an extensive range of attractions and facilities which include young farm animals. These are usually located in the front paddock and appeal especially to urban families. Cows calving often have audiences and lambing tours are popular. A baby sitting service, play house and play area are also provided and help to attract those families with young children.

In relation to marketing, Mrs Armstrong's philosophy is for market led development. She believes that guests expect five star treatment and not just the humble country bed and breakfast. She emphasises the importance of having a menu that will satisfy a wide variety of tastes.

GOLF BASED TOURISM

Golf is recognised by the NITB as having great tourist potential. In Northern Ireland the ratio of golfers to courses is 455:1 whereas in America the ratio is 1736:1 and 4515:1 in Japan (see table 8). For example, in Japan membership can cost over \$750,000 or \$1,500 for a round of golf.²⁰ It would be less expensive for Japanese golfers to fly to Ireland, stay for one week and play golf at some of the worlds best courses. Japanese golf package holiday have been forecast to increase substantially in the next few years.

Table 8: The number of golfers per course selected countries.

Country	Golfers : Courses
United States of America	1736:1
Japan	4515:1
Great Britain	455:1
Ireland (Republic)	500:1
Northern Ireland	455:1

Source: Tourism Potential of Golf in NI (Research Dept (NITB 1990)

Northern Ireland should realise this untapped potential. However, the NITB's Research Department concluded that Northern Irish golf clubs, although they have the golfing facilities and infrastructure necessary to offer attractive, competitive golf packages abroad, are not interested as they are all private clubs which are not profit motivated and are currently self sufficient.

To combat this the NITB has been supporting the development of a small number of quality courses which will be open to all, including the tourist.

CASE 2. THE ASHFIELD GOLF COURSE. Large scale, private development.

James and Elizabeth Quinn of Cullyhanna, South Armagh, were farmers in a LFA who found that their income was dwindling and costs were continually rising. As South Armagh experiences high unemployment there are few opportunities for alternative income to the farm through other part-time employment. Mr Quinn was aware of unsatisfied market opportunities for golfing. There were no nearby courses and the closest ones had full membership.

The Quinns established an eighty acre golf course named Ashfield on poor quality farmland. Developing the course involved considerable financial commitment but the five year projection was promising. Grant aid was obtained from the Agricultural Development Centre at Newry through the Farm Diversification Scheme; from LEDU (Local Economic Development Unit); and from Newry and Mourne District Council.

The course, which opened in September 1990, had a professional designer and required such things as 6,000 trees and sand from Lough Neagh. The Quinns had the natural advantage that their LFA land had natural contours which were suited to golf course architecture. Thus a previous disadvantage to farming was turned around into an advantage for tourism.

Now there is also a club house, a driving range and a restaurant accommodating up to eighty people. So far, membership has reached 200 with 40% of them coming from the Republic.

The Quinns marketing was led by the general interest of golfers. In an international context, they cooperated with a local hotel to market jointly abroad. Promotion has been helped by extensive media coverage, eg.ITN, London Times, New York Times, Tokyo Times, again realising and hopefully reaching the untapped market identified by the NITB's Golf Report.

COMMUNITY COOPERATIVES

CASE 3. SOUTH ARMAGH. A Cooperative Venture.

South Armagh is a predominately rural area which has many of the problems that are so often associated with a declining rural area. As South Armagh is a border area the local people have to deal with the problem of the "Troubles". This is not helped by the negative media attention it receives.

ROSA, Regeneration Of South Armagh was formally launched in May 1990. The group is a voluntary cooperative whose members felt that a co-ordinated approach to economic regeneration was a realistic aim for an area that had remained relatively passive for a number of years. Members of the group came from SAFE, South Armagh Farming Enterprises the newly formed Rural Development Council, WORD Women on Rural Development, Community Associations and Community Enterprises. The group recognised the agricultural problems of the area but believed that farm diversification could help. They aimed to offer help and advice as well as giving support to speed up negotiations with relevant grant aiding bodies.

Tourism was highlighted as one area that had been under-developed and the group believed that agri-tourism could capitalize on the significance of the area's designation as an AONB, (Area of Natural Beauty).

The ROSA group aimed to co-operate with other agencies in advising and implementing a tourism strategy of the area. Some of the proposed targets centre around developing viable farm enterprises through farm holidays and establishing a central marketing system.

ROSA created tourist development plans which set out a variety of targets. For example,

- Tourist amenities and services necessary to make South Armagh a viable tourist area.
- A network of heritage and cultural activities needs to be promoted for the communities' benefit, to interest the visitor and to help develop cultural and activity holidays.
- Appropriate training, marketing and infrastructure provision.

Their final statement in the plan seems to capture their cause:

"We in South Armagh are fortunate to enjoy a most picturesque and relatively unspoilt environment. However, short sightedness in planning and farming methods can quickly destroy this strength we intend to actively promote.... a stronger sense of South Armagh as an environment to be cherished by all. (ROSA, 1990)."

CASE 4. COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS. Cross Border Cooperative.

In August 1989, Community Connections, the Rural Action Project of West Fermanagh and the Integrated Rural Development in the Manorbhamilton District came together, with the help of the IFI to establish a regional management committee. Formerly called the Cross-Border Community Development Programme and covering the areas of West Cavan, North Leitrim and West Fermanagh the group plan to undertake a programme of economic and community development. It was intended that this would lead to a strong, active, confident community, increase the choices and opportunities for people socially and economically; promote integrated rural development; influence Government policies and promote area revitalisation and regional identity.

This organisation demonstrates that rural tourism should be developed in a sustainable way with a *bottom up* approach (that is all round community involvement).

Their emphasis on community, tourism and agricultural inter-connections and development are outlined below.

The four main objectives are:

- i) the development and support of local communities development groups with the help of professional support, information, training, advice and networking.
- ii) the development of farm diversification as a means of increasing and retaining on-farm population.
- iii) the development of a tourism strategy with local involvement.
- iv) the development of a strategy to stimulate private/Community enterprise.

In other words the exploration and identification of economically viable projects based on the areas resources. (Community Connections Development Programme).

RECOMMENDATIONS

DANI believes that with the trend away from the traditional sun based activities and facilities, Northern Ireland can offer an unrivalled blend of scenery, activities and facilities to the tourist. Our image is still that of a predominately rural area and there are opportunities for farms to capitalise on that image.

To do so the following considerations should be made:-

MARKET RESEARCH

Market research is necessary to identify the factors which influence and motivate people to take rural holidays, who they are and where they come from.

MARKETING AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

The marketing aspect is a major problem that needs to be addressed. One outstanding difference that tourism has over other products is that in terms of product acceptance, the product must be brought to the market before the market will move to the product. It can take between two to four years (or more) before a carefully targeted consumer decides to use the packages product. Therefore, it is essential that promotion must portray the product in a viable form.

To counteract the detrimental effect that the "*Troubles*" has had on tourism considerable effort must be expended to counteract the false media image which has evolved since 1969 and promote the truth about Northern Ireland as a safe holiday destination. Effort must be extended to give people valid reasons for visiting the province. Experience has already shown that those groups having a specific interest are less deterred than the casual holidaymaker. This must be built upon.

There are many travel trade workshops organised worldwide. Those involved in rural tourism development should take greater advantage of these.

PRODUCT AND PACKAGE DEVELOPMENT

For Northern Ireland to develop, manage and market its rural tourism effectively, efficiently and successfully any tourism venture must meet a clearly defined market need, be properly researched; be of sufficient quality yet maintaining value for money in order to attract the potential tourist.

Generally, the Northern Ireland tourism product is poorly integrated and packaged. Currently many of the component parts of the package which the tourist desires are fragmented under different ownership without cooperative linking and promotion. Future strategies should concentrate on repackaging, re-marketing and niche marketing for specialist forms of holidays.

Hopefully, this will lead to complete packages being melded together which will provide food, beverage and accommodation as well as somewhere to learn, relax, recreate and be entertained. This should eventually lead to product branding that will enable the potential customer to identify more easily with the product on offer.

PUBLIC SECTOR INVOLVEMENT

Public sector involvement which draws on the expertise knowledge and training of government funded employees should be encouraged. Although the EC's CAP reforms appear to be detrimental, the Community is paying more attention to rural tourism as a means of sustaining the rural economy and a vibrant community.

All of this needs to be backed up by the establishment of a supporting framework similar to the Federation Nationale de Gites Rureaux de France. In Northern Ireland this could be run by an agency that has representatives from such bodies as NITB, planners, local business community and local residents. As such, these co-operatives will take time and money to develop but they can greatly enhance the chances of reaching the niche market and they give clout when approaching statutory and grant awarding bodies. It is interesting to note that within the last few weeks (April 1993) the NITB has incorporated a private limited company to develop the very concept of Gites in Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland has the resources and the unrealised potential for establishing itself on the tourist map as a rural area that will satisfy the needs of the new emerging tourist.

CONCLUSION

The small number of cases show that there is a wide variety of tactics which may be used to develop the facilities and the infrastructure for an agri-tourism product. National policy and grant making bodies, local cooperatives, cross border groups and private developers, both small and large, all have a valid role to play in creating sustainable tourism. For the small developer the provision of a spare bedroom in a large farmhouse or a few additional rooms with bath are low cost, low risk developments which can be incrementally added to in response to increased business patterns. However greater help from government agencies is required in interpreting the highly confusing range of grants which are available.

This coupled with a specialist feasibility service, sensitive to the lack of catering business experience in the farming community would be of considerable help in further developing agri-tourism in this beautiful land.

Agri-Tourism in NI is a form of tourism which provides employment where it is needed and gives opportunities to large and small investors. Agri-Tourism does not bring about dramatic changes in the lifestyle or the culture of the country and it does not threaten or damage the environment: these are the very things which attract the agri-tourist in the first instance.

Rural or agri-tourism does appear to be a logical strategy for exploiting the natural resources that we have in Northern Ireland. Current trends in consumer expectations appear to be for travel and tourism to be *real* and to provide rewarding and enriching experiences through exposure to the environment, the culture and the people of the country. These trends provide Northern Ireland with a golden marketing opportunity for contributing towards the economic health of the community.

After all giving hospitality is the Irish way, it comes naturally from our most important natural resource and for us in NI it does not require customer sensitivity training.

REFERENCES

- 1 Reid,T.The Impact of the Troubles on Overseas Arrivals in Northern Ireland 1969-1989. PGD Dissertation, University of Ulster, 1992.
- 2 Reid,T. Ibid.
- 3 Belfast Telegraph, 14 May 1993.
- 4 Belfast Telegraph, 14 June 1993.
- 5 Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland. Annual Report, 1990-91. DANI, 1991.
- 6 Martin,W,H, &Mason,S. Tourism Management. June 1987.
- 7 Lane,B.The Future for Rural Tourism: Market Profile Insights. The Tourism Marketing Intelligence Service, English Tourist Board. 1989.
- 8 Bramwell,B. Green Tourism in the Countryside. Tourism Management. 1990.
- 9 Jordans. British Leisure Industry, Leisure Time, X-XIII, 1992.
Annual Abstract of Statistics. Central Statistical Office, Her Majesty's Stationery Office. 1992
- 10 Lane,B. Ibid.
- 11 Gilbert,D,C. Rural Tourism and Marketing. Tourism Management. 1989.
- 12 Gilbert,D,C, &Tung,L. Public Organisations and Rural Marketing Planning in England and Wales. Tourism Management. 1990.
- 13 Wales Tourist Board. More Money From Tourism - A Practical Guide for Welsh Farmers. 1986.
- 14 O'Donnell,M. Bord Failte's Role in Rural Tourism. March 1992.
- 15 The Northern Ireland Tourist Board. Corporate Plan 1992-5.NITB, 1992.
- 16 Belfast Telegraph. 18 May 1993.
- 17 NITB. Ibid.
- 18 DANI. Ibid.
- 19 Magee,S,A,E. Diversification on Northern Ireland Farms. DANI, 1990.
- 20 The Northern Ireland Tourist Board. Tourism Potential of Golf.NITB, 1990.