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## Social Entrepreneurs as Drivers of Destinations

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# **Social Entrepreneurs in tourism: divers of destination development**

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# 1. The Literature: Explaining the role of entrepreneurs in destination development

- Role of entrepreneurs under-researched
- Traditionally seen as those who create jobs and bring money into the area
- But in addition to economic wealth we must also consider the wider impact that they have
- Our focus is often on lifestyle entrepreneurs
  - Predominance of lifestyle entrepreneurs, especially in rural tourism destinations
  - Primary motivation is lifestyle not profits
  - Divided opinion about whether they are 'good' for destinations
  - How can the actions and desires of these entrepreneurs be harnessed to aid rural and destination development?

- A type of entrepreneur that has not been fully considered and debated in the tourism entrepreneurship literature is that of social entrepreneurs.
- This paper shows that they can initiate, create and influence tourism development and harness local lifestyle entrepreneurs into this process.

## 2. What is social entrepreneurship?

- Leadbeater (1997) social entrepreneurs are people who use their entrepreneurial skills to solve a social rather than a business problem
- E.g.s of social entrepreneurs:
  - Florence Nightingale
  - Maria Montessori
  - Robert Owen
  - Muhammad Yunus

- Bill Drayton (Ashoka) says that they are ‘individuals who combine the pragmatic and results-oriented methods of a business entrepreneur with the goals of a social reformer’ (Sen,2007 p.536)

Neck, Brush and Allen (2009, p.18) highlight their importance ‘social entrepreneurship is the engine of positive, systematic change that will alter what we do, how we do it and why it matters’





# Social entrepreneurs in the tourism literature

- Morrisson et al (2005 p.11 )
  - Entrepreneurship ‘is not the preserve of only for-profit organizations. Entrepreneurship has the potential to be applied across institutions of all types: commercial firms; charitable organizations...’ (p.10)

- E.g.s have been identified but not classified as social entrepreneurs (Johns & Mattsson, 2004, Pheby, 2007)



# Methods



- Exploratory
- Secondary Research
- Local Entrepreneurs (10 – 33.3% response rate)
- Key informant interviews

- **Case study area**



– Uneven economic development in Irl.

– WDC - Eco tourism is seen as a way of attracting tourists

– Green Box is established in 2004

# Development of the Greenbox

- 2004 WDC set up Greenbox
- INTERREG €1.4m funding secured in 2006
- 2 flagship projects and 42 smaller projects
- Website, Training, networking
- National certificate in Eco tourism
- Influenced national policies/government dpts

# Profile of entrepreneurs

- Motivations:
  - profits (1)
  - lifestyle (7)
  - environmental issues (1)

But what does lifestyle mean in this context?

2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> rankings show interest in the environment or the desire to 'make a difference' as the most common factor listed

Mulvey 'about half are motivated primarily by lifestyle and half by concerns and interest in the environment'

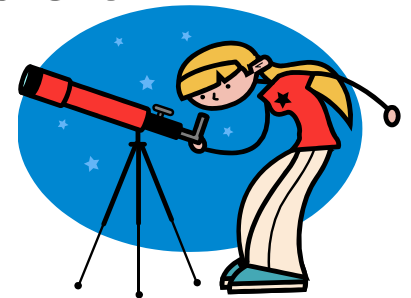
Mack 'the main motivation is a genuine love of their natural heritage'

# Key drivers of the development of this Eco-tourism destination

- 1. Natural Resources
- 2. The community 'artists, craftspeople and artisans moved to the area' 'culture of trying things an alternative way'
- 3. Regional policy Greenbox, Alan Hill, Mary Mulvey
- 4. Funding

# 5. Social Entrepreneurs – initiated the idea

- ‘Nucleus of green people living in the area’ (Mulvey)
- Mid 1990 a group got together as they identified that ‘this region was left behind’ – ‘happy band of green warriors’
- ‘The people who sowed the seeds were hardline environmentalists who were able to demonstrate the potential for green businesses’
- Visionary exercise with number of decision makers in county councils

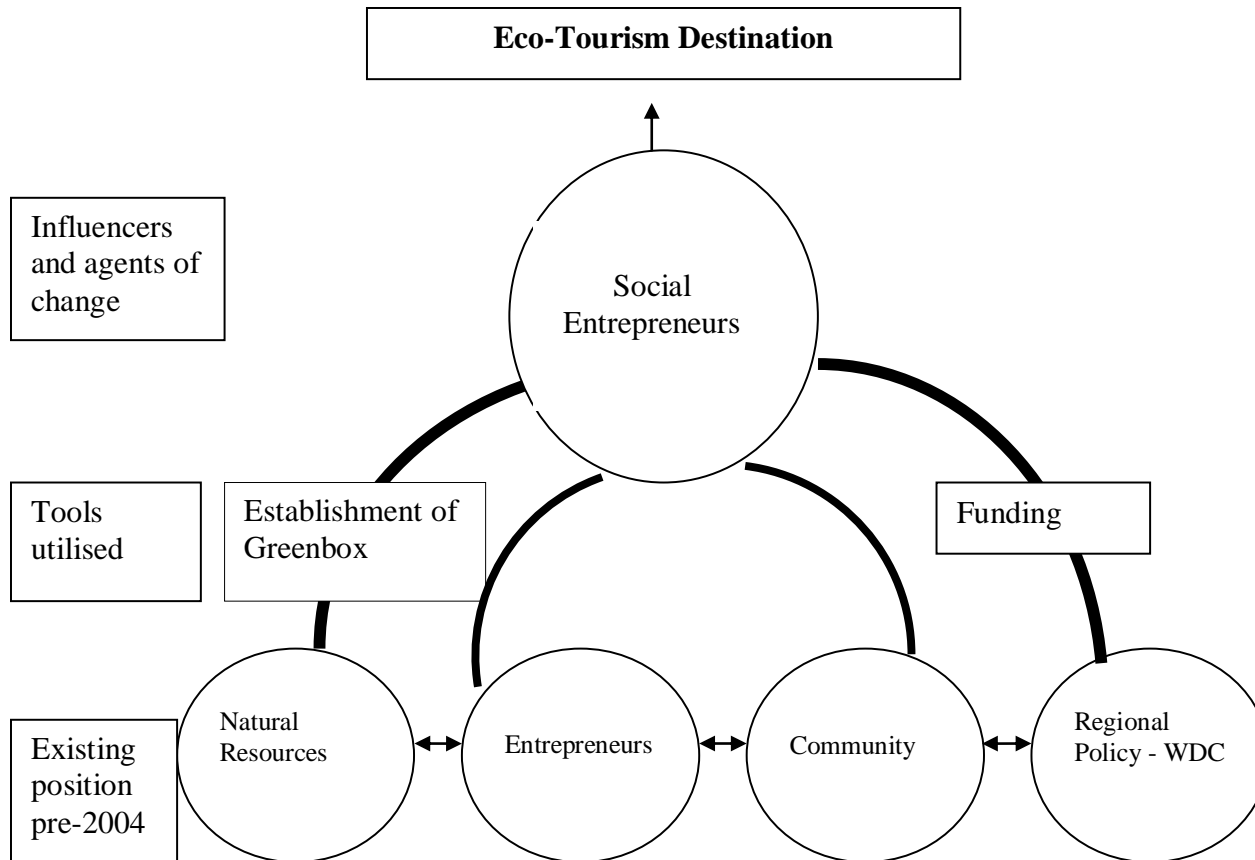


# 6. Lifestyle Entrepreneurs

- Many have embraced eco-tourism idea – for some they were always conscious of environmental issues others are pragmatic and see it as a way to fund development
- The social entrepreneurs needed buy in from these entrepreneurs to create a critical mass



# Process of development of eco-tourism destination





# Conclusions



- Greenbox is still in its infancy
- The establishment of tourism businesses can be utilised to affect social change both in terms of local rural development and environmental awareness.
- Social, economic, and lifestyle objectives are apparent and they have combined to create/develop this tourism destination
- The idea generated by the ‘happy band of green warriors’ has mushroomed into a national eco-tourism destination



- The basic factors to allow the development of an ecotourism product have long been in evidence in this area, it is the social entrepreneurs who instigated and drove this idea to make it a reality.
- We need to consider social entrepreneurs
- Social entrepreneurs have a role in destination development

