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Ziene Mottiar

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Exploring the motivations of tourism social entrepreneurs

The role of a national tourism policy as a motivator for social entrepreneurial activity in Ireland

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Ziene Mottiar

*School of Hospitality Management and Tourism,
Dublin Institute of Technology, Dublin, Ireland*

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to examine the motivations of social entrepreneurs. It explores the case of the Gathering in Ireland in 2013, when against a backdrop of recession, the national Government encouraged individuals and communities to organize events and invite the Diaspora to visit Ireland as a way of helping the country to revitalize. Some 5,000 events took place across the country during the year, and this paper examines this in the context of social entrepreneurship. Three research questions are posed: Who were these tourism and social entrepreneurs who organized events as a result of the Gathering? What motivated them to engage in these activities? Will this social entrepreneurship activity be maintained beyond 2013 and how has it been impacted by the Gathering?

Design/methodology/approach – The empirical research was conducted in two counties in Ireland, Co. Kerry and Co. Westmeath. The research tools used were key informant interviews, a survey of event organizers and focus groups.

Findings – Key findings show that the Gathering has resulted in the emergence of new social entrepreneurs, but it has also had a positive impact on those who had run their events before, as it made them be more strategic in the way they planned and ran their event and also resulted in them thinking about these events in terms of tourists rather than just the local community. They also developed new skills which will aid their future development. It is clear that social entrepreneurs can play a fundamental role in the development of tourism destinations, and this is an important topic for researchers in tourism to be concerned about.

Originality/value – The originality of this paper lies in the fact that it addresses the issue of motivation of social entrepreneurs and challenges us to think more about how these types of entrepreneurs identify the problem that they will address. Furthermore, this case shows that the motivation for such action can be prompted by a national strategy, rather than as the literature heretofore represented it as an innate motivation that materialized and developed within particular individuals.

Keywords Ireland, Social entrepreneurs, Entrepreneurs, Entrepreneurial motivations

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Social entrepreneurship is a relatively new literature, and this concept has not yet been appropriately considered within the tourism context. In the tourism literature, there is general agreement that entrepreneurship is an under-researched area (Li, 2008; Thomas *et al.*, 2011) and as Kompplu (2014, p. 369) notes, “the role of individual enterprises and



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entrepreneurs is largely underestimated in the literature”. However as Thomas *et al.* (2011) state in addition to discussion around numbers of publications in this area, there also needs to be awareness of the relatively narrow avenues of research that have been undertaken in the area of tourism entrepreneurs, and the need for more conceptual development. Similarly, Short *et al.* (2009, p. 161) state that “social entrepreneurship research remains in an embryonic state”. There are key challenges in the literature in terms of agreeing on definitions, moving from conceptual work and broadening the discussion into the very many related areas of concern.

From a tourism perspective, it seems evident that social entrepreneurs are a relevant and important group that must be considered. In particular, they can play a key role in terms of destination and product development. Thus, it is vital that we understand more about them, and this paper adds to the limited research in this important area.

The key area of interest for this paper is in terms of motivations of social entrepreneurs. Much of the discussion about social entrepreneurs begins with the premise that these individuals are motivated by their desire to solve a social problem. However, this needs to be explored in more detail. How do they identify this social problem that they wish to solve? Unlike other entrepreneurs who are driven by their innate desire to make profits, the motivations of social entrepreneurs are driven by external factors, so in fact, the motivation does not just come from within the individual, it is driven by the environment. Can this environment also create a positive motivator for social entrepreneurship to emerge, so rather than it being a problem which alone drives the entrepreneur, can the state or a higher agency encourage individuals to act socially entrepreneurially to address a problem? The second part of this paper presents a case where this is what has happened. 2013 was the Year of the Gathering in Ireland, and the objective of this project was to encourage more international tourists, and in particular, the Diaspora, to visit Ireland, and the communities and citizens were asked to organize events and invite relatives to visit during the year. This was set in the context of economic recession and was presented as a way of helping to improve the economic situation.

Literature review

Short *et al.* (2009), in their review of research on social entrepreneurship, highlight the increasing practice of social entrepreneurship and the corresponding academic interest in this topic. One of the key difficulties is the lack of a single unified definition which makes comparison difficult. Perhaps as a consequence of this, “the published literature is largely of a theoretical and descriptive nature”, and much of the emphasis is on definitional issues (Granados *et al.*, 2011, p. 198).

In line with the mainstream entrepreneurship literature, a number of authors have explored the characteristics of social entrepreneurs, and they are often described in positive ways such as “change agents” (Sharis and Lerner, 2006); “changemakers” (Shoka, 2014). The focus is on these individuals as being driven by the desire to make social change rather than being focused on profits. This is a distinguishing feature, as Dees (2001, p. 20) states, “mission related impact becomes the central criterion, not wealth creation”. Although in some cases Fowler (2000, p. 645) notes that “commercial undertaking can often be used to cross subsidize social interventions”. And this leads to the argument that we need to categorize different types of social entrepreneurs. For example, Monti *et al.* (2007) identify civic entrepreneurs as business entrepreneurs

whose business model includes a social mission, and writers such as Peattie and Morley (2008) discuss social enterprises as hybrids which can have a variety of mixes of motives between commercial and philanthropic. Furthermore, Williams and Nadin (2011, p. 118) observe that entrepreneurs can change over time so “what begins as a commercial venture may become more socially oriented over time or vice versa”. Peredo and McLean (2005, p. 4) suggest that there are a “variety of distinguishable uses ranged along two continua; one having to do with the social element in the concept, and the other concerning the entrepreneurial component”. In exploring the two concepts of social enterprise and entrepreneurship Chell (2007, p. 19) concludes that we need a more “holistic, interpretive approach” to our understanding of entrepreneurship, as in reality, it creates both economic and social values.

Vasakarla (2008) identifies the behavioral traits of social entrepreneurs with the focus on identifying what qualities play an important role in social entrepreneurial success and shows that giving high importance to ethics, having the ability to take risks and being innovative are the highest ranked factors by the social entrepreneurs studied. Boluk and Mottiar (2014) state that “the typical characteristics that dominate the social entrepreneurship literature usually focus on individuals and demonstrate idyllic and honorable characters”, and Parkinson and Howarth (2008, p. 291) note that the descriptions of social entrepreneurs in the literature reveal “heroic claims”. Levie and Hart (2011) note the cultural differences in the way that social entrepreneurs are described in different countries and observe that:

UK commentators (academic and practitioners) tend to have adopted less of a heroic ambitious tone to their description and they refer to Demarco’s (2005, p. 48) suggestion that “social entrepreneurs” is just a new term for those generous individuals who have always existed and who are motivated to the make the world better. 

From a tourism perspective, this issue is important, as many destinations and tourist products are developed and shaped by community groups, individuals from the local area and local business people. Yet, according to Pechlaner *et al.* (2014, p. 1), in the literature, “discussions on leadership have usually been limited to firms” and yet as Beritelli and Bieger (2014) note, there are at least two dimension to leadership in tourism destinations: leadership of organizations and inter-organizational leadership. Investigating power in destinations, Slocum and Everett (2014) note that commercial interests ultimately control the destination image in a resource-constrained destination. As we broaden our understanding and concept of leadership in destinations, it is important that we include social entrepreneurs in the discussion as often such individuals who do not necessarily have commercial interests, or are not part of local government or destination management organizations, can significantly influence destination development as shown in this paper. As Northouse (2010) says, leadership can be defined as a transformational process which inspires followers to fulfill more than immediate self-interests, and in this way, they are often motivated by the desire to affect change which will have a positive impact on their community. As such, many of the leaders in tourism destinations may be categorized as social entrepreneurs and yet there has only been limited research on social entrepreneurs in tourism (Mottiar, 2009; Boluk, 2011; Johns and Mattsson, 2004). How do we distinguish between the role of community and social entrepreneurs? Is social entrepreneurship just a re-branding of the extensive and well-recognized role of community leaders in tourism? And if so then

is there a room in the field for the development of a literature on social entrepreneurship or are we already dealing with such issues under the theme of community tourism development? 

There are no easy answers to these questions and particularly as there is no agreed definition of what constitutes a social entrepreneur, and as [Thompson \(2000\)](#) notes, this concept usually incorporates profit-seeking businesses that wish to help society, social enterprises which have a social purpose but are established as a business and the voluntary sector. A community leader and a social entrepreneur can easily have the same objective – to change something in society – but the distinguishing feature lies in the methods that they use and the perspective. [Zahra et al. \(2009, p. 519\)](#) describe social entrepreneurs as people who adopt “business models to offer creative solutions to complex and persistent social problems”, and [Vasakarla \(2008, p. 32\)](#) note how they “use their entrepreneurial abilities to bring about social change”. It is these actions which distinguish a social entrepreneur from a community leader, although of course many people could be described as both. The objective is not to undermine or replace the valuable analysis that has been undertaken in community tourism literature but to add to it by utilizing the framework and concept of social entrepreneurs as a way of enhancing our understanding of tourism leaders and the role of local communities.

What there is consensus on in the literature is what motivates the social entrepreneur and that is to address a problem in society. It is this that distinguishes them from an entrepreneur who is motivated primarily by profits and economic factors. [Miller et al. \(2012\)](#) identify compassion as a key motivator for social entrepreneurs. [Germak and Robinson \(2014, p. 18\)](#) conclude from their research that “SE [social entrepreneurship] motivation is distinct from either commercial entrepreneurship motivation or from public-social sector motivations”, and they call for more work in this area. They conclude that social entrepreneurial motivation emerges from personal fulfillment, helping society, nonmonetary focus, achievement orientation and closeness to social problem. Thus, they highlight that there can also be personal motivations, and [Boluk and Mottiar’s \(2014\)](#) research also shows this, identifying that for some social entrepreneurs, there can also be lifestyle motivations and so they are influenced not just by making a difference to society but also by the desire for a particular type of life for themselves.

While there has been limited attention paid to motivation in general, even less research has been conducted on how these issues or problems are identified by the individual. In their work, [Zahra et al. \(2009\)](#) develop a typology of social entrepreneurs, and one of the variables which distinguishes them is their search processes, i.e. the way in which they discover social opportunities. The Social Bricoleur identifies the problem through their local knowledge, whereas Social Constructionists, who are focused on broader social problems, use their capacity to spot opportunities at a societal level, and Social Engineers often deal with national transnational and global social issues and their activities are often ideological and revolutionary. [Levie and Hart \(2011, p. 214\)](#) note that the place of residence can also be a factor showing that “women entrepreneurs are more likely to be social rather than business entrepreneurs if they reside in more deprived communities”.

In all of these discussions, the underlying assumption is that the individual identifies the problem and then uses their skills to develop a solution. In both [Zahra et al.’s \(2009\)](#); [Levie and Hart’s \(2011\)](#) work, it is also assumed that where the problem is identified (i.e.

at local, national or global level) is where it is addressed. But this is not always the case. There are many issues that may be identified at the national level, but the solution lies in action at the local level. These are often dealt with via national policies (economic, social and environmental) which are then applied in local areas and communities. The argument of course against such strategies is that they do not take account of specificities of individual localities, their particular problems and the views of the local community. Is it not feasible that local social entrepreneurship action can be motivated, not by the individual identifying the “problem” but by this identification happening at a national level and then individuals responding in the most appropriate way in their own local areas? This is what happened in the case discussed below. Identifying that the source of motivation may not be intrinsic to the individual social entrepreneur has policy implications and points to the fact that we need to consider the whole issue of motivations of social entrepreneurs in more depth.

The Gathering, Ireland 2013

The Irish economy entered into recession in 2007, and between 2008 and 2011, real gross national product declined by 10.1 per cent and unemployment reached 14.7 per cent by 2012 (ESRI, 2014). The country also experienced a banking crisis, and in 2010, the government negotiated a financial assistance package from the European Union and the International Monetary Fund. Against this backdrop of an extremely difficult economic environment, in 2009, it was decided to establish a Global Irish Economic Forum, and the inaugural meeting was attended by 112 people from abroad and a range of public sector decision-makers and business and cultural leaders. The objective of the forum was to develop a link with the 70 million Diaspora and to provide a platform for them to contribute toward Ireland’s renewal (Global Irish Forum, 2011). The idea of nominating a year in which the Diaspora would be encouraged to visit Ireland emerged from this forum, and subsequently, 2013 became the year of the Gathering. The population at large was urged to invite friends and family home and to organize events that would attract international tourists to visit. At the launch of the Gathering, the Taoiseach (prime minister) said:

This initiative needs the widespread participation of communities and local organisations all across Ireland. The Gathering gives each and every one of us an opportunity to do something positive for our country in our own unique way (Barrington, 2012).

Responsibility for implementation of this project was to lie with Fáilte Ireland, the national tourism authority. While this was a national policy managed by a national agency, it was clear early on in the project that the success depended on what happened in local areas. To attract people to visit Ireland, a wide range of events must be developed, and this needed to be done at the local level. International marketing campaigns could be organized by Fáilte Ireland to attract international tourists and the Diaspora, but it were the local communities that would need to provide the “product”. There was a national call to all Irish citizens to organize events, invite families to visit and get involved in the project. At the regional level, each county established the Gathering steering committees to guide the project in their area. Limited funding was available, but it was decided that this should be administered locally, so funding applications were managed and awarded by the local county councils. So while this idea

emerged at a global forum and became a national policy, it was dependent upon individual and community action to succeed.

According to Miley, project director of the Gathering, the “target was to help create 20 or 30 events per county, so a few hundred in total. We ended up with around 5,000” (O’Fatharta, 2013). Events ranged from clan (family) gatherings to events and festivals marking historical events and a plethora of cultural and community events. Some were events that were already in existence, but many others were developed because of the Gathering. The project has been deemed a success, with 250-275,000 more tourists coming to Ireland during the year, estimates of additional revenue raised is €170m (Miley, 2013) and communities reporting that it has had significant positive benefits in terms of bringing communities together (Mottiar *et al.*, 2013). From a social entrepreneurship perspective, this is an example of a case where a national policy harnessed the heretofore dormant social entrepreneurial skills of many individuals in tourism destinations throughout the country.

The key research questions that this paper asks are:

- RQ1. Who were these tourism social entrepreneurs who emerged because of the Gathering?
- RQ2. Were they tourism and hospitality entrepreneurs?
- RQ3. What motivated them to engage in these activities?
- RQ4. Will this social entrepreneurship activity be maintained beyond 2013 and how has it been influenced by the Gathering?

Research methods

This research focused on two counties in Ireland, Co. Kerry and Co. Westmeath. The reason these two counties were chosen for this study was because Kerry is an example of an area with a significant tourism history and one which, after the cities in Ireland, attracted the next highest number of international tourists. By contrast, Co. Westmeath attracted one of the lowest number of international tourists in 2012 (Fáilte Ireland, 2012). During 2013, 229 gathering events were organized in Co. Kerry and 83 in Co. Westmeath. It was decided to choose counties with different levels of tourism activity, as this may result in a gathering of a wider variety of different types of social entrepreneurs in terms of past experience, motivations and previous engagement with tourism.

There were four phases to the research; first, all recordings of meetings, websites and a range of secondary sources were investigated to ascertain information regarding the overall level and type of Gathering activity in the two counties. The second phase involved 16 key informant interviews with Gathering coordinators, representatives of the Gathering steering groups, key figures working in local authorities, local chambers of commerce local development companies, LEADER and those more generally involved in economic and tourism development at local and county levels. Phase 3 involved an on-line questionnaire for event organizers. In total, 73 responses were attained[1], representing 21 per cent of the sample, and this probably reflects the fact that this population was frequently surveyed throughout the Gathering year. While this response rate is lower than ideal, an analysis of the responses shows a good geographical spread between the two counties, with 65 per

cent from Co. Kerry and 35 per cent from Co. Westmeath (reflecting the national figures, whereby 73 per cent of the Gathering events in the two counties were in Kerry), and the analysis of where the social entrepreneurs were from within the counties shows a good regional spread. Further, 64 per cent of the events organized were new events, and 36 per cent had been in existence prior to 2013, reflecting the national figure of 30 per cent new events (Miley, 2013). The sample has a slightly higher proportion of individuals who received funding from the Gathering (44 per cent) than the national average, reflecting the fact that such individuals were probably more likely to respond to the survey. The questions in the survey related to issues such as the type of event organized; how the idea was initiated; what motivated them to engage in this activity; who was involved in organizing the event and their background; and impacts such as number of attendees, their perceived impact in terms of the local community and future plans in terms of the event. Stage four involved five focus groups with community members and event organizers, and in these groups, there was more in-depth discussion relating to how these ideas and events emerged and their impact on the local community and area.

This approach of using a variety of methods was used, as it provided a number of different avenues for research and the findings from each were built upon by the next stage. In the first instance, the key informant interviews provided a picture of the activities that had taken place throughout the county and gave a holistic view of the activities and the relevant individuals in each area. The survey results then provided a more focused collection of data about the individuals themselves and their motivations. This knowledge was then used to inform the discussion questions at the focus groups where issues were teased out in more depth.

Findings

Who were these tourism social entrepreneurs who emerged because of the Gathering?

There were a variety of types of people who organized events, some were people who had run this event in the past, others were part of a local committee and others were individuals who decided to take action directly as part of the Gathering and either worked alone or set up a group to work with them.

It was expected that organizers might be predominantly individuals who were from local tourism business and saw this as an opportunity to develop their business or the destination, or people from the arts who would use the opportunity to put on events, but interestingly as Figure 1 shows, this is not the case. Only 7 per cent of organizers were from the tourism sector. Those in the other category provided details of their background and they vary from many parts of public and private life. So, it is clear that this call to act to attract tourists to the area was taken on by the community at large rather than being championed by the tourism industry. In fact, in one key informant interview from Westmeath, it was lamented that while some from the hospitality industry were involved, in general, “they did not work together to respond to this initiative”. This may reflect the fact that while this was a tourism project, managed by the national tourism body, communities saw it as primarily a community activity, as one key informant said “many people considered it as a community action rather than a tourism action” and another commented:

Fáilte Ireland wanted to bring more people here to make money for business but community made a conscious decision that the Gathering is not just for people abroad, it was for community.

So if these individuals were not primarily from the tourism sector were they people who were active at a community level and so this was like an extension of the work that they do in their local area? Interestingly, 26 per cent of respondents said that they were not active in any other local group; thus, their social entrepreneurship was directly caused by the Gathering. Those who were involved in other local groups listed a whole range of groups including charities, business, sports, clubs and local committees.

Why did they engage in these activities?

A key issues raised in the literature review is why people act in a socially entrepreneurial way. In this case, when asked to rank the reasons why they organized their event as shown below, the most important reasons were to bring back friends and relatives and international tourists because it gave them an opportunity to celebrate and bring the community together and because they thought that it would be good for their county.

Analyzing the mean scores in terms of importance shows that the two most important factors were to bring back friends and relatives and to support the Gathering. As Co. Kerry is more tourism-oriented and has a long history of tourism, it might be expected that there would be a difference in the means depending on which county the social entrepreneur was based. However, the data below show the similarities in each category. Analysis was undertaken to see if there were any significant differences between the motivations of social entrepreneurs in the two counties, but as shown below, this was not the case. The *t* tests show that there is no significant difference in the reason they ran the event according to their location (Table I).

T1

It is interesting that bringing back friends and relatives and attracting international tourists was a specified objective of the Gathering overall, and event organizers clearly saw this as a key goal. However, while the Gathering collectively had a national objective in terms of aiding the economic development of the country, the event organizers were most affected by the idea that they could have a local impact, focusing on the impact on their county. Similarly, the community effect of bringing people together and providing an opportunity for local people to celebrate was more evident at this local level. As one focus group participant said, “it was really about communities

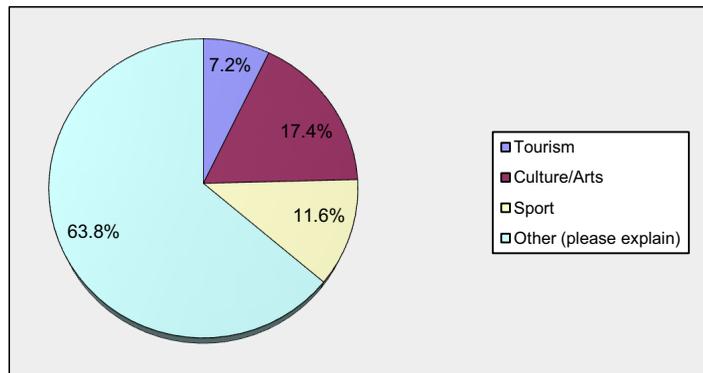


Figure 1.
What area does the key person who organized the event come from? (*n* = 69)

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	Mean for total sample (lower no. implies ranked at higher level of importance)	Mean for Co. Kerry	Mean for Co. Westmeath	Significance (two-tailed)
To attract international tourists	4.03	4	4.08	0.821
Because I thought it would be good for our country	4.18	4.13	4.29	0.638
Because I was asked to	4.77	4.77	4.79	0.888
Because it was an opportunity to celebrate	4.03	4.19	3.71	0.190
Because I had a good idea for an event	4.34	4.28	4.46	0.544
To bring back the Diaspora	4.39	4.4	4.38	0.917
To support the Gathering	3.72	3.83	3.5	0.360
To give local people a reason to come together	4.03	4.06	3.96	0.769
To do something to help the country	4.32	4.28	4.42	0.629
To bring back friends and relatives	3.51	3.45	3.63	0.677
Because we run this event annually	4.24	4.26	4.21	0.891

Table I.
Why did you
organize your
gathering event?
(Please rank in order
of importance with
one being the most
important)

and inviting friends and relatives home, then tourism was a by-product benefit from that". It is interesting to note that this is the case in both counties; with a greater reliance on tourism in Co. Kerry, it may have been expected that a tourism focus would have been more evident among this group.

Analysis was undertaken to see if there were any significant differences between the groups of social entrepreneurs depending on whether they were already active or this was the first time they had organized such an event. It is interesting to note that new social entrepreneurs were more focused on attracting international tourists and bringing friends and relatives back to Ireland (with both having *p* values of 0.03). Thus, this group was directly motivated by the government strategy and so their objectives were guided by this national project. It might be expected that having gained funding for the event would make this group of social entrepreneurs more focused on the issue of attracting international tourists in particular, as this was a factor on which applications were assessed, but this was not the case (*p* value of 0.544). However, the non-funded social entrepreneurs were significantly different from those who were funded in terms of motivations in the case of just one factor – the opportunity to celebrate was more important for them.

The Gathering also provided an opportunity for people who had never been involved in committees before to get involved, and according to one interviewee, "it gave ordinary people an opportunity to come up with different initiatives; gave them a purpose; opened up their minds". So while the organizers were motivated by the broad objectives of the Gathering as a whole, and they worked within this framework, they were also motivated by what local impact they could have, as one key informant explained, "many people considered it a community action rather than a tourism action". This locally focused

impact reflects the fact that these social entrepreneurs probably fall into the category of Social Bricoleur as outlined by Zahra *et al.* (2009) and so have the advantage of local knowledge and see their activities within this local realm. This also reflects the fact that while this was a tourism policy, many of the organizers of events saw it not just in terms of attracting tourists but also in terms of developing communities.

The Gathering generated a stimulus for action. Frequently, study participants said things such as “The Gathering gave us the push” and “the Gathering gave things a kick-start”. For a number of individuals and groups, something that they had been talking about or thinking about for a while became a reality as they suggested it at a Gathering meeting and so it was included in the calendar so then they “had to do it”. The concept of the Gathering provided the impetus for people to develop their ideas and act socially entrepreneurially.

Will this social entrepreneurship activity be maintained beyond 2013 and how has the Gathering impacted this activity?

When asked whether the events that they run will run again in the future, 74 per cent of respondents said that this is very likely or likely. This shows the sustainable nature of the activity that was spurred by the Gathering. The Gathering generated projects, ideas and groups whose social entrepreneurial activity will continue beyond the life of the project. Analysis was undertaken to see if the likelihood of running the event next year is related to either whether the event has run in the past or the location of the entrepreneur. Despite the fact that one would expect social entrepreneurs from Kerry to be more tourism-oriented and therefore possibly more likely to run events again in the future, independent *t* tests analysis show a *p* value of 0.955; thus, their future plans are not significantly different depending on where the social entrepreneur is located. However, the relationship between the likelihood of running the event again and whether the event is new has a *p* value of 0.29, thus making this a relevant factor. Thus, it is clear that by initiating new ideas and events, the Gathering will have an effect that goes beyond 2013.

As part of the Gathering, Fáilte Ireland offered training courses to event organizers. Only 30 per cent of respondents attended this training, and surprisingly, statistical analysis shows that there is no significant difference between those social entrepreneurs who were organizing events for the first time and those who had done so before in terms of accessing training. Of those who did attend training, 81 per cent said that they developed skills that they will be likely or very likely to use again.

These skills included communication, marketing, social media, website design, PR and database design. However, it is notable that even those who did not attend formal training courses identified skills and processes that were enhanced by the Gathering. Further, 63 per cent of all respondents said that the Gathering helped them develop new skills that will be useful in the future.

It is notable from Figure 2 that many of the events were run in previous years. Thus, one could question to what extent the Gathering “created” these social entrepreneurs? In total, 36 per cent of this sample and 30 per cent of Gathering events nationally (Miley, 2013), had been run before, so these events did not emerge because of the Gathering. But in a number of cases, the way that the event was run or organized changed because of the Gathering. For example, “An Spud Mór”, a potato-growing festival, began in 2009 as a community event, running over the summer as families and parishes competed to grow

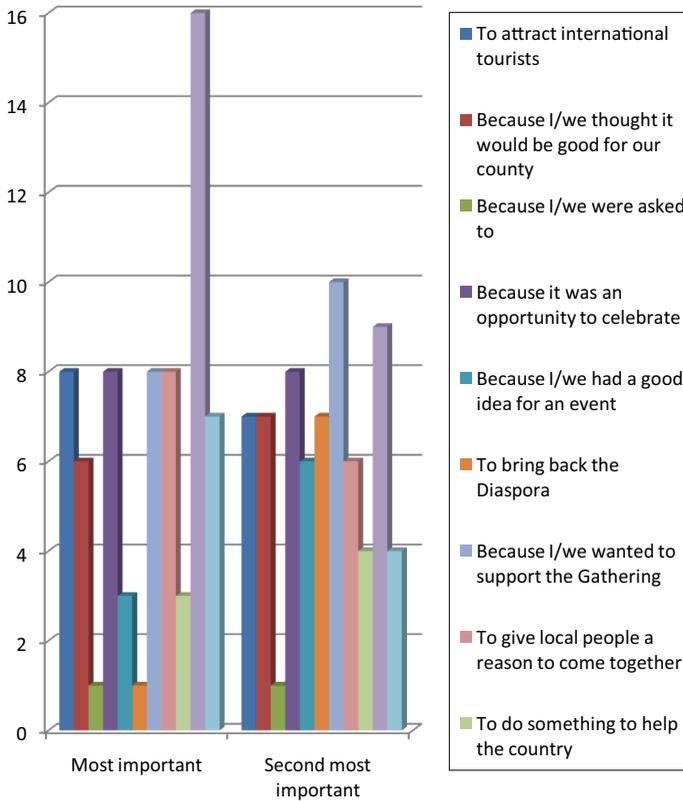


Figure 2. Why did you organize your event?(respondents were asked to rank the reasons in order of importance) (n = 69)

the biggest **spud** due to the Gathering, to attract tourists, they compacted the event which used to run over a five-week period and established a “proper committee, and this will endure”. In this way, the event has become a tourist experience which it was not before, and as one of the organizers stated, the Gathering “forced us to stand back and review what we had and what we could make of it”. Similarly, another town in Co. Kerry, Killorglin, was very reliant on one event and they developed new events and also changed the calendar of events, and instead of having them spread throughout the year, they have brought them together. Again this is an example of how the Gathering helped create a situation where local event organizers became more focused on tourists and thought more strategically about how to maximize the impact and attractiveness of their events. In the words of one of the people on the committee in Killorglin, “as a result of the Gathering we learnt a lot and have some legacy events to carry forward”.

Thus, the Gathering created an environment in which even those events that had run in the past were affected in a positive way. Skills were enhanced, tourists were identified as potential audience by many events and festivals which up until then had been organized as community events and connections were made with other event organizers in the county and the county council (local government). All of these things enhance the social entrepreneurial nature of these individuals and

organizations and establish a foundation for future development in terms of the events, tourism and the local area.

Discussion

This is a good example of how a tourism project can have significant implications at a local level and how national and local objectives and responsibilities can work together to achieve a common goal. Key to the success of the gathering was the local initiative that it generated. The question that has to be addressed in light of the discussion in the previous section is whether this initiative was taken by social entrepreneurs or local community leaders? At the outset, the expectation would be that leadership would be given by the established leaders in the community. And certainly when steering committees were established, they mostly comprised key individuals in the community, business leaders and from local government organizations. In both counties, the steering committees held public meetings to generate ideas and plans for the Gathering. At this stage, many other members of the community came forward and played a role in initiating ideas and organizing events. As the survey shows, 26 per cent of event organizers were not active in any other group. So while established community and business leaders did play an important role, other, newer leaders also emerged. These new social entrepreneurs were more guided by the objectives as set out by the national plan of the Gathering, in terms of being particularly focused on attracting more international tourists and bringing friends and family back home, than those who had existed previously. This shows how a government plan like this can perhaps have a long-term impact on such social entrepreneurs, as, at an early stage, it plays a role in the development of aims and objectives, and these are likely to continue for the individual and group beyond the Gathering event. From a tourism perspective, this is particularly important, as projects like the Gathering, encourage communities to be more focused on the importance of tourism for their local areas, and instilling the idea of measuring success and evaluating strategies of events on the basis of their impact on attracting tourists are fundamental achievements.

To what extent was their activity social entrepreneurship? Is it a reasonable conclusion that they are social entrepreneurs rather than just individuals who said that they would organize an event? Just as [Thompson \(2000\)](#) talks about the inclusion of profit-seeking businesses, social enterprise and volunteering under the social entrepreneurship banner, so too are there likely to have been a variety of individuals who were involved in the Gathering for a variety of reasons and operated in many different ways. However, each event had to be developed from the idea, to a concept and a reality, potential audience had to be identified and it had to be marketed and budgeted. All of these activities required entrepreneurial skills. Furthermore, the discussion above is extremely important, as it shows that because of the Gathering, some groups and individuals have become more structured and have developed business skills which will be utilized going forward. Each of these people “adopted business models” ([Zahra et al., 2009](#)) or used their “entrepreneurial abilities” ([Vasakarla, 2008](#)) to develop their event and it is that that makes them social entrepreneurs.

The key issue of concern for this paper is that of motivation. In the literature, it is assumed that the individual is motivated by something that they identify in their external environment and this causes them to take action. However, in this case, it is not

the individual who identified the problem explicitly, the problem was highlighted by the government and they suggested a possible solution in terms of attracting more international tourists, and it is this that the individual social entrepreneurs reacted to by devising events that would attract these tourists. The source of the motivation is still external but it did not involve observation and identification of a problem. This differs from the work of *Zahra et al. (2009)* that differentiates between types of entrepreneurs based partially on how they identify the problem. It is not being argued that the individuals involved did not know that there was an economic recession, but that perhaps they had not made the connection between that and how they could have an impact. The Gathering, and in particular the call from the Taoiseach to get involved and contribute, aided the realization that it was possible to play a part in recovery. Furthermore, the new social entrepreneurs who emerged were guided by the Gathering objective in terms of seeking to attract more international tourists, and it is interesting to note that whether the county had a stronger tourism history did not have any statistical significance in terms of their motivation, thus showing the strong influence that a project like this can have in a variety of destinations. The way in which this project developed is key to the success of the Gathering, as ownership was retained at local and indeed often individual levels. It is this that facilitated the emergence of this extensive socially entrepreneurial activity.

Why does this matter beyond this particular case? The implications of the research can be identified in terms of theory and our understanding of social entrepreneurs, Government policy, destination development and the tourism and hospitality industries.

Theoretical implications

First, the research shows us the complexity of motivation in the case of social entrepreneurs. Heretofore in the literature, there has been an underlying assumption that a problem is identified by the social entrepreneur themselves and that it is the identification of this problem that motivates the entrepreneurs to take action. The findings of this research challenges us to think of the multifaceted ways in which social entrepreneurs can be motivated, and the fact that the source of motivation does not have to be intrinsic. Theoretically, this finding challenges us as researchers to re-investigate the issues of motivation and problem identification. This would be a welcome addition to a literature which often is case study-based and focuses on investigating the ways in which the entrepreneurs act, yet a fundamental concern has to be why they choose to act in the first place. Because of this, research questions that require further investigation include:

- RQ1.* Are social entrepreneurs who identify the problem themselves “different” from social entrepreneurs who don’t do this? If so, in what ways?
- RQ2.* Are there any other sources of motivation which are important for social entrepreneurs?
- RQ3.* What factors influence problem identification for social entrepreneurs and what processes does the individual use to evaluate their selection of a problem?

RQ4. Is it the identification of the problem which leads them to act socially entrepreneurially or do they decide that they want to be a social entrepreneur and then choose the issue that they are going to focus on?

Policy implications

This then leads to the second general implication of the research. From a government policy perspective, it shows the key role that national or local government can have in terms of encouraging social entrepreneurship. A government policy which resonates with citizens and communities can result in significant activity and have positive implications. The key to success here in terms of encouraging social entrepreneurship at the local level is the fact that there was local ownership of the project. Lessons for government then include ensuring that national policies facilitate local ownership of the project, and so while objectives are set at the government level, decisions about how to achieve those objectives are controlled at the local level. This type of local empowerment encourages and facilitates individuals to act in a socially entrepreneurial way. As such, these findings highlight the important role that the government can have in terms of identifying social problems and encouraging the emergence and development of social entrepreneurs.

Implications for tourism destinations and hospitality managers

From a destination perspective, this research is useful, as it shows the key role that social entrepreneurs can have in a destination in terms of product offering and also tourism numbers. It is interesting that in this case, although the national project was a tourism project, with objectives set in terms of attracting more tourists, in fact as discussed, the tourism and hospitality sectors played an extremely limited role. The focus for hospitality managers has to be bed nights and occupancy levels, but the potential of a project like the Gathering in terms of providing events which will attract new tourists, developing new ideas in the destination and bringing the community together has to be recognized. The emergence of these social entrepreneurs can have a long-term impact on the development of destinations, and consequently the hospitality industry and individual businesses. Traditionally, many hospitality and tourism operators cooperate with other tourism providers, but what this research shows is that it may also be beneficial to build links with the social entrepreneurs in destinations. While this may be challenging, in terms of the different goals and objectives that the social entrepreneur and the hospitality/tourism provider may have, the possibilities in terms of future development for all parties may be significant.

Conclusions

This research adds to our understanding in a number of different ways. First, it has shown how important it is that we pay more attention to social entrepreneurship in the tourism literature. This is a valid and relevant category of entrepreneur that is generally being overlooked. Although the discussion in the literature around definitional issues shows the lack of clarity that exists, there is a place for tourism researchers in this debate, in particular in terms of contributing to more empirical studies which is a current gap as identified by [Short et al. \(2009\)](#) and [Granados et al. \(2011\)](#). As this case shows very clearly, individuals acting in a socially entrepreneurial way can have a significant impact on a destination and in terms of the development of tourism products and

experiences and a national strategy can play an important role in terms of motivating social entrepreneurs.

Second, the example of the Gathering challenges us to think in more depth about the motivations of social entrepreneurs. While there is consensus in the literature that the motivations revolve around making a difference to society [Miller *et al.* (2012); Vasakarla (2008); Zahra *et al.* (2009)], the assumption is that the problems are primarily identified by the individual. This case has shown that it is possible for the problem to be identified at another level and that this then serves as an ignition for individuals to put their ideas into action. The framework created by a national project may also act as a driver for individual potential social entrepreneurs and their motivations and so objectives may be influenced by the national project. This identifies the role of external actors, and in particular, the government, in the development of socially entrepreneurial motives, and it moves us away from the assumption that social entrepreneurship motives are always generated by an individual. This is the key finding of this research. As noted by Germak and Robinson (2014), although in the general entrepreneurship literature, there is extensive research on the motivations of entrepreneurs, this is lacking in the social entrepreneurship literature. This paper shows that not only do we need more research on motives, we also need to explore the issue of how social entrepreneurs identify the problem which they are motivated to address. This also has implications for the potential role that the government can have in terms of encouraging social entrepreneurship.

From a tourism point of view, in particular, this study is important as what this research shows is that government can influence tourism social entrepreneurs and in so doing can have a significant impact on activities in a destination. Not only did the development of this policy result in significant numbers of local events and brought communities together, furthermore, as discussed above, there will be longer-term impacts in terms of the way events are organized and the fact that some events will become annual occurrences. It also resulted in individuals who heretofore had not been active in the community coming forward and taking on leadership roles. Studying and understanding social entrepreneurs adds another avenue of research to the destination leadership literature. Importantly, the research also shows the vital role that social entrepreneurs can play in tourism destination development, and as such hospitality and tourism businesses and stakeholders need to be more aware of these individuals.

Another key tourism finding is that a project such as this can mean that tourism becomes something more than an industry or a source of income for some in the area. These communities were bound by the objective of increasing the number of tourists to their area and bringing the community together. For many, this was not in a bid to make more profits, as they were not part of the industry, but by organizing events and festivals, this was an effect, and for those who received grants success was measured in terms of the number of international tourists who attended the event. In this way, these communities became more tourism-focused, as community leaders and individuals identified tourism as a vehicle which would contribute to economic and local development. From the tourism industry's perspective, this is an important implication which may have longer-term impacts.

There is plenty of scope for future research in this area for tourism academics. For example, we need to better understand how social entrepreneurs interact with other stakeholders in tourism destinations, how their activities impact on local economies and

societies, how they become local leaders and explore how some entrepreneurs and leaders balance their entrepreneurial activities in their own business with their social entrepreneurial activity in the destination. Exploring such issues in more detail will add to our understanding and knowledge about not only social entrepreneurs but also leaders, communities and destinations.

Note

1. Not all respondents answered all questions so the n in some charts may be less than this.

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Further reading

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About the author

Dr Ziene Mottiar is a Lecturer in the School of Hospitality Management and Tourism, Dublin Institute of Technology, Ireland. Dr Ziene Mottiar has a wide range of research interests, in particular in the areas of entrepreneurship (especially social and lifestyle entrepreneurs), inter-firm relations and regional development. She has publications in a variety of journals including *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, *Current Issues*, *Leisure Studies*, *International Small Business Journal* and *Journal of Vacation Marketing*. In addition, she has written a number of book chapters in the area of tourism entrepreneurs and regional development. Ziene Mottiar can be contacted at: ziene.mottiar@dit.ie

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