

Chapter XLIII

ICT and Tourism

Enterprise Collaboration in Rural New Zealand

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the development and associated outcomes of two government funded projects designed to support small tourism enterprise (STE) collaboration in rural New Zealand. Following a review of literature on the importance of networks and information and communication technology (ICT) in STE and local development, we discuss “Kiwitrails,” a five-year program designed to develop a Web-based virtual community of businesses in the remote and relatively impoverished East Coast of the country’s North Island. We then review an ICT enabled STE network in Western Southland, a region with a strong farming base. The cases reveal that local “champions” are vital in initiating and sustaining collaborative organizational activity, and in facilitating the environment within which STE networks can flourish. We argue that locality and embedded cultural dimensions must be factored into government and/or community attempts to develop ICT enabled collaborative initiatives in tourism.

INTRODUCTION

The rural economy of New Zealand has undergone significant shifts in its structure and character in recent decades. Many rural areas have turned to the tourism sector as an important source of supplemental income and employment generation. Unfortunately the shift from traditional agricultural enterprise towards tourism is not always an easy one. Small tourism enterprises (STE) often struggle to attract the “elusive tourist,” and find it difficult to form the types of collaborative business networks that underlie successful destination development.

In an attempt to develop rural tourism in New Zealand, governments at both the national and local scales, have adopted strategies that embrace information and communications technologies (ICT) as tools to build collaboration and enhance enterprise performance. This chapter examines the implementation and outcomes of two such publicly funded projects that have been undertaken by the New Zealand Tourism Research Institute (NZTRI). The projects use ICT to increase collaborative activity between tourism enterprises and to generate broader networks between STE and the surrounding economy (schools, agriculture, arts, and cultural activities).

The first project was focused on the East Coast of the North Island (Figure 1) and involved a five year (2000-2005) program to develop “Kiwitrails,” a Web-based virtual community of businesses and communities using “Web-raising,” and open-source “community building” software. Since 2004 the work initially developed for Kiwitrails has been refined and implemented in the Western Southland region of the South Island. This ongoing project has gained momentum with the spread of broadband through the region and the emergence of a range of new opportunities to create and disseminate user generated content (including the use of locally produced pod-casts). In both cases, STE and the broader community have been involved in the establishment of destination Web-sites that

represent both individual businesses and the surrounding community.

We discuss the major issues that have emerged during the establishment, implementation and ongoing development of these projects. In reviewing their successes, and also failures, it becomes clear that the role of local leadership is vital in not only initiating, but also sustaining, collaborative organizational activity. “Place” and “culture” are further vital influences in shaping STE collaborative structures and outcomes. We must never forget the important role that locality and embedded cultural dimensions play in creating sustainable collaborative outcomes.

THE CONTEXT

The rise in significance of rural tourism has led many commentators to analyse what enables the formation and growth of successful STE and

Figure 1. New Zealand and the case study areas



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