

On the crest of a wave: Donegal and the Wild Atlantic Way.

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The research explores what is the current service provision in a specific area on the “Wild Atlantic Way” (WAW) in County Donegal. The paper identifies those service providers that currently participate in the “visitor experience” on a section of the route Rossnowlagh to Slieve League Cliffs; one of the 3 iconic designated signature experiences in Donegal. This allows the researcher to obtain insight in relation to the status quo in the tourism product offering, whether registered or not with an affiliated body. These facts and feedback that relate to the small to medium business sector in tourism provide rich data for recommendations for a collaborative approach for a future sustainable development plan. In relation to the research both qualitative and quantitative analysis was carried out. Statistical analysis was also carried out using frequencies and percentages in order to examine trends among the participant’s responses. The launch of WAW by Tourism Ireland/Failte Ireland, offers a unique opportunity to Donegal. It may open the “flood gates”; allowing access to mainstream tourism, previously concentrated on the lower counties. The impact of the recession in Ireland and particularly the Northwest from 2008, has resulted in closure of many facilities; hotels, B&Bs and businesses in general. Regeneration in the tourism sector is imperative for Donegal to reach its potential, in terms of provision of services, employment and income. The introduction of the WAW is an inspiration for surrounding communities; a vision for a sustainable future. A review of the literature indicates that developing rural tourism and marketing through its stakeholders, Donegal will need to meet the emerging needs of independent travellers in terms of accommodation, activities, access natural resources, countryside and local culture. With the development of the Roadmap initiative “The WAW”, it is anticipated that the number of visitors will increase in Donegal. This will require additional accommodation and facilities. The overall aim of this study is to ascertain the current service provision for visitors, to identify gaps in the provision, and to make recommendations for further developments to support tourism providers, thereby enhancing “the visitor experience”.

Keywords: Wild Atlantic Way, Rural Donegal, Service providers, Sustainable tourism, Collaboration.

Introduction

This area of research addresses the topic of ‘Rural Tourism’, specifically in relation to service provision in a sample area of Donegal’s section of the WAW (see appendix, Map). The results from the research undertaken will inform tourism bodies, marketers, and provide feedback for the participants in the sample area. The objectives outlined seek to answer the research question underlying in this study, if you don’t know what the county is currently offering in terms of the service provision, how do you know if you can satisfy the needs of the potential visitor?

On the basis of this information, the 10 year WAW project initiative that started in 2014 subsequently could utilise the research to inform decision-making from an alternative perspective and serve as a starting point to further research in Donegal in this area where currently there is none. The Wild Atlantic Way is a touring route (2500kms), stretching along the Atlantic coast from Donegal to West Cork. There are 15 “signature experiences” 3 of which are in Donegal- **No.1 Malin Head, No.2 Fanad Head No.3 SliabhLiag (Slieve League)** (Failte Ireland 2013a; Failte Ireland 2013b).

The five objectives of this study are:

1. Examine the WAW project to gain knowledge for research; interview local Failte Ireland representative.
2. Research relevant Rural Tourism literature to gain knowledge of subject area.
3. Determine the status quo of “rural” tourism in the sample area Rossnowlagh to Slieve League, approximately 70km of the WAW.
4. Meet with the service providers with a view to information gathering.
5. Collate Findings and make recommendations.

Context

Donegal is located in the North-West of Ireland, bounded to the north and west by the Atlantic coastline. Tourism in Donegal is underdeveloped in relation to the rest of Ireland. According to Haase and Pratschke (2008) Donegal is the most disadvantaged local authority area within the whole country, situated within the most disadvantaged region in Ireland- the Border Region. Donegal has often been described by its residents as “the forgotten county” (Hughes and Coughlan 2007), geographically north, associated in the past as a no go area with “the troubles” of Northern Ireland, and perceived even by some of the residents of southern counties as part of the six counties in Northern Ireland. The underdevelopment in Donegal during the “Celtic Tiger” era as oppose to the rest of the Republic of Ireland was markedly evident. The outlook for Ireland, particularly Donegal, is a challenging one as many find themselves confronted by the fragile economic environment. Traditional employment in the agriculture and fishing industries is no longer viewed as viable, due to austerity measures sustained in the community and economy as a whole. Poor infrastructure, such as no rail service, infrequent bus services, and only a small regional airport located in the coastal region weakens the channels of distribution for industry and tourism. High levels of unemployment, skilled graduates and school leavers emigrating en masse have left an indelible mark on communities in the county.

However, more recently the tourism industry shows signs of recovery at grass roots. The success of the Gathering 2013, and the launch of the WAW 2014, brings a new wave of promising development. The WAW initiative is the first time Donegal has been integrated into the marketing of tourism for Ireland as a whole (Tourism Ireland 2014, Failte Ireland 2014a). The Republic of Ireland tourism trade has been mainly focused on the South and West. The “*uphere is different*” or the “*forgotten county*” perception of too far north can finally be recognised on a route soon to be famous (with good marketing) on a global scale (Doherty 2010; Hughes and Coughlan 2007).

Donegal County Council (DCC) suggests it places an emphasis on seeking to build upon current strategy and objectives to create viable sustainable jobs, harness its culture and creativity, plus invest in the development of its natural resources (Donegal County Council 2012). According to DCC *Overview* report, the Donegal mainland coastline is the longest in the country at 1,134 km and constitutes 17.1% of the total national coastline with thirteen blue flag beaches (Donegal County Council ND; Donegal County Council 2012). There is immediate scope to brand Donegal as a “must see and experience” destination for the culturally curious and avid explorer (Failte Ireland 2012).

Major themes and issues within the definitions of “sustainable tourism” and “rural” for development purposes, acknowledge the complexity of rural changes in the economy which encourage agricultural diversification, and shifts in visitor expectations in terms of a holiday experience in rural

areas. As Telfer (2002) suggested, growing numbers of city-dwellers are getting away from it all in the countryside. One of the advantages of rural tourism is that it is based on local; initiatives, local management, has local spin-offs, is rooted in local scenery and it taps into local culture. In theory, the emphasis on the “local” can help to generate regional development. According to Sharpley and Sharpley (1997), rural tourism is increasingly being used for socio-economic regeneration and diversification. Rural tourism extends beyond farm-based tourism to include: Special-interest nature holidays and ecotourism, walking, climbing and riding holidays, adventure, sport and health tourism, hunting and angling, educational travel, arts and heritage tourism, and in some areas, ethnic tourism (Lane 1994:9). Macleod (2011) suggests a holistic approach to developing, recognising the complexities and interrelationships involving activities in and components of rural areas. Changes in the rural economy which encourage agricultural diversification to include tourism, noting the importance of countryside capital are imperative.

Methodology

The research begins with an intrinsic approach otherwise known as “blue sky” research or “curiosity driven” (Thomas, 2011:98). Little secondary or primary research been conducted within the Donegal region in relation to both tourism and accommodation trends. The current research proposed to add value by conducting a survey of perceptions of service providers toward the WAW. A ‘case study’ approach was employed. The method focused on “The Wild Atlantic Way” initiative in Donegal; rather it used the parameters of the WAW to highlight the case of rural tourism within the sample area. Since the overall subject area is rural tourism, this study utilised primary field research to add value to secondary data from the literature reviewed and applied these links in the real world (Failte Ireland 2013:5. From the outset, the researcher examined the “*Wild Atlantic Way*” route project online (Failte Ireland 2013). Slieve League was identified as the sample geographical area to research. A map of the WAW Donegal section was drawn up (see Appendix 1) and the point of entry from the south of Donegal starting at Rossnowlagh, was selected as the starting point, travelling the route from the visitors’ perspective; the researcher followed the signage and called with all service providers advertising en route. The route was plotted and all tourist service providers were to be visited within a 2km drive of the main WAW route to Slieve League, and driving northwest on the N56 taking in Glen Colmcille and finally to Ardara. A two-phase approach was used within the research. In the first phase the qualitative approach was employed using in-depth interviews and in the second phase the survey technique was used.

Phase one involved (1) one semi-structured interview, (2) one unstructured telephone interview and (3) an observational group discussion. In order to facilitate phase one of the research, the researcher compiled a list of those stakeholders (statutory bodies) involved in the tourism sector, and service providers. Initially, contact was made with Failte Ireland, Teagasc, DCC, and DLDC; key individuals charged with development authority in Ireland/ Donegal. This was to determine the current activity in their sector towards marketing and proposals for future development in the county of Donegal.

Phase 2 as suggested by Czaja and Blair (2005) the process of planning a questionnaire took a strategy in terms of five stages. The focus of the research is on the facts, views or actions of participants in their individual businesses. Formulating research questions are guided by a sense of specificity and focus (Vaus 2002). Elements such as time context, the researcher interest in the issue now and future development are all taken into consideration.

The first step involved the specification of the central research questions:

1. What is the status quo in relation to rural tourism providers?

2. What is currently the projected image formed by the providers?
3. What is currently being provided for tourists in terms of rural tourism facilities?
4. What are the stakeholders doing to develop and support the rural tourism?
5. Is there funding available, and is it evident that service providers have utilised this?

As suggested by Flick (2006) the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods in this case focus on the single process of question/answer format in which the same people complete a questionnaire and are also interviewed. Each question that allows a comment to be recorded can evolve into a free format discussion in the subject area. This generates “rich” or “deep” data for the analysis stage using a constant comparative method (constant going through the data over and over again, then comparing each element with the others). The basic principle according to Thomas (2011:171) that governs the process of constant comparison is that you emerge with themes that capture or summarise the essence of the researcher’s data. Service providers hence forth participants (N =46) were informed of the topic and duration of the survey. Background knowledge of the subject area, cultural and demographic make- up of the proposed participants informed the way in which questions were worded with sensitivity, avoiding inability or unwillingness to answer. Participant confidentiality and anonymity was assured. Participants could withdraw at any time during the survey. There were 50 surveys distributed to those detected along the route, of which, 46 were completed (N = 46). One survey was not returned, and another not completed with an explanation that they were winding up their small enterprise with a comment that in regard to the WAW project “*a few signs are not going to make a whole lot of difference anyway*”. The other two were from hotels, after returning three times were still not available for collection. The surveys retrieved for analysis are not totally representative of all providers; some may be overlooked and other premises were unattended. Given 96% response rate to the survey is indicative of a very positive outcome.

Findings (Wild Atlantic Way Section)

Participants within the survey were predominantly from the main towns or coastal resorts or within a radius of 2km of a town. This included; Rosstown (n=11), taking in Donegal town, Killybegs, (n=8) Kilcar & Carrick (n=8), the Cliffs at Slieve League (n=6), Glencolumbkille (n=5) and Ardara (n=5). All participants were within close proximity of a town or attraction with the exception of those dotted on the WAW route between Donegal and Killybegs. Overwhelmingly participants expressed their concern that there had been a decline in service provision of B&B’s (n=1) “*there used to be 15 B&B’s along this stretch of road, now there are 3 including myself*”. Although hotels were established along the route, some of these were either closed during part of the week or closed altogether since the recession. There was no hotel accommodation/facilities provided between Killybegs and Ardara.

It was noted that within the Donegal hinterland Glamping or “glamorous camping” was becoming very popular, attracting a varied clientele from all over the world. Another example of an innovative enterprise at a beach location was a camping and caravan park; as a direct result of farm diversity in the county. The survey provided an overview of the local service provision, their attitudes and perceptions of the current situation in local tourism from the “rural” perspective and exploration of the WAW route. Furthermore, it also provided an opportunity to discover new innovative business start-ups. Participant’s could also express their views or concerns about businesses in the area. For example, a guesthouse owner (n=1) reported that “*one their guests that required disabled facilities could not access the cliff road because of the closed gate*”.

A positive finding from this research is that the WAW presents an opportunity to develop the “rural” in Donegal; in terms of the economy, employment in the service sector, and branding as “a must see and explore” destination on a packaged tour in Ireland. Attractions such as Slieve League are highlighted to overseas visitors on the route, now documented both in print and online through the government tourism bodies of Ireland. Funding is in place to enhance visitor attractions, previously overlooked in comparison to other counties. The signage on the WAW makes global recognition simplistic for the visitor. The brand signage needs no further interpretation with language. The signs were often in Irish in certain areas (Gaeltacht), or lack of them in Donegal has been an issue for overseas visitors. The feedback has been varied on whom and what has been excluded, or included along the route (Duffy 2014). The overall impact should remain positive. Once the few initial adjustments required in any project start-up are addressed and action taken accordingly, there should be less cause for concern in the community.

Quantitative data revealed the majority of the participants (n=35) provided accommodation only. The participants with both accommodation with an attraction attributed the next highest score (n=4). The majority 70% did not provide an activity or an attraction with accommodation, of the 30% there was a variety of add ons provided in house. 59% of tourist providers operated all year round, 41% summer season only. The number of participants operating four years plus (n=39), however, during interview (n=9) had been in business ranging from 10-41 years. There were (n=7) ranging from start-up to one year in business.

Majority of participants (n=25) were B&B providers. Hostels ranked second (n=5), hotels (n=4). The remainder was a combination of other. The number of visitors accommodated per establishment from 1-7 to in excess of one hundred, the majority in the 7-14 bracket (n=17), 25-50 bracket (n=10), 14-25 bracket (n=9) and in excess of 100 (n=4). The majority of participants 85% did not receive any funding for their business. The remainder 15% were funded by a grant of some description or bank loan.

One comment recorded as follows: (n = 1) talking about the process involved with Leader “*Still shell-shocked, so much red tape and stressful*” [P21]. Comments in general were that there were no grants available, and that something would need to be done to help existing service providers to renovate and update, or to encourage more providers into the business. The general feeling portrayed was that of despondency in the sector regarding funding.

The participants reported that their marketing was utilising multi distribution channels and the majority (n=14) were using their own website/website affiliated with Failte Ireland. The next ranked (n=7), participants using their own website/other. The remainder used a combination of travel website, newspapers and magazines, a booking engine or word of mouth. Surprisingly (n=15) of the total surveyed were not registered with any tourism agency, (n=9) were registered with Failte Ireland alone, and a combination of B&B Ireland or Tourism Ireland, Failte Ireland (n=18) and (n=3) other. The majority of participants 69% did not have any communication with a community group. The remainder 31% had some contact with community group/meetings. The majority of those registered with Failte Ireland reported that they receive contact/ information via the internet.

Comments from participants included (n=1) “*it was much more community orientated 24-25 years ago*”, (n=1) “*there is very little communication*”, (n=1) “*we work very much in isolation*”.

Do you have any concerns about the Wild Atlantic Way, positive or negative please specify?

Themed Comments- 46 Participants	f
Communication "Breakdowns/ lack of consultation"(P4) "More communication" (P7) "Serious lack of information and consultation with providers" (P11). "You see workmen turn up and no idea what to expect in our area" (P16)	4
Positive: "Hopefully attract more visitors" (P30). "It's a great idea we are delighted with it!" (P22) "Positive, can only be" (P12). "Positive, more visitors expected from this" (P6). "Positive, the gathering was a good start" (P10). "Positive, everything helps" (P17)." Positive, but only if facilities in place" (P35). "Positive, more business (P25)". "Hope it makes a difference" (P18). "Great initiative" (P24). "Very positive for tours in groups but unrealistic itinerary for some trying to cover long distances independently" (P39). "It appears to be very positive, we shall see if it improves visitor numbers" (P19).	12
Negative: "Hot spots will be over populated" (P27). "Tours /more coaches for hotels drop off and go" (P32). (Other perceived negative comments in other sections)	2
"No concerns" (P14)." No comment" (P26). "No, but Donegal needs to be more proactive" (P36). "No" (P41). "Neutral on this, another name for the same, (Atlantic Drive, Highland Way)" (P1). "No" (P9). "No real thoughts on it, it's just signs at the moment, no change for us" (P3). "No, not yet" (P45). "No" (P8). "No" (P13).	10
"Positive for visitors, more awareness" (P29). "So many visitors haven't even heard of Slieve League Cliffs" (P38). "Positive on routes visitors don't usually travel on, guests encouraged to venture out"(P33).	3
Forgotten county: "Will we ever be more than the "forgotten county" (P43). "Past and present, Donegal is still the "forgotten county" (P44).	3
"Hate to see Cliffs of Moher happen here (over exposure) in Slieve League, but need an extended season and recognition for places for interest" (P26).	1
No comment at all	1
Signage confusion: "Some places not signed, others in the wrong place or pointing away from places of interest (examples given at Muckross Point, Carrick, Kilcar)" (P13). "Poor info point location at Rossnowlagh" (P5)." No signs on cliff road Rossnowlagh"(P20).	3
Visitors: "Worried not enough visitors outside the hub of Donegal town" (P31). "Worst year yet for tourism in July (2014)" (P2). "Very quiet, worst year since recession for tourists here" (P15). "Economy still very much in recession, Donegal visitor numbers in B&Bs around here very low" (P37). "Concerned lack of visitor numbers here" (P21).	1
Infrastructure "Concerned about the state of the roads on the route, cost of provisions for tourists" (P44).	1
Marketing: "Everything should be catalogued of what we have to offer- No bias to have to be registered" (P21). "List everything we have to offer in Donegal" (P28). "We are not proactive enough here in Donegal" (P23). "We lack overseas marketing, advertising and especially the small business sector" (P34). "Hotels, hotels, big business that is where marketing is targeted" (P40).	5

What could be done in your area to improve facilities for the visitor experience on the WAW?

Themed Comments - 46 Participants	f
<p>Marketing “Marketing and advertising very poor for Donegal” (P15).” We are last on the priority list- “the forgotten county” (P20). “Why has everyone heard of the Cliffs of Moher and not Slieve League?” (P31). “This area needs more outdoor activities- mainly water-based” (P1). “Marketing for more visitors” (P17). “We need more business, so marketing essential” (P25). “Market everyone; there isn’t even a category for my business to register in Ireland” (P13). “Big gap in what we have to offer and visitors could see and the lack of marketing, serious issues” (P39). “Marketing please” (P3). “Nothing is well advertised in this county” (P11).</p>	10
<p>Positive for Donegal-“Positive for Donegal not to have a lot is good” (P6). “Tthe WAW walkers all talking about the route but mainly south of this county” (P18). “Positive that WAW signs are universal to all to read” P24). “There isn’t too much going on, scenery, Irish culture , do not need false like other places” (P12).</p>	4
<p>Slieve League “Slieve League needs proper toilet facilities” (P32). “Tourism info office in Carrick (there was one 2012/2013) but we have been advised this is not funded for 2014, that wouldn’t happen anywhere else” (P38). “No eating facility at entrance to cliffs” (P33). “No restaurants in general area” (P21). “Port a loo (temporary) no hand washing facility” (P19). “No bank machine in Slieve League area, nearest Killybegs” (P14). “No real facilities by DCC at all at a major attraction” (P22).” Need visitors’ bureau/centre” (P26). “People with different abilities had not been considered- disabled access to cliffs” (P2)</p>	9
<p>Activity:“ No local swimming pool, have to go to Ballyshannon, no bowling alley around here or any wet weather facilities”(P23).</p> <p>“More facilities need to be in place and variety of product offering” (P5). “Some visitors complain of containment of animals on roads” (P4). “Need more activity as hill walking popular and there isn’t enough for young people to do” (P35). “More guided tours and better advertisement of these” (P7).</p>	5
<p>Dwell time in Donegal “More needs to be done to stop visitors just using Donegal as a set down point to go South or North” (P8). “Typical visitor journey stay in Donegal town then maybe a trip to Glenveagh or straight to the Causeway Coast, and vice versa to Co. Clare” (P9). “Discovery points not researched well here” (P16).</p>	3
<p>Forgotten county: “Will we ever be more than the “forgotten county” (P27).” Past and present, Donegal is still the “forgotten county” (P36). “Broadband services really poor in this county” (P46).</p>	3
<p>“Hate to see Cliffs of Moher happen here (over exposure) in Slieve League, but need an extended season and recognition for places for interest” (P34). “Over kill of hotspots, encourage visitor distribution” (P10).</p>	2
<p>Grant Aid: “Encouragement to existing businesses to renovate, newbusiness grants to help in first year start-up” (P28). “Make county enterprise more accessible and more proactive and less selective, (who gets what and provide what is needed)” (P37).</p>	2
<p>Infrastructure: “Various beauty/historical spots in area are hampered by Access/improve these to get to see Slieve League area” (P41).” Disabled access to the summit road” (P44). “Terrible signage to Cliffs and embarrassment to the county and its people” (P29). “More signage. No signs onto places like the waterfall- Maghera” (P30). “Desperately need tour guides to enhance visitor experience around the county” (P40). “Better transport services to tourist attractions” (P43). “Facilities at the beaches changing/shower off points and toilets” (P42). “Broken steps for many years in Silver Strand dangerous” (P45).</p>	8

Service Providers

Perhaps the most valuable conclusions can be attributed to the participants of the survey. The researcher was often invited into their homes (place of business) allowing for personal discussion around the subject area and relating to their real world experience. There was a conflict of information in local press stating, visitor numbers were up in the northwest "*Donegal could be experiencing its best tourism season since the downturn began*" (Magee 2014:4,) "*Wild Atlantic boost for Donegal*" (Failte Ireland 2014b). However, the majority of participants did not reflect this and indicated that it had been the quietest year yet. There were clusters of visitor activity in towns and near beaches, with the visits to Slieve League, if they happen to hear of it. The overall consensus from the participants was that Donegal was currently considered a set down point; staying over in Donegal town en route to the Causeway Coast. There was a general feeling of despondency around the future for the services provision, particularly the B&B sector in the sample area. There was recognition of a need for training and support; however participants were not always able to take this up, as it was usually available at peak times around high season. Overall marketing was perceived as being more focused on hotels for group travel and tours.

The survey gave insight to the innovative enterprises that participants are embarking on or add-ons to their existing business (selling plants and doing crafts; spa and holistic treatments; traditional music in the evenings; cookery; card games). Outdoor pursuits with accommodation such as pony trekking and Glamping (glamorous camping) are currently not able to register with an Irish tourism body. There is not a category identified at present for registration, or reduced insurance rates that apply to businesses registered with Failte Ireland. It could be said that this research offers an opportunity to avoid mistakes; overkill, and overdevelopment and excessive exposure that may have occurred in other counties. However, if we get a sudden influx of visitors as a result of the WAW, we could be left with a shortfall in accommodation, attractions, and facilities. The consequence of which tourists may not return, furthermore word of mouth may deter others from visiting. The manner in which the service provision is being presented is not uniform, in as much as some are recognised being registered and publicised, others are not. Therefore a true picture of the product offering is not evident. Currently there is no database for reference, in either a statutory form, or for the visitor; a catalogue of all tourism facilities, in print or online produced by the county itself.

Conclusion

It is clear that Donegal has the "geography" of a rural area and it can be accepted that the main land base employment is in agriculture and tourism. There is recognition that agri- tourism is a combined word for the alignment of agriculture with tourism. Development of the sector would compliment established enterprises in Donegal and provide encouragement for others to be entrepreneurial, regenerating existing but non-utilised resources (such as farm building and land). As suggested by Pine and Gilmore (2011) there should be a continued focus on the development of the consumer experience; thus in this case employing farming or agri-tourism based initiatives. Pine and Gilmore (2011) make clear, that their suggestions are salient for the current economic times within a rural regional area. The WAW is an exciting initiative that gave the researcher an opportunity to ascertain what is currently on offer for the discerning traveller as identified in market segmentation (Failte Ireland 2014i). It is suffice to accept that this research met with its objectives it set out to accomplish and provides a basis for further research in the future. Scope for research into rural tourism is vast and varied, for it spans geographical, environmental, marketing, economics, management and planning, political and sociological aspects. Rural tourism stands alone as a subject in its own right.

Collaboration

The recommendations are as follows:

- Integrated model adoption- collaboration of all agencies (Failte Ireland, Tourism Ireland, DCC, Teagasc, DLDC, Coillte and associated enterprise agencies) and an equal representation of the tourism business stakeholders. Model of Integrated Rural Tourism and Links with Strategic Fit (Cawley and Gillmor 2008).
- A statistical database of **all** tourism providers in the county (Henegan 2002).
- Devising guidelines for innovative enterprises to meet registration standards.
- Designing training courses (certificated) open for **all** service providers in conjunction with the local tourism college.
- Grant Aid to for consultation waiver of registration fee for 1st year (example B&B).
- Leader application for funding process to be revised and strict timeline for project completion to alleviate red tape and financial hardship.
- Extension of the Social Farming Scheme to include accommodation/activities for people of all abilities in terms of equality in tourism opportunities.
- Suggest a circular return route that joins the WAW Letterkenny to Donegal Town or vice versa to encourage dwell time in the county as package tour in itself.

The aim of this research was to identify what tourist service provision was available to visitors in the sample area on the WAW. More critically, the research aimed to increase awareness of the impact of the WAW in relation to the sample area. With this in mind, how a given key signature point, Slieve League section of WAW could be researched and transferrable to the other two signature points in Donegal (Fanad Head, Malin Head). There is little knowledge of the perceptions of service providers. This research considers their views as key stakeholders in the tourism product offering, that are paramount when planning future rural marketing and development.

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