

Co-operatives can play a Constructive Role in the Management of Environmentally Designated Commonages

Case Study Area – Clifden Region and a Segment of a Bog Complex



Research Project

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Co-operatives can play a Constructive role in the Management of Environmentally Designated Commonages

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Abstract

The rationale of this research was to establish the appropriateness of co-operatives in addressing environmental management of commonages. The objectives are to establish the suitability of co-operatives embracing all stakeholders including farmers, the State and beneficial interests; for example tourism, alternative energy and EU citizens. In addition, to discover if the resources and demographics make the current programme practicable. The research has also tried to identify the lack of understanding that currently exists in the general populace in relation to the importance of commonages as one of our potential national resources.

The research is primarily based on recent literature because commonage has only come to national prominence since the imposition of EU Directives. This commenced in 1992 and 'was transposed into Irish law in the European Union (Natural Habitats) Regulations, 1997 as amended in 1998 and 2005' (NPW, 2010). However extracts in relation to commonage management from the past are also included. It also focuses on the need to address productive farming in terms other than food, for example tourism/recreation and alternative energy.

The assessment survey embraces a combination of qualitative and quantitative research. This includes externalities but also has the opinions of local residents, especially in relation to the management and socio-economic benefits. This is to address the central theme of Robert Chambers (1983) 'that rural deficiency is often unseen and misrepresented by outsiders'.

This research was stimulated from Co-operative and Social Enterprise and more importantly by its focus on developing/expanding 'new types of co-operatives/social enterprises to meet the changing needs of our own communities'

What has the research done - This research clearly supports the hypothesis that 'new types of co-operatives/social enterprises' can be developed 'to meet the changing needs of our own communities' and it also includes practical examples to support the theory. It also potentially positively fills the void suggested by Harris, (2006:4) in Co-operative Social Responsibility that - 'It is fair to note that the environment is conspicuously absent from the Co-op Principles, suggesting that co-ops do not have a clear advantage for managing or enhancing their environmental bottom line'. It also discovered that lack of positive State action/engagement is having a serious impact on sustainability in designated areas.

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Abbreviations

AEOS	Agri-Environment Options Scheme
Co-op/s	Co-operative/s
CSO	Central Statistical Office
DEDs	District Electoral Divisions
ESA/s	Environmental Special Area/s
EU	European Union
GAEC	Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition
National Heritage Area/s	NHA/S
NPW	National Parks and Wildlife
SAC	Special Areas of Conservation
REPS	Rural Environmental Protection Scheme
SPA/s	Special Protection Area/s
ICOS	Irish Co-operative Organisation Society
UK	United Kingdom

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Introduction

It is well documented that Co-operatives (Co-ops) have played a major role in the development of the Dairy/Food Business/Industry in Ireland for over 100 years. This evolved by continuous expansion/development, first to promote/export to the United Kingdom (UK) market and later the European Union (EU) market and more recently the world market. In Ireland the driving factor behind the establishment of co-ops was their creation in the dairy sector, 'originally the vision of William Thompson' (Ward, &Brisco, 2005:24) but brought to the forefront by Horace Plunkett in the late 1800s and early 1900s (ICOS, 2012). It could be argued that the internal factors in creating dairy co-ops were not because of a recession/poverty. But as a management structure for marketing of agricultural produce, which had prime export potential at that time. The main aim which was later incorporated in the Plunked Foundation was 'Better farming, better business, better living' (ICOS, 2012). The external driving factors are primarily developed and led by the dairy product sector in response to competition on the World market. This is mainly achieved, by co-ops/associates and are currently exporting food/drink world wide – UK, 41 per cent (%), rest of Europe 34% and Rest of the World 25 % (Bord BIA, 2012).

Although Ireland is leading the way in co-op development, it is primarily confined to the food productive agricultural sector, - 'Excluding credit union activity, the agricultural sector (when taken together as agricultural, farm relief and fishing societies) accounted for 98 percent (%)of total turnover of all co-operatives registered with the RFS in 2005' (Forfas 2007:18). Its membership based on the same report was just six percent of the total population (this in many cases would include people who are members of more than one co-op and in reality would be even lower). Some co-ops are also hybrid, incorporating co-ops and private limited companies.

There is very little emphasis on sectoral elements of the economy for example health, environment and tourism which are of major importance in Ireland's economy today.

However, this is not surprising as the environment is not even mentioned in the Co-op Principles which are the foundation on which they are built on; this is referred to by Harris, (2006:4) in Co – operative Social Responsibility - 'It is fair to note that the environment is conspicuously absent from the Co-op Principles, suggesting that co-ops do not have a clear advantage for managing or enhancing their environmental bottom line'.

The landscape environment is a priority in both Europe and Ireland today. The European Union (EU) policy of protecting the environment is incorporated in all rural development policy, (2006/144/EC), this is primarily achieved through programmes but in some instances it is imposed without consultation. One of the tools used are EU Directives. The response to the directives in Ireland has primarily been negative by land owners, especially to EU Directive 92/43/EEC (1992) as it is perceived as a top down initiative. There was widespread resentment at its implementation which was expressed at public meetings and it was not unusual to hear the repetition of Michael Davitt's words 'Can a more eloquent denunciation of an accursed land code be found than what is witnessed here in this depopulated district' from a meeting in Mayo (Straide) when he led the Land League (MacManus, 2005:633). However even if there were no EU directives the management of the commons is still a necessity; to maintain them in good environmental condition.

The development of a pilot scheme in the Burren, (Co Clare) an area which is a prime tourist attraction has added a new dimension to co-op conservation management. This is the development of a co-op alliance between Farmers, Department of Agriculture and National Parks and Wildlife (NPW). The Burren is described as 'One of the most important and best-known landscapes in Europe due to the wealth and diversity of its natural and cultural heritage (Burren Life, 2010).

This research mainly focuses on just one part of the multiple commonages in the Clifden Region of Connemara. An area that is primarily dependent on tourism. The study area is a large segment of a bog complex. However, the thesis will also include references in relation to other commonages/practices. Its main focus will be on land and tourism/recreational management. While also highlighting additional benefits that a co-operative structure can potentially deliver to commonage farmers.

The main objective of this research:

- (A) To establish the suitability of co-op management for a Special Area of Conservation (SAC).
- (B) Develop an understanding of the needs/motivations of the (SAC) farmers.
- (C) Do the current existing/ proposed structures from the Irish State pertain to a demographic sustainable populace and management (SAC region)

Structure of the Thesis

Section: 1 What is the Rationale for the Research

This section deals with the rationale for the research. It also gives a definition of commonage and the Special Area of Conservation (SAC) designation. The impacts of the directives on demographic sustainability are also discussed.

Section: 2 Literature Review

This segment deals with the Literature Review; it will commence with a brief introduction to the evolution of commonages, the government response and commonage management in general. This will be followed by the main literature under the heading, literature relating to the overall theme of management. This will be achieved by first over viewing/reviewing some of the literature that relates in general, followed by a more specific literature relating to the research question and finally reviewing a small number of researchers that directly relate to the subject matter. This will be followed by focussing on selected literature and analysing same in relation to the overall governance of commonages. Which will be achieved by concentrating on the following three perspectives - A: To establish the suitability of co-op management for a Special Area of Conservation (SAC), B: Develop an understanding of the needs/motivations of the farmers, C: Do the current existing/ proposed structures from the Irish State pertain to a demographic sustainable populace and management?

The literature will encompass segments from within and external to Ireland. It will also include some of the current ongoing debates.

Section: 3 Case Study Area

This part focuses on the case study area and will give an overview of the region being analysed. It commences by defining the bog complex and then deals with the tourism profile and dependence on tourism. The population trends deals with the populace fluctuation that has occurred over the past century and also contrasts some of the recent findings with Galway County/City and the Irish State, which are based on Central Statistical data. The number of farmers and its contradictions because of pluriactivity are based on local research plus relative State collected data. The education element is assessed by selecting data from a

sample of the fourteen District Electoral Divisions (DEDs) which the area encompasses; first assessing them individually, then collectively and contrasting the sample with the regional and national picture. The infrastructure/services draws attention to the main network and services within the area. The section is completed by a short summation.

Section 4: Methodology

This section deals with the method applied in the research; it commences with an introduction. It also includes five additional headings - Research Approach, How was Data Collected and Analysed, Ethics, Utility of the research and Limitations of research.

Section 5: Analysis of Case Study

This section focuses on the findings and analysing the key responses that relate to research questions; first dealing with the case studies, followed by the tourism/recreational questionnaire. It will also deliver a number of stats in figure form.

Section 6: Discussion on Findings

This segment gives a summary of the overall research findings. It also places an emphasis on the findings in the recommendations. It also supports and justifies the research notwithstanding that it appears it was not done before at least embracing a formal new co-op concept.

Section 7: Conclusion

Section 1:

1.1: What is the Rationale for the Research?

The availability and enjoyment of the countryside is perceived by many as an absolute right, and in many cases would not be aware that the vast majority of especially the land is privately owned. This land in many cases is individually owned but the vast amount of the designated is comprised of multiple owners. This incorporates areas of special interest, in a format described as commonage. For time immemorial these commonages have been maintained by the custodians of the environment (farmers). In the past this was delivered by the interactive cooperation - 'Ireland has a long history of collective action originating in the 'meitheal system' of informal co-operation between farmers' (O'Shaughnessy, 2000:94). But the changing demographic environment has 'Increased affluence, mobility and changing values have also brought new demands with respect to landscape, conservation, heritage and recreation' (Buckley, Hynes, Rensburg, 2006), this has led to the current problem of mismanagement which is perceived by many as destroying part of Ireland's national heritage.

Designated commonages are of very important environmental value delivering significant benefits not only to traditional farmers but to people in general; in commonage areas, policy makers are recognising the value of open-air outdoor recreation as a means of supporting rural incomes. These areas also face significant challenges to their social/economic viability because of rural depopulation and developing an ageing populace because of the flight from the areas. 'Commonage land needs targeted rural development measures to sustain this valuable resource and these need to be drawn up in consultation with all stakeholders' (Moran, 2013).

Tourism is one of Ireland's main potential growth areas and its benefits entwine and sustain sections of both urban and rural dwellers. Accordingly the enchantment of SAC needs protective management. The vast majority of SACs in Ireland are located in remote coastland and mountainous districts, delivering exceptional recreation locations for 'open air activities, including hill-walking, mountaineering, mountain biking, surfing and horse riding' (Phillips and Tubridy, 1994; Nugent, 1996; Dunne and O'Connell, 2000). This is now thought to have important economic benefits for promoting rural tourism.

The case study area selected is in west Connemara, an area that is almost totally dependent on tourism either directly or indirectly and the tourism economic returns are at the behest of a well maintained and accessible environment. There is very little research carried out in relation to co-op management encompassing all beneficial stakeholders, but this is now paramount to comply with EU designation, this was cited by Minister Coveny in the Dail (2013) when he said in relation to commonage management -

*Commonage lands form an important part of the farming enterprises of many farmers, particularly along the West Coast. They also form an important part of the local environment from the point of view of bio-diversity, wildlife, amenities and economic returns e.g. tourism. It is my stated aim that management will be achieved by working with the farmers directly managing the lands including relevant State Agencies, farming organisations and all other interested stakeholders. The Minister acknowledged that it would not be an easy task, but it was achievable if everyone worked in a **co-operative** basis.*

He also emphasised the necessity in relation in complying with Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition (GAEC) and the potential risk of financial corrections being imposed by EU Commission.

In addition there is also the potential of an inclusive co-op alliance in delivering alternative energy. For example the experience of the Samsø Island Denmark in delivering this service in a designated area by encompassing collectively, co-operatives and private enterprise (Gipe, 2006).

1.2: What are Commonages?

Commonage is land owned collectively or by one person over which others have rights exercised in common with other individuals, which may include inter alia pasturage/rights to graze, turbary and estover/right to take timber such as firewood (Aglionby et al 2010). It also may include fishing and shooting rights in many instances which are usually owned by third parties. In Ireland, this land is referred to as commonage and is subject to land owned in common but grazed collectively by shareholders. The grazing right in theory is proportionate to the share of the land owned.

Each tenant holds an undivided share or shares in the property and is collectively responsible for its management and also any potential liability that may occur. Commonage is not physically divided so no one person owns any particular part of the property (but tenants have the right to divide if they so wish). In effect **it is private property** and is communally owned and operated and **‘third parties must treat the co-owners as a single unit for transactions in respect of the land’** (Pearce and Mee, 2000:3). However, in Ireland tenants may sell/lease their individual rights.

‘Commonage in Ireland covers 426,124 hectares and involves about 11,837 Farmers’ (Bleasdale et al, 1995:1). This is 8.5% of the total utilised agricultural area in 2010 (CSO, 2012). However, Mayo, Donegal, Kerry and Galway combined have an average of 25% commonage of eligible farm land. The vast amount of farmers would have small shares attached to their farms; in many cases just a few hectares. Historically, Irish tenants with very small holdings were given commonage grazing rights by the Landlords, later by the Congested District Boards (UK) and finally by the Irish Land Commission (Irish State from 1922). Commonage land is generally not enclosed on which two or more farmers share ownership or ‘pasture rights held in common’ (Lyall, 2000:3). Traditionally, economic activities on commonages include extensive cattle and sheep grazing and hunting (Bleasdale et al, 1995; Butler, 2000:1).

1.3: What are Special areas of Conservation (SAC)?

Special Areas of Conservation are lands and sea beds designated by the European Union and the Irish State, also known as the Directive 92/43/EEC (1992), on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora. The vast majority of sites are in the countryside, although a few reach into town and city landscapes, for example Dublin Bay and Cork Harbour. Their main aims are to protect wildlife conservation which is considered important on a European and Irish level. The SACs are entwined with National Heritage Areas (NHAs) and Special Protection Area/s (SPAs) (NPW, 2010).

The SACs were preceded by Environmental Sensitive Areas (ESAs) of which there were two pilot areas, Slieve Bloom Mountains in County Laois and Slyne Head Peninsula (Ballyconneely) in Connemara. The ESAs were the basis for the SACs and were established in 1987 (Department of Agriculture 1987)

The legal basis on which they are designated is under the EU Habitats Directive which was transposed into Irish law in the European Union (Natural Habitats) Regulations, 1997 as amended in 1998 and 2005 (NPW, 2010). The Directive lists certain habitats and species that must be protected within SACs. Irish habitats include raised bogs, blanket bogs, turloughs, sand dunes, machair (flat sandy plains on the north and west coasts), heaths, lakes, rivers, woodlands, estuaries and sea inlets. Some of the 25 Irish species which must be afforded protection include Salmon, Otter, Freshwater Pearl Mussel, Bottlenose Dolphin and Killarney Fern. To date, Ireland has transmitted 381 sites to the European Commission as candidate SAC (National Botanic Gardens, 2012). A full list of the Irish habitats designations and species covered by the Directive are available, nationally from the National Parks and Wildlife, and at local offices where maps are also available for inspection. The information is also available on line www.npws.ie.

The selected areas chosen as SAC in Ireland cover an area of approximately 13,500 square kilometres. Roughly 53% is land, the remainder being marine or large lakes. This designation area is constantly changing as land is regularly being included and occasionally excluded. Across the EU, over 12,600 sites have been identified and proposed, covering 420,000 sq. km. of land and sea, an area the size of Germany (NPW, 2013). The SAC land area in Ireland is just less than the land area of County Cork.

The directive protection is implemented by Duchas NPW who is responsible for Ireland's natural and built heritage. The only rationalisation for damaging a priority site is consideration relating to human and public safety. If a site is damaged Duchas (NPW) has the power to seek an injunction to stop works or order the land owners to restore the site to its original state. Duchas (NPW) has wide spread powers in relation to designated property, for example, to enter on to private designated land without the permission or prior consent of the owners (Ireland's National Conservation Strategy (no date)).

In SACs certain activities or operations that might be damaging, can only be carried out with the permission of the Minister for the Environment Heritage and Local Government. These are called Notifiable Actions and vary depending on the type of habitat that is present on the site. Landowners are sent copies of the Notifiable Actions that are relevant to their lands. The main headings are Maritime Habitats, Grassland, Blanket Bogs and Heaths, Raised Bogs and Fens, Woodlands, Wetlands, and Artificial Habitats (NPW 2010). The activities listed in

the Notifiable Actions may not in some instances be prohibited but require the landowner/occupier to consult (in practice with the local Conservation Ranger) in advance. Notifiable Actions do not apply where a licence or permission is needed from a planning authority (e.g. planning permission) or another Minister has responsibility (e.g. a fishing licence or planning permission) or to activities covered in a REPS or NPWS farm plan.

The Government is committed, as part of the social partnership process, to the payment of a 'fair and proper level of compensation to landowners and users who have lands proposed for designation as a NHA, SAC or SPA' (NPW 2010). This is achieved by extra payments in farm schemes for example the REPS, NPWS and more recently by the Agri-Environment Options Scheme (AEOS). A landowner may also seek compensation for actual losses incurred as a result of having land included in a NHA, candidate SAC or SPA. Should the applicant be dissatisfied with a compensation that is made, the case may be referred to an independent arbitrator who will review the matter and make a final decision. Compensation is also available for Aquaculture losses (NPW, 2010).

Where a proposed SAC/NHA/SPA designation prevents the landowner from carrying out an activity or development the compensation due will exclude any payments that have been attracted under grant schemes (other than headage or premia payments). (Statistical data in this paragraph attained from National Parks and Wild Life (2010) and Irelands National Conservation Strategy (no date).

1.4: How has the Directives impinged on Demographic Sustainability?

The introduction of SACs in Ireland led to widespread protests with land owners (farmers) believing that their privacy and ownership was impinged. Numerous protest meetings were held especially along the western seaboard where the vast majority of SACs are situated. The main objections were based on the method of its implementation. They were implemented without any consultation with land owners. Traditional rights enjoyed by property owners were prohibited, for example, turf cutting is curtailed- 'Turf war could escalate as 28 more bogs may see cutting ban' and also farming practices (Tierney, 2012). The fear factor of prohibiting turf cutting, on especially the elderly is having a serious impact on the social well being.

Since 1997 approximately 135,140 ha of active blanket bog have been proposed as Candidate Areas of SAC in Ireland. These proposed SAC Blanket Bog sites are located mainly along the Atlantic Seaboard counties of Ireland, especially Counties Mayo and Galway (Coillte, 2006/7). The enforced 'sheep scrapage scheme' of early 1999 caused serious problems, 'flock owners with ewes in lamb for the coming season, and who were causing no overgrazing, were told to slaughter 30% of their flock and have it done within weeks just because they happened to live in an area'(Shirley, 1999). The problem is continuous and ongoing – 'The National Parks and Wildlife Service will host a public meeting in Maam Cross tomorrow (2008) to further discuss the proposed destocking of sheep on Connemara mountains'. The controversial legislation will mean farmers will have to remove sheep from the Connemara Mountains for five months of the year (Galway Bay FM, 2008). The potential development of the next generation is being essentially prohibited by the problems with planning permission. Because of planning difficulty, large numbers are now settling outside of the areas. There is also an expense for planning applications as an environmental impact report is mandatory.

In an attempt to deal with equality, the state developed a much heralded appeal body which was put in place for land owners to apply for the removal of all or part of designated property (Gavin, 2011). This body which comprised farming and environmental interests with an independent chairman has recently been abolished. This now means that a land owner that may have all lands/farm designated and will have no provision to apply to have any part of it removed. The necessity would usually arise when an application for planning permission was necessary to build a second family residence.

It is well documented that management of the SACs by Duchas regulations, which were comprised without consultation with farmers has led to serious problems. The policy of removing too much stock has led to overgrowth and stagnation of small plant life. It has also led to numerous mountain fires, which cause serious problems to fauna and flora. The overgrowth in the Burren has led to a situation where mechanical diggers were employed to try and dig/remove scrub growth. This was an area that was maintained by the husbandry of the inhabitants for centuries, 'we must appreciate that the Burren has been shaped, not just by natural resources but by countless generations of farmers as well' (Burren Life Project, 2010).

Section 2:

Literature Review

Introduction

Commonage farming and management is entwined in farming practices for centuries; however, it could be argued that that in Ireland it affects only a small but important segment. Based on CSO, (2012) it is 8.5% of the total utilised agricultural area in 2010. The current focus on developing our national resources in especially tourism has placed a new emphasis on commonage lands, because the vast majority is situated in high amenity designated areas. The importance of especially designated commonage is well documented in delivering significant benefits not only to traditional farmers but to people in general, in terms of ‘recreation activities and landscape value’. The importance of commonages for recreational purposes is also evident in a survey carried out in Roundstone which discovered that 86 % visited the site for access to the beach, while 63 % referred to the scenic view as an important factor. Other important factors highlighted were pathways, the unspoilt environment, good waves/wind for water-sports and the surrounding vegetation (Hynes et al, (2007:16).

In the past informal co-op supervision was the foundation of commonage management and farming in general but this no longer prevails in the current social climate. The changing demographic environment of ‘Increased affluence, mobility and changing values has also brought new demands with respect to landscape, conservation, heritage and recreation’ (Buckley et al, 2006). These areas also face significant challenges to their social/economic viability because of rural depopulation and developing an ageing populace because of the flight from the areas. ‘Commonage land needs targeted rural development measures to sustain this valuable resource and these need to be drawn up in consultation with all stakeholders’ this is stated by Moran (2013) after a fact finding mission in the UK.

It is acknowledged by the Irish State that the current management structures have failed and a new formalised structure is essential. A pilot scheme currently in place in the Burren is a new innovation. However, it does not deal with the husbandry/management and the farm traits of especially sheep flocks.

The main aim of this section is to present the main attainable literature in relation to the research question. The topic discussed dates back for time immemorial; however, there is very little literature available from the distant past as the topic only developed as an issue

within the past twenty years. So there are very few journals relating to the topic but there are research papers available from universities and also theses which were assessed by universities; this will be the main basis for the literature review. However, it will also include State agency reports; therefore in effect the literature is primarily academic based. However, literature from non academic sources is also used in the thesis; this is to give the reader a broader overview of the necessity for the research.

The literature will be based on an overall review of literature relating to the research question and based on the primary theme of - Co-operatives can play a Constructive Role in the Management of Environmentally Designated Commonages Areas. This will be achieved by first concentrating on an overview of the literature that relates in general, in addition to literature already included in the thesis. **This will be followed by a more specific review, relating to the research question and completed by reviewing five academically accredited researches; that directly relate to the subject matter. The five will have academic research headings.**

This section will commence with a brief introduction to the evolution of commonages, the government response and commonage management. This will be followed by the main academic literature under the heading 'Literature relating to the overall Theme of Future Management. This section will conclude with an overall analysis based on the research perspectives which will be classified as A, B and C; It will also attempt to identify gaps in the literature, relevant to the research question/s.

2.1: The Evolution of Commonages

Common land or sometimes referred as commonage dates back for centuries and in effect there is no definite date of its origin. It is commonly believed that it evolved from tribal times when all land was open and tribes individually managed their herds/flocks on pasture. In latter day Ireland it is believed that common land evolved from the British feudal system – 'under the feudal system, all land was owned directly or indirectly by the king. He granted use of these lands to his subjects in return for the rendering of military or other services' (Ting et al, nd:4).

In Scotland it is believed the system evolved from Crown Commons where lands were held directly by the Crown. Believing their origin stemmed from Royal Hunting Forests, these were 'areas within those forests where traditional communal use existed, having predated the establishment of the forests', a structure even after the forests ceased to exist broke during the medieval time. It is believed that Crown Commons were the only authentic common land in the Scottish region all other land referred to as 'common is private property owned by people who derive their interest from other property they own' (Callander, 2003:7).

The culture of common property and property rights are prevalent in most European countries although now at a reduced level, for example in Italy most common land structures were established in the Middle Ages, the eleventh to the fourteenth century. This includes common ownership/rights which were known as common property rights. However, they were later considered an obstacle to modern development and were dissolved by law in the nineteenth century based on the theory of DeMontvert (1789:52) which had extended throughout Europe, by the progressive individuals that all 'remnants of ancient habits and traditions had to be eliminated, because only the complete, direct and individual ownership of the land could allow both its improvement and the introduction of innovations'.

In Africa the tribal common system evolved into a formalised structure when villages were established during the early to mid-1800s and residential sites in such areas were allocated and transferred in ownership. Traditionally the commonage provided a place for town residents to keep their 'transport animals, milking cows, animals for slaughter and butcher's stock. Animals being moved between grazing lands could depasture on the commonage' (Anderson & Pienaar, 2003:3) Common ground is always owned by the state or private individuals, notwithstanding that it may incorporate various legal structures. There is a popular misunderstanding that all commonage in Ireland is public goods and available for the general public to use as they so wish. This legal right was established as farmers in general are successors in title to the lord of the manors, having acquired the property directly or bequeathed to, by the Irish State.

2.2: The Irish Government response to Commonage Land

The Irish Government had very little input in respect of commonages as it merely carried on with the old system when the new state was founded, in reality the old state agency - The Congested Districts Board was given a new name - The Land Commission. It was 1939 before a new Land Act gave statute power to compulsory divide commonages. Although there was a positive response by many farmers to the new act, the Land Commission rarely used its vested power to sub-divide commonages. In reality they only assisted tenants to sub-divide when there was unanimity by all, which was a rare occurrence. So the Land Commission slogan referred in their annual report of 1971/72, 'The Irish Land Commission are anxious to encourage division and development of commonages and offer advice and in certain cases practical assistance to owners who want their commonage divided' (Land Commission, 1971/72:48) was of little benefit to farmers. However, the author is aware of tenants that bucked the trend and organised commonage sub-divisions of their own accord.

The Irish State is no longer actively involved in commonage sub-division; this is referred to by the then Junior Minister at Agriculture Eamon O'Cuiv (1998) when he said his Department had withdrawn from new commonage partition activity.

The emphasis on commonage returned again when Ireland 'joined the EU in 1973' (Business 2000) when grant aid was established for poor land areas which was primarily the hill/mountain regions of the west coast. Over the years this area has expanded, for example all of Connacht is currently included. The payment is currently referred to as Area Based Payment. At inception and currently this payment was/is not exclusively paid on commonage although commonage land is eligible. The emphasis on grant aid based on stock numbers continued through to the 1990s unabated and was of financial benefit to farmers. However, the massive increase of stock especially on the mountain commonages was having serious environmental affect. This led to the intervention of the EU in relation to protection of these special areas which were primarily commonage land. This was achieved by designation under the EU Habitats Directive which 'was transposed into Irish law in the European Union (Natural Habitats) Regulations, 1997 as amended in 1998 and 2005' (NPW, 2010). The

Directive lists certain habitats and species that must be protected within SACs. This directive meant instant culling of sheep on the commons and a reduction in sheep numbers.

The Irish State through its agencies has delivered environmental schemes commencing with the Environmental Sensitive Scheme (ESA) which was a pilot scheme in the Slieve Bloom (Laois) and Slyne Head Peninsula in Ballyconneely in 1986/7 but the scheme had no support built in for commonage. Only two farmers joined the scheme in the Slyne Head area including the author. There are no public records in relation to the scheme in the public domain. This was followed by the REPS schemes from 1994, which included four schemes, each of five years duration, which are now almost complete (REPS, 2014). A new scheme to replace the REPS is currently in place but focuses primarily on designated land; this is referred as the AEOS scheme (AEOS, 2014). These schemes are not exclusive for the commons but additional funds were paid through the REPS schemes for designated commonage. A few additional schemes were also put in place which were/are administered by the NPW. The current proposals from the department of Agriculture are all farmers would develop a grazing regime to maintain sustainable grazing levels. This would entail some farmers putting as few as five sheep on the commonage. So in effect is not practicable and has been rejected by farmer representatives. Although the recreational benefits to tourism are well documented by academic researchers, the Irish State has not addressed this as of now. Indeed it's the opposite as a prominent actor from the NPW said in response to a preliminary question by the author in relation to same- 'We have no interest in the potential tourism benefits that designated land/commonage may generate'.

2.3: History of Commonage Management

Since time immemorial it is commonly believed the management of the commons and or commonage was managed by farmers commencing with the roaming tribes. This system evolved over time with a continuous belief by many that communal type farming was complex and each farmer would prefer to manage his grazing right as a separate enclosed area. This belief is well supported by the various 'enclosure acts' introduced worldwide and the continuous reduction in common land globally. It is well documented that in 1235 the Statute of Merton established that where there was a surplus of land beyond the grazing needs of the commoners it could be enclosed and so remove rights of common from open land. The Commons Act of 1285, also known as the statute of Westminster the second

reaffirmed the landowners' right to fence off surplus common land beyond what was required to meet the commoners' needs and turn it to more profitable agricultural use. This was finally regulated under the Law of Commons Amendment Act of 1893 (Clark&Clark 2001). A somewhat similar theme evolved in Italy when there was a continuous partition enclosure of common land to provide better management and the management in general. This is referred to by Cencelli (1920) when he said that all territories under common property had to be registered and that a formal statute had to be written, with clear definition of purposes and of managerial rules. This process was ongoing with a continuous emphasis of commonage reduction to deliver better management. The Italian Government continually legislated to reduce the expansion of communal property which they believed stimulated fragmentation (Guidetti and Stahl, 1976:52).

The Industrial Revolution also impacted on commonage management because the invention of machinery and the development of urban centres required a change to cater for the city/town inhabitants. The Industrial Revolution came at a time of agricultural change as well as industrial invention. There were significant land management changes which led to improved productivity. The most documented being the enclosure movement of the 1700s across Europe and the UK. This consolidated the tiny, inefficient parcels of feudal land into larger, more productive plots. In the UK, for example, about 7,000,000 acres of land were enclosed between 1760 and 1845; these were made more productive by mixed agriculture, Ting, Williamson, Grant, Parker, (nd:5). However, the theory of commonage partition because of the Industrial Revolution is also considered by Clark&Clarke (2001:24), and they argue that it arose in part because of the great increase in the English population after 1760. Which drove up the value of land; even to this day common land is much more valuable when partitioned?

The landlord management of Commonage in Ireland was administered by the landlords through their 'Herdsman' who generally were based in a central location on the common and occupied a small cottage. The ruins of which are prevalent to this day, usually surrounded by a few acres of cultivated land which is still clearly visible in the mountain/hill regions. Although today usually covered with wild fern or the common rush plant. The herdsman in effect controlled the management of the commonages by ensuring that the landlord's tenants adhered to a strict regime of stock management. This involved a quota for each tenant and various forms of calculation, the measurement usually involved a stock unit commonly

referred as a collop. For example a cow was one collop and cattle two years of age likewise, a horse one and a half and six sheep equalled one collop. The cow and the breeding horse were also allowed the inclusion of their offspring to maximum of six months. The age of the animal was determined by the herdsman examining their teeth before grazing commenced. This was necessary because the tenant paid an annual fee based on the number of collop he grazed on the common – there was only one possible exemption that was for the donkey which the ‘good landlords’ did not charge a fee for. The collop was based on the amount of natural fodder on the common and the maximum number of adult cattle or equivalents it could potentially sustain.

The tenants used sections of the commonage to bring their animals, which travelled along routes that were/are commonly referred to as ‘cow paths’. This also involved the ‘mini hut’ which was usually about one meter square with an open front and a ‘sedge’ roof or occasionally a crevice in the rocks (remnants are also visible to this day). This is where the tenant or more likely one of the children spent the day/s minding the stock. This system of management slowly came to an end with the establishment of the Congested District Boards and later the Land Commission over a century ago; however, the system for a few prevailed until the latter part of the nineteenth century. Although the landlord management system is only recently extinguished and in many cases just one generation removed from actual practice, it is difficult to find written reference to its existence. Even the author has a limited experience of time spent in the ‘mini hut’. However, Jones (1995) refers to the collop as – ‘a ‘band’ or ‘collop’ provided tenants with grazing rights for a set number of livestock for a set period of time’. The collop is also addressed by Kramm et al (nd) in *Modelling the Impact of Land use in Agriculture, Biodiversity and social economic development of the Irish Upland Commons*.

The various enclosure acts and some commonage owner’s initiatives have reduced the amount of commonage lands worldwide. It could be argued that primarily all the high quality farm land has been partitioned and the common land still prevalent is referred to as marginal land. In Ireland this is primarily the mountainous regions with a small amount of beach grassland. This land has now reached a crisis point in management because of the depopulation of the referred regions and the reduction in active farmers (at an age) to manage the ‘open’ farming system that prevails. The EU directives are in theory a management plan but there is no practical policy for implementation. However, if Ireland does not take action

to manage the designated commonages it will have a detrimental effect on the environment and by extension tourism. There will also be monetary penalties from the EU which the country has already faced in other environmental mismanagement. As already referred to in the rationale for this research, the Minister for Agriculture has acknowledged that commonage management 'would not be an easy task but it was achievable if everyone worked in a **co-operative** basis.

2.4: In-depth Literature relating to the overall Theme of Management

Traditionally the main emphasis on common land management focused on the agriculture element but this slowly evolved to encompass the broad environment. This has led to a greater challenge to manage the overall amenities/heritage and plant life. It has also led to an increased interest and demand for land based recreational amenities. This by extension has seen 'The rise of conflict between landowners and recreationalists (particularly walkers) in the Republic of Ireland' (Buckley, 2008). This problem is also discussed by Ostrom (2012) in relation to potential common pool resources, she suggests that all common pool resources suffer, because in many instances there is no overall responsibility and no individual will have the incentive to conserve. She also emphasised that attempts to privatise or government ownership can have disastrous effects. However, Hardin (1968) believes the only way is to have an external body impose a management structure. The Bere Island Conservation Plan proposes that the best way to manage a common pool resource is through the co-operative approach; in this case the Island heritage incorporating farming interests. Di Falco & van Rensburg (nd) suggest that co-operative management 'has a positive and important impact on commonage conservation'. The lack of collective management is also referred to by Bleasdale, (1995) in relation to the effects of over grazing including impacts on the disappearance of heath, and reduced habitat for rare species. It also impacts on the decline in grassland productivity due to replacement by less productive grasses and the loss of peat. The damage by mechanical cutting of turbary has resulted in a 47% loss of peatland habitats in Ireland (Irish Peatland Conservation Council); this also reinforces the need for a collective management to regulate same.

The new demands on conservation, heritage maintenance is discussed by Hynes et al, (2007) in relation to increased affluence, mobility, ageing of the population and changing values. The increased demand and interest in country pursuits, has also exposed management

problems in relation to public access. This has generated considerable debate in relation to the issue in Ireland over recent years (Irish Department of Agriculture and Food, 2004).

This study conveys the findings of an empirical investigation into the recreational use of low land commonage in the west of Ireland. There is also extensive literature on the exploitation and valuation of common pool resources based on their extractive use by Hardin, (1968); Bromley, (1991) and Ostrom, (2000).

The promotion of tourism has also generated additional management problems in other parts of the world. For example in Africa the State promotes tourism on commonages; van Wyk, Wilson, (2006) have discussed the potential impacts on commonage both positive and negative and included Hardin's (1968) theory that pastures or public spaces such as national parks open to all without restrictions degrade the resource. In relation to agricultural commonages, Hardin contends that the tragedy lies in forcing individuals to increase their livestock without limit. However, after highlighting all the problems they have no suggestion to the overall theme of management.

The generation of alternative energy has been promoted in Denmark with a special emphasis on retaining sustainable rural communities through a co-op approach. Research by Gipe, (2006) discovered that the Island of Samsø is generating 100% alternative energy through a co-op approach. This is assisting small farms to generate extra income which supplements the farm income. There is currently no promotion of a co-operative approach in relation to the generation in Ireland; despite the suitability of multiple commonage land.

Analysis

The above researchers have discussed aspects of commonage supervision but without a constructive road map. Ostrom (2012) discussed the many problems related to common pool resources, especially the failures; this was also addressed by Buckley, (2008) in relation to conflict between farmers and tourists. The Irish Peatland Conservation Council and Hynes, Buckley and van Rensburg (2007) have also highlighted the management problems.

The South African Government promotes tourism on commonage to generate additional income for farmers. Bere Island and Di Falco & van Rensburg, (nd) suggest a co-operative management based on the co-op approach. Samsø Island has also applied the co-op approach in developing pluriactivity and by extension rural sustainability. However, although the

problems and benefits of co-ops are addressed none of the researchers have proposed a potential management plan encompassing all potential stake holders

A Report to the Heritage Council by the European Forum for Nature Conservation and Pastoralism (EFNCP) Prepared by Patrick McGurn (2011) in *Developing a targeted-based programme for High Nature Value (HNV) farmland in the North Connemara Area*.

Patrick McGurn carried out extensive research in relation to commonage and its diverse problems. He emphasises that Grazing management is the main driver, influencing the conservation status of the main habitats. In addition different habitats have different grazing requirements to maintain species composition and structure. Some habitat types are very sensitive to grazing and require very low levels or no grazing at all, whereas others require moderate levels of grazing. In such a large scale grazing system, defining a sustainable grazing plan which allows for these different requirements is a difficult task. He also emphasises that in effect different types of animals are required because of the different types of pasture/grass that exist.

He also discusses the failures of the REPS plan due to its voluntary nature; as it was not in itself a sufficiently adequate policy in tackling over-grazing on Irish commonages. The lack of control developed to a stage that the EU threatened to stop all REPS payments to commonage farmers in the west of Ireland. He also stresses that the current grazing regime is based on historical numbers and suggests an alternative would be to determine the sustainable stocking rate for an individual commonage based on the area and condition of the habitats present. He accepts that this would require agreement among the shareholders and also a more formal structure to be established. The central role of the farmer in managing the landscape and the need for their support in preservation of the upland environment is also included. This is supported by (Whilde 1994, Bleasdale 1995, Kaule 2008, Smith *et al.* 2010, Irish Uplands Forum 2010). The importance of local knowledge in the management of a 'common pool resource and the benefit of Biodiversity are also recommended by Feehan *et al.* (2005) and Visser *et al.* (2007). The complexities of grazing are also dealt with in relation to the different grazing action of cattle and sheep referred to by English Nature, (2001). He also deals with the loss of the traditional shepherding and suggests temporary erection of stock-proof fencing to control grazing distribution, on certain habitat types. However, he

acknowledges that Kaule (2008) argues against fencing, citing that it leads to fragmentation of pastures for large scale grazing.

Analysis

The Heritage report has dealt with the problems and the necessity of a broad management of the commons, to be addressed as a common pool resource. It also emphasises the necessity of a more formal management structure because of the diverse species involved. The importance of local knowledge is also addressed.

However, despite a comprehensive report in the need of collective management, no co-op management structure was suggested. The suggestion of erecting fencing also contradicts the current policy of the NPW - open management of common land. There is also no reference to the general public and farmers of the potential social economic benefits.

Research, Environmental and Natural Resource Economics Research Unit at NUI Galway, has also addressed commonages through *Governance Institutions and Common Property Resources* by Di Falco, Nyambura, Rensburg and Yadav (2010).

For some time now they have been working on common pool resource problems, particularly with regards to commonage in Ireland but also in developing countries.

They suggest that Governance and institutions has an important role to play in supporting sustainability. Stressing there are countless examples of projects and case studies that are economically efficient and sustainable but fail on the ground because they are unacceptable to communities for various reasons. They focus on research by Perman *et al.*, (2003) and Common and Perrings, (1992), that efficiency does not necessarily guarantee sustainability between current and future generations in terms of the distribution of natural resources. In providing critical insights into supporting sustainability, that are however not sufficient to guarantee sustainable outcomes and economic efficiency.

The common pool resource is also addressed by reference to Adger and Luttrell, (2000) and Ostrom (2000) in relation to problems such as congestion, overuse and potential destruction, unless some form of common property management regime is enforced. It is also suggested

that common property resources are seen to be inefficient by economists as they provide incentives which can lead to socially sub-optimal outcomes. They cite commonages in Connemara as an example of a common pool resource in Ireland. They see it as a case of an institution that is caught between the history of a traditional society and a modern efficient society. The historical management is mentioned and also modern problems already addressed, in addition the theory of Runge, (1986) Taylor, (1987) Ostrom, (1990) Sandier, (1992), Bardhan, (1993), Baland and Platteau, (1996/1997) that common or communal property rights may actually encourage a higher level of conservation. Because there is a more direct dependence on ecological services, and a stronger interest in their conservation; is also included. They also address recreation activities including conflict between land owners and the public with regards to access rights to commonage. The rural sustainability is addressed based on the recreational and leisure pursuits and also their potential to make a significant contribution to the rural economy; suggesting that they may be as important economically as output from livestock or crops.

They also address the multifunctional nature of commonage and in particular the recreation value of the resource. This includes the limitations associated with public access to farmland in Ireland including commonage. The need to calculate the actual economic worth of commonage to the farmer, other users and therefore society as a whole is also considered. A survey of 238 farms that allow for an analysis is also included; the main findings indicate that agri-environment schemes support cooperative efforts by farmers to conserve their land.

Analysis

The NUI Galway research has highlighted a number of factors in relation to commonage management in embracing all potential beneficiaries. It has clearly defined that Governance and institutions have an important role to play. In addition it includes research by Adger and Luttrell, (2000) and Ostrom (2000) in relation to problems such as congestion, overuse and potential destruction, unless some form of common property management regime is enforced. Their supported research believes that common or communal property rights may actually encourage a higher level of conservation than divided land. They also focus on the multifunctional nature of commonage and its potential social and economic benefits to the society in general and stakeholders. The research focuses on the multifunctional nature of

commonage and potential damage if a common management is not put in place but it offers no potential structure to establish same.

The Institute of Technology Sligo (IT Sligo) has carried out extensive research in relation to commonage management.

This was funded through Leargas by Leonardo Da Vinci (VETPRO) Lifelong Learning Programme of DG Education and Culture of EU Commission. It also involved a fact finding mission over seven days (20th May to 27th May 2012) in Scotland and Northern England led by James Moran and Declan Feeney from IT Sligo. The group also included members from NPW and Teagasc. The mobility experience dealt with building capacity for common land management, policy frameworks and encouraging collaboration on common land. It is available under the heading *Capacity Building for Irish Commonages*. This research has focused on theoretical and practical application of commonage management based on experiences from Ireland, Scotland, England and Wales.

The research displays that Irish commonage has many similarities with common land in the rest of these islands – a common Gaelic tradition with Scotland and an inheritance of English legal concepts. In addition similar issues face common graziers under both the English and Scottish legal systems. However, the response has been clearly different in the two cases. Also the EU directives in relation to environmental designation are also similar.

Some of the common problems management is dealt with in relation to Scotland where farmers are allowed to set up grazing committees to administer grazing under relevant Acts 1886-2010. However also dealing with the system where farmers (crofters) are generally landlord's tenants. The tenants in a small number of cases have adopted a co-op approach through stock clubs. This means the flock is managed as one flock but collectively owned. They also discovered that the problem of non user shares is prevalent in all regions and is not exclusive to Ireland.

They also encountered how the actual traits of sheep operate in practice in England; for example the 'hefting' which refers to the natural homing instincts of animals, in particular hill sheep kept under range conditions without fencing. The shepherd reinforces the hefting behaviour by regular shepherding and guiding sheep back to home ground or 'heft'. Emphasising this is an important management tool in upland areas as hefting brings

controlled grazing. In its absence there is a requirement for fencing or sheep will simply concentrate on more palatable herbage and sheltered areas leading to overgrazing/undergrazing and animal health issues. Referring to its original documentation in relation to homing instincts of animals, in the Blackfaced Sheep Keepers Guide, (1924) and also cited in Hart 2004).

Analysis

The research has dealt with the similarities of common land on these islands. It also gives examples of where a co-op approach in relation to commonage management is applied in practice. The traits of the sheep flock demonstrate how common land was traditionally managed and why it was achieved without fencing. The multi function of commonage in relation to tourism and public access was not addressed; this is probably not surprising as 65% of the party of 23 that travelled were Teagasc personal and no one directly involved in tourism attended. Especially when Scotland is promoting tourism based on open access to the countryside and public access is available in England through 'pathways' for time immemorial. Although the research highlighted the importance of commonages as a common pool resource it offered no practical suggestions to the future management of the commons.

Hynes, Buckley, van Rensbur, (2007) have addressed commonage under the *Recreational Pursuits on Marginal Farm Land: A Discrete-Choice Model of Irish Farm Commonage Recreation*

This research focuses on the potential of commonage to generate economic benefits in addition to the traditional agricultural activities. Suggesting, this may be achieved by outdoor recreation activities which would be an efficient use of commonage resources. In addition policy makers are recognising the value of open-air outdoor recreation as a means of supporting rural incomes. This can be achieved through niche tourism, environmentally guided farming, rural diversification, job creation, and rural regeneration. They also acknowledge the open access policy in Scotland appears to impinge on farming business privacy and citing Horsburgh (2003) that just because - 'This approach to land management worked in country x, so country y should do the same'. Each nation needs to find its own approach.

They also discuss Government supported initiatives to promote public access to the countryside in Ireland. Including the Irish Tourism Board Quote 'Without agreed access to the countryside, Ireland does not have a Walking Product to market' (Failte Ireland, 2003). They also make the point that from tourism prospective, uninterrupted access to the Irish countryside by recreational users is imperative as countryside pursuits are the bedrock of Ireland's Special Interests Tourism. They also include research by (Bogue, 2005) that one third of visitors to the countryside considered farmers as unwelcoming. The research of Curtis and Williams (2002) is also quoted which found that approximately three-quarters of the adult population in Ireland (2.2 million) participate in walking for recreational purposes.

They carried out a survey in relation to commonage use by visitors to Roundstone Commonage, in Connemara. The Roundstone commonage site is owned and managed by a group of 16 shareholders who use the land for grazing but allow freedom of access to the public for walking and other beach related recreation activities. The commonage site is situated on an outcrop of land that separates Dogs Bay and Gurteen Bay. The commonage offers visitors a highly distinctive landscape, 'including a variety of walks across open sandy grassland, coastal edges and exposed granite' (Bassett and Curtis, 1985).

The survey involved a total of 265 individuals which were interviewed in relation to their primary commonage usage in July and August 2004. The survey resulted in the following response 72.2% of those interviewed indicated sunbathing as a primary reason. A further 42.6% indicated swimming while over 36% cited walking. The survey also discovered that over 86% visited the site for access to the beach, while 63 % indicated the scenic view as an important factor. Other important factors were pathways, the unspoilt environment. It also must be remembered in order to gain access to the beach it is necessary to travel through the commonage.

Analysis

The research dealt with the importance of commonage access in relation to developing alternative/additional income including job creation, and rural regeneration from the commonage environment. They also highlight the vast amount of people that are engaged in recreational activity, including walking. They also highlight the importance in developing an open access structure in order to promote rural tourism. The survey stresses the importance of

access; to for example, the beach and this would also apply to hill/mountain walking/climbing access. However there was no cooperative plan suggested to try and regularise the current impasse.

Burren LIFE Farming for Conservation in the Burren, Co Clare, Technical Final Report covering the project activities from 01.09.2004 to 31.01.2010

The Burren Life Project evolved from the publication of a book by Dr Brendan Dunford 'Farming and the Burren' which highlighted the 'Impact of Agricultural Practices on the Natural Heritage of the Burren'. The findings emphasised the urgency of the situation and stimulated the local and research staff from the NPWS to seek funding. Funding was secured of €2, 230,487. The Project start date: 01/09/2004, Project end date: 31/01/2010

Dr Dunford was awarded a contract to draw up a proposal for (Burren) LIFE funding which would involve Teagasc and the Burren IFA as partners with the NPWS. This formed the basis for the LIFE application. The Name Beneficiary; National Parks and Wildlife Service - Dept. of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

The main application of this scheme involved 20 farmers operating as a pilot scheme in regenerating part of the Burren landscape and returning the site to its former ecological farmed state. The main emphasis was on the development of a farming plan based over five years to achieve this goal. The main emphasis appears to be on farming as tourism receives only a very brief mention. However, it must be considered that the Burren soil has a high productive quality unlike the common mountainous regions, except for the grassy beaches, which are limited. The report also acknowledges that farming in the Burren is not capable of supplying an income equivalent to the average industrial wage, but an additional socio-economic study demonstrated the added value provided by farming for conservation in terms of externalities generated and proved that the public are willing to contribute financially to sustaining the landscape and biodiversity of the Burren.

Although the programme was promoted as a collective co-op approach encompassing Teagasc, NPWS, local farm planning agencies, as well as Burren IFA, in reality it was a top down programme administered by the NPW. However, it included interaction with local

stakeholders at primarily committee level and an office was based locally. This office was used ‘not just by the project team but also by local farmers and organisations for meetings and to get information from the project team’. It was decided not to set up a formal ‘co-operative’ structure, after consultation within the project team and with the Project Steering Group. ‘Thus the aims of the co-operative continued to be addressed in an informal way through the project team and the associated ‘satellite’ groups’.

The report records the success of the scheme in delivering a better grazing management of the area by consultation with active farmers. It also mentions the failure in relation to ‘some areas remain, which are little or no better grazed than at the start’. Attributing this to lack of farmer engagement, unsuitable stock, for example stating that modern breeds of suckler cow cannot be ‘pushed’ as hard as the dry stock that would have dominated the winterage in the past. Finally there was **an increase in the area deemed overgrazed during the project** (from 13 to 192ha).

It is also interesting to note an independent research project commissioned by the Heritage Council of Ireland in conjunction with the Burrenbeo Trust and Burren IFA offers strong evidence of the positive impact of this process of active engagement; this survey was not part of BurrenLIFE. The survey involved 245 people from 111 Burren farm families (an estimated ‘1 in 6’ farmers from the broader Burren region). It found that BurrenLIFE was the programme which the majority of survey respondents had direct contact (61%), and it was also the programme that survey respondents believed to be the most relevant to farming (87%).

However, only 32% of respondents felt that BurrenLIFE best represented Burren farmers and an even lower percentage of Burren IFA agreed at 24%. Notwithstanding that 88% of all respondents said they agreed ‘The Burren LIFE project has had a positive impact on the conservation of the Burren’

Analysis

This is a programme that was promoted as a co-operative approach to conservational management and it has received an abundance of publicity. This was achieved through regional and national media outlets. However, based on the final report the role of farmers appears to be occasional consultation. This would appear to be borne out in relation to the

independent survey as only 24% of the local IFA agreed that BurrenLIFE best represented Burren farmers; while accepting that the project had a positive impact on conservation.

The lack of progression in establishing an inclusive formal co-op management approach would appear to leave the future 'rudderless'; as there is no formal group to continue the programme management. The lack of a formal coordinated collective approach may have impeded the overall goal. For example there was an increase in the area deemed overgrazed during the project (from 13 to 192ha) and 'some areas remain which are little or no better grazed than at the start'. The project organisers suggesting that this failure of progress was created because of a lack of farmer engagement?

2.5: Summary of the Review in Relation to the Research Questions

Perspective (A): The suitability of co-op management for a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) commonage farming community

The research by Ostrom (2012) discussed the common pool resource management failures. This was also addressed by Buckley, (2008) in relation to conflict between potential stakeholders. In addition The Irish Peatland Conservation Council and Hynes, Buckley and van Rensburg (2007) have also highlighted the management problems. However they gave no insights to its potential co-op management. However Bere Island and Di Falco & van Rensburg,(nd) suggest a co-operative management, as the way forward. Samsó Island has applied the co op approach in practice. PatrickMcGurn (2011) emphasised the necessity of management to address a common pool resource, including the creation of a more formal structure. The NUI Galway research dicusses the importance of collective management. It also includes research by Adger and Luttrell, (2000) and Ostrom (2000) in relation to problems such as congestion, overuse and potential destruction, unless some form of common property management regime is enforced.

IT Sligo research in relation to commonage management gives examples where co-op management in practice is applied, in delivering farm management of commonage. It also places an importance on farming knowledge in relation to the traits of farm animals, especially sheep. The Burren Life Project programme was promoted as a co-operative approach to conservational management. However based on the final report it was an informal alliance, with farmers merely being consulted.

Perspective (B): The needs/motivations of the farmers.

The South African Government promotes tourism on commonage to generate additional income for farmers. The NUI Galway research also focuses on the multifunctional nature of commonage and its potential social and economic benefits to the society in general and stakeholders. The IT Sligo research has not included the general beneficiaries, for example tourism despite the recent promotion of tourism in rural Scotland and England. Hynes, Buckley and van Rensburg (2007) research dealt with the importance of commonage access in relation to developing alternative/additional income including job creation, and rural regeneration from the commonage environment. They also focus on the needs of the general public in relation to an open access structure. Although the Burren is a prominent tourist destination there was no emphasis on this aspect within the project notwithstanding that the final report acknowledges that farming in the Burren is not sustainable in its own right.

Perspective (C): Do the current proposed structures pertain to a demographic sustainable populace and management

Samsó Island has also applied the co op approach in developing pluriactivity and by extension rural sustainability. PatrickMcGurn (2011) makes no reference to the general public and farmers of the potential social economic benefits, which has the potential to develop a demographic sustainable population. IT Sligo has made no reference to the maintenance of a rural population to address commonage management. Hynes, Buckley and van Rensburg (2007) have not dealt with the current structures that are currently in place. The Burren project has applied a current management system on a pilot basis which has now concluded. However there was no continuance built in when the scheme expired and in addition it only applied to a small segment of the farmers. IT Sligo has given examples of management but no reference to how people can be retained to apply it. NUI Galway research has not addressed the current/proposed structures and the relevance to sustainability.

Section 3: Case Study Area

3.1: Anonymous Bog Commonages

The case study will focus on multiple interlinked commonages in Connemara, County Galway. The total collective area is several thousand Hectares. All of the lands are designated as SAC, SPA and NHA areas. Their collective boundary is achieved by the fenced

lands of the enclosed holdings. In the past the area was farmed as an extension of the enclosed holdings and many co-op elements prevailed in their husbandry. Today the land is farmed individually and with very little interaction with fellow users. However, there is a reduction in the actual numbers using the land. This is due to depopulation and amalgamation of holdings due to purchases and also theoretical abandonment. This occurs when farmers use the enclosed farms only. There is also the additional problem of people using the land who have no entitlements to do so. This may be of benefit if the commonage is primarily under grazed but causes serious problems for the environment when it is potentially over grazed.

The site was designated because of its active blanket bog and lagoons, both priority habitats on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive. One of the main habitats within this site is lowland Atlantic blanket bog, which is of high conservation significance to Ireland as well as Europe. Most of the area is covered by blanket peat greater than one metre in depth. The Bog mix is characterized by areas of deeper peat surrounded by rocky granite outcrops, covered by heath vegetation. The key plant species of lowland blanket bog are Black Bog-rush (*Schoenus nigricans*), Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*), Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*), Deergrass (*Scirpus cespitosus*), Common Cottongrass (*Eriophorum angustifolium*), Bog Asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*), White Beak-sedge (*Rhynchospora alba*) and Bog Moss (*Sphagnum*) species. The deeper peat areas are often covered by lakes and river systems and an assortment of different plants therefore exists. The area is also of national importance for bird life, in relation to wintering populations of Greenland White fronted Geese. Small flocks (up to 30) are occasionally found on bog. Also occurring within the overall site are several lagoons (a type of brackish lake) which display considerable variations in size, depth and salinity, resulting in a diverse assemblage of floral and faunal communities (NPW 2010).

3.2: Profile of the Associated Regions

The commonage case study area is just one segment of an extensive multi commonage district in west Connemara. The area is primarily defined as the **Clifden Region** for tourism purposes. The Clifden Region comprises in general the Church Parishes of Clifden (Ballindoon/Omey) Roundstone and Balinakill, including Inishbofin Island.

Clifden Region



Figure 1

The main coast roadway stretches from Roundstone to Renvyle, a distance of 45 Kilometres. The area has 14 District Electoral Divisions (DEDs) and a population of 7,789, this includes the main population DED of Clifden Town which had 2,613 residents on census night 2011, this compares to 2,387 in 1911.

There are 4,935 houses in the general area of which 2,709 are occupied, 54.8% - County 79% vacant 2,225, 45.2% County 21%, houses occupied by one person 28% - county 23.1% on line access 58%, this compares to the county with 68%, households with no car 16%, 11% in the County.

Total available for work on census night 2011=3,785=employed = 2959, 78% County 82% unemployed 789, 22%. This compares with the County 18% and the State 19%, (CSO, 2013).

3.3: Population Trends

The population of the region was on a continuous downward slope since the Great Famine (1840s) and only in recent times showing a population increase. The population in 1911 was 13,028 which is 67% more than the 2011 census results. Even the figures of 2011 are

substantially down on the pre famine figures, for example the census of 1841 records a population of 29,084 which is 373.2% more than 2011 (CSO 2013).

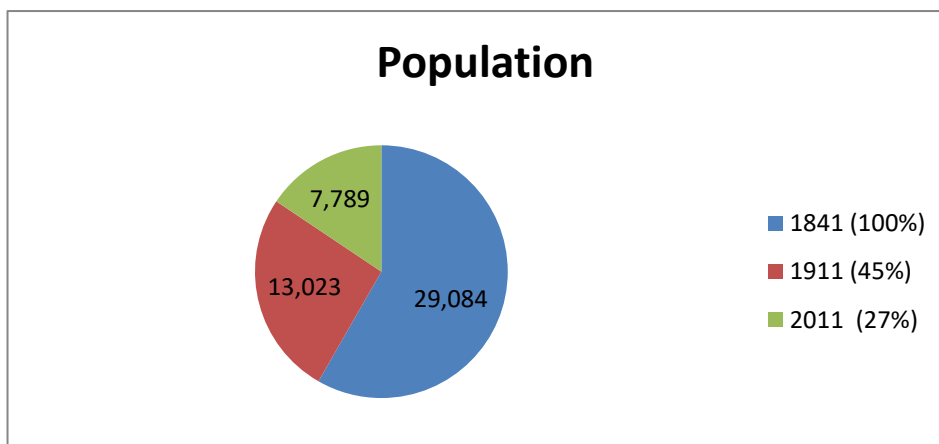


Figure 2

The population of Galway County has increased from 159,256 in 2006 to 175,124 in 2011; this is an increase of 9.9%. During the same period the Associated Regions have increased from 7,063 in 2006 to 7,789 in 2011, an increase of 11%; both exceed the national increase of 8.2%. The breakdown between male and female is male 3,958, 50.8%, female 3,831, 49.2% this compares to Galway County 50.4% male and 49.6% female.

Although the Associated Regions collectively show an increase of 11%, seven percent is recorded in the Clifden Town DED. This leaves just an increase of 3.2% for the other 13 DEDs (CSO, 2013). The vast amount of depopulation is due to the historic migration/emigration from the area.

3.4: Numbers Engaged in Farming/Fishing

The main types of farming in the area are dry stock, sheep and Connemara Ponies; there are no tillage or dairy farmers in the area. In addition the fishing is of a similar ilk with primarily part time seasonal activity. The numbers involved/employed in agriculture/farming/fishing is hard to define because pluriactivity is rife in the area. The multitask work culture has evolved from centuries past; primarily because of the small farms and small scale fishing that existed/exists. This is referred to by Moffit, (2008) 'People from Connemara area and along the western seaboard travelled to Scotland for seasonal farm work from the 1870s' and O'Malley (1905) the creation of 'Kelp' in the 1890s also delivered part time work (burned seaweed). It is not unusual today to have farmers involved in part time building work,

tourism and fishing all at the same time. This accounts for the small number of people/households declaring involvement in agriculture/fishing on the census returns. Because many declare just one of many tasks they are involved in/with. The census returns (2011) gives 257 as the number of households involved in farming in relation to agricultural activity but 811 returns declaring they had farms. Based on Department of Agriculture statistics from 2008 there appears to be anomalies. This is based on an analysis of the three DEDs in the Ballyconneely area.

In 1989, there were 189 people involved in agricultural activity with herd numbers responsible for 2,262 cattle. In 1999, the numbers had reduced to 159 herd owners and 1,882 cattle and in 2008 it further reduced to 120 herd owners and 1,263 cattle (Department of Agriculture 2008). That is a 36% drop in herd owners and a 44% drop in cattle numbers between 1989 and 2008. It is clear from the extracts from census 2006 that all people with herd numbers were not classifying themselves as farmers, for example people receiving farm assist, retired, on health benefit and some with off farm income. It would also appear that herd numbers of a substantial amount of deceased farmers are not being renewed. There is currently no count available to the public for sheep and Connemara Pony numbers.

The fishing is primarily seasonal lobster activity but it is difficult to get participant figures because it's mainly part time operational. In addition prices are at an all time low. Regulations have also impinged on its economic benefits; on November the 1st 2006 at 13:00 hours the driftnet fishing ban came into effect. A complete cessation of salmon driftnet fishing, at the stroke of a pen, the part time salmon fishermen, were no more, gone was the additional income that topped up the farming income (McGee, 2006). New safety regulations created one more additional expense in the commercial fishing sector. The new regulation in brief means that the small wooden boats, that are used for fishing, in the inner bays, will need the same equipment, as the big boats fishing the open seas (The regulation does not apply to pleasure boats).

3.5: Dependence on Tourism

Tourism in Ireland generated over Four and a half Billion Euro in 2010 and 348 million to Ireland West Tourism (Failte Ireland, 2010). The development of Rural Tourism is promoted by many as the cure for all ills in rural areas, but this is not a reality for the vast majority. There is no doubt that in some areas, and for some households, tourism can be valuable, but

‘there are serious problems in its universal application’ (Lane, 1993). Yet there are areas that are perceived to be lucky enough to have the tourism requirements that create sustainability. The Clifden Region which is part of Ireland West Tourism which incorporates the counties of Galway (including Galway city), Mayo and Roscommon is perceived to be one of those places. The region is situated west of Maam Cross excluding the Gaeltacht and uses Connemara as a brand name, a brand name which is well known in the tourist trade.

Tourism in the Clifden Region ‘commenced shortly after the building of Clifden Town in 1812’ (Gibbons & Gahan, 2004). By 1839, in a relatively short time the town was beginning to flourish and consisted of many new buildings, including two hotels/lodging houses and three public houses (Robinson, 1990). The development of a ‘railway link between Galway City and Clifden 1895 opened up Connemara for business (Wall and Matthews, 2000). This brought the rich and famous, including ‘King Edward VII who travelled to Ireland in 1903 and used the train’ (Villiers-Tuthill, 1990).

Tourism in modern times has brought prosperity to the Clifden and the North/West Connemara region which now relies heavily on the industry. Although the Clifden Region is well known as a tourist destination there is very little research carried out in relation to tourism in the area. The first and only in-depth analysis of the area was carried out by Turbidy, (1991) and dealt with the period 1982 to 1991. Based on a report by Byrne, (1991) the numbers were generally static between 1982 and 1987 but showed an increase of 47% from 1987 to 1990. It was also estimated that a further 20% visited the area but stayed elsewhere, for example in Galway City. The overall number of visitors in thousands to Galway and the Clifden region in 1990 was - Galway 1090 and Clifden Region 436. The profile of the visitors to the Clifden region which are as a result of research by Fahy (1991), and Dr. M. Cawley of the Department of Geography, NUIG (nd) based on surveys of visitors to Connemara National Park are as follows - 48% were Irish, 25% European, 16%, British, and 10% North American. When excluding the home market the figures could be rounded off as European 50% British 30% and North America 20%.

The 1990s was a boom time for the western seaboard and the Clifden Region with an estimated 15.1 Million bed nights spent on the west coast by overseas holidaymakers, reduced to 9.8M. 2010 (New Directions for Tourism in the West, 2010). This was at a time in the Clifden Region when accommodation was almost impossible to attain in the peak season. ‘There were B&BS everywhere and full, self catering and hotels were also fully

booked. The place was also full of campers' said Josephine DeCoursey, Connemara Tourism (personal interview) and long time activist in tourism.

The 2000s have brought fluctuating holiday trends. Over the past decade the number of holiday visits to Ireland from overseas increased to a peak of four million in 2007. Since then Ireland has seen a 30% drop in overseas holiday visitors to an estimated 2.8 million in 2010. The first seven months of 2011 has seen a modest recovery, but numbers are still almost 20% below the 2008 levels. This trend is also reflected in the West and Galway/Connemara.

Total numbers of overseas tourists for Galway 2011, in thousands 950 this is made up of Britain 201, Europe, 376, North America 216 and other areas 70 (Failte Ireland, 2010). Based on the criteria used by Byrne, (1991) figures for the Clifden Region would be - Total 345 thousand made up of Britain, 80 (23%), Europe, 150 (44%) North America, 86 (25%) other areas, 28 (8%). (By distributing the 8%, not calculated in 1990 pro rata, Britain 25%, Europe 47% and North America 28%. There is just a small variance in visitor category percentage between 1990 and 2010 but the overall visitors are down by 21%, Britain down 5% Europe 10% and North America 6% (Failte Ireland 212).

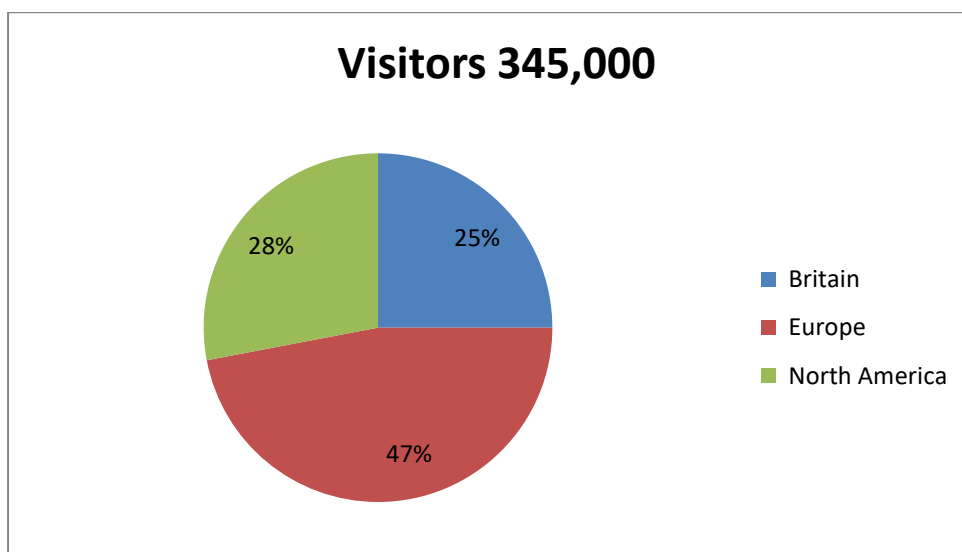


Figure 3

The new tourist especially the European has developed a new trend 'shorter and more frequent trips, greater consumer use of modern information and communication technologies more experienced travellers with heightened quality and value expectations a trend towards later booking '(Failte Ireland, 2010). There is a new type of tourist coming to Connemara, they usually stay for shorter periods and the old interests for example lake and sea fishing is no longer of importance and the marketing of urban areas is having a direct affect on

declining numbers. ‘The marketing of Galway city as a main destination and using Connemara for day trips is seriously affecting accommodation in the Clifden Region’ said Josephine De Courcey, Connemara Tourism (personal interview).

The Clifden Region has faced declining numbers over the past few years. Golf was a key factor in bringing tourists into the area but since 2007 there is an overall decline of 25% accumulative in Connemara Golf Club figures said manager Kathleen Burke (personal interview). The golfing tourist is very important based on their overall spend - ‘The overseas golfer spends three times the regular tourist’ (Deeney, B., 20012).

The general consensus of the management of three anonymous hotels is – accommodation has dropped by 5% over the same period but this is mainly because hotels are well marketed today and are in effect closing down B&Bs. ‘There is a 70% drop in the B&B trade said local business man Brendan Keogh as the hotels are mopping up their trade’(personal interview). ‘It is obvious that French and German tourists are gone, how many cars will you now see, but we are lucky enough here as they are replaced by Irish, mainly Dublin’ said Josephine DeCourcey (personal interview). Self catering – this is almost impossible to assess as only a fraction of the units are in the public domain, for example the Slyne head peninsula has approximately 550 including (Mobile homes) units but ‘only about 10% are advertised in the open market and yet they all appear to be booked’ said a disgruntled holiday home rental owner. Brid Connell from Kylemore Abbey Heritage Centre believes it is all about good quality, presentation and marketing (personal interview). ‘We have ‘bucked’ the trend by upgrading our facilities and marketing, our numbers have increased from 166,000 in 2009 to 192,000 in 2010 that is an increase of 16% and 2011 also shows an increase. We employ 100 people at peak season and were number 15 in Irish Fee Paying attractions for 2010, and number 22 in visited attractions she said.

Economic/Social Impacts

Based on the previous paragraphs, the Clifden Region has a long history of tourism and economic and social benefits are visible everywhere. Income is accruing to local residents in the form of wages, salaries, distributed profit, rent and interest. This is in addition to local income which is in part re spent in the local economy on goods and services. The social benefits, people can remain in the district and retain services that the population justifies for example schools a hospital and a third level college. The direct effects and indirect effect of

tourism is also important as it generates income for fishermen, farmers, food stores, restaurants and other service providers. The required services in the area are significant with well in excess of 2,000 holiday units excluding mobile homes (CSO, 2013) and numerous hotels all requiring renewals and maintenance and caretaker services, including staff. The initial expenditure by tourism in the area has also significant additional effects throughout the rest of the local economy, resulting in increased income and expenditure by a range of different groups, many of whom are not directly connected with tourism. This process of spending and re-spending is commonly described as the multiplier effect and is visible throughout the area. The importance of tourism to the town is evident from the survey carried out by Ryan (2009:243), respondents who declared that the town is '100% dependent on tourism' an area where 'tourism is the main industry and everybody is involved in tourism in Clifden either directly or indirectly from the taxi services to hotels, bed & breakfasts, restaurants, the equestrian centres' (C. Murray, personal communication 2006). The importance of commonages for recreational purposes is also evident in a survey carried out in Roundstone which discovered that 'Over 86% visited the site for access to the beach, while 63 % indicated the scenic view as an important factor. Other important factors were pathways, the unspoilt environment, good waves/wind for water-sports and the surrounding vegetation' (Hynes, 2007:16)

The development of material tourism is limited by the designation of the region as high amenity and SAC. This limits development as it is only allowed in exceptional cases. However, the promotion of its unique environment is not restricted. The area incorporates the Twelve Bens Mountains, almost all of Connemara's macair beaches, the majority are commonages, numerous peatland commonages including part of the renowned Roundstone Bog Complex, Inishbofin a tourist developed island, Connemara National Park, Kylemore Abbey, Connemara Golf Links, Ballinahinch Castle, festivals, and an array of historical sites - this makes the area ideal for activity holidays with tourists going on holidays to participate in their hobby, or interest. This involves mountain climbing, walking, surfing, cycling, golfing and historical presentations. The lack of collective support for development is apparent in relation to the actions of a manager in a key hotel, just outside of Clifden, who explained that 'his hotel would send people to the more distant town of Westport in Mayo rather than to Clifden' Ryan (2009:271).

Summary

The Clifden Region, which is common throughout Ireland, has developed fluctuating numbers in tourism from the 1980s to the present day. The trends are also evident with a different type of tourist now frequenting the area. The traditional tourist, spending a month in the area incorporating lake and sea fishing has been replaced by a new cliental. The new tourist has shorter holidays and has more frequent breaks and seeks accommodation to appropriate value. The urban destination is now the preferred destination. The area is attracting fewer overseas visitors than twenty years ago. The perception that hotels are gaining business at the expense of B&BS requires further research because citing a 70% reduction in the B&B trade fails to factor in the massive increase in self catering accommodation. The failure of the tourist beneficiaries to co- operate and promote jointly its possibly unique environment is causing the area to lose out to more organised competition, Ryan, (2009), research confirms this. The success of Kylemore Abbey highlights the inadequacy in the marketing and the standards required for tourism in 2012. It is obvious to many that the old style marketing of putting a sign at the gate is for the archives.

3.6: Highest level of Education Completed

An overview of the region will be assessed by selecting three DEDs from the region, based on their population on census night 2011. The focus will be on highest level of education completed. The first is Dunloughan with the lowest population of just 94 residents; this will be followed by Ballinkill 593 one of the middle populations DEDs and the highest population, Clifden which incorporates the small town with a population of 2,613.

Dunloughan DED like many other rural areas has experienced a massive population reduction; its population in 1841 was 1,288, this had reduced to 444 by 1911. The current downward trends have continued to the current census returns of 2011, which is 94 (CSO 2013). The education levels based on the 2011 census results which are defined in three categories are primary including no formal, 22.5%, second level 21% and post graduate 8.4%.

Ballinakill has fared in a similar manner with a continuous population decline from 1841 when its population was 2,112 to the returns of 2011 which stands at 593. Education levels, primary 17.7%, second level 33.7% and post graduate 8.1%. Clifden by contrast shows an increase from the 2,387 in 1911 to 2,613 in 2011. Education levels, primary 17.5% second level 31.4% and post graduate 9%. These results show the disparity that exists even in a rural district that would at first appear in general to be compatible.

The education levels at Galway County, Galway City and National level based on census 2011 in comparison with the local samples, are County: primary 17.3%, second level 36%, and post graduate 8.2%. City: primary 9.3%, second level 29.4% and post graduate 15.1%. National: primary 15.2%, second level 50.9% and there are no post graduate levels readily available.

Analysis: In relation to primary cessation, both Clifden and Ballinakill are on par with the County and just slightly above the National average (2%). Dunloughan is almost 7% above the National average and Galway City is below (6%). Second levels have a broad variance with Clifden, Ballinakill and the County in the 30% bracket, the National at 50%, Galway City 29% and Dunloughan at 21%. Post Graduate levels are similar in the three DEDs and the County at 8/9%, with Galway City at 15%. When the three DEDs are averaged it produces the following, primary (including no formal) 19.2% and second level 28.7% this compares to the County: 17.3% and 36%, the City: 9.3% and 29.4%, the National: 15.2% and 50.9%.

This effectively means that the highest level of education achieved is 47.9% to second level and below, this compares to the County 53.3% and nationally 66%. Overall more people that have completed their education have a higher third level in the DEDs than the County or Nationally. This excludes the 'not stated' of DEDs, 8.7%, County, 3.4%, City 5.8% and National at 4.6%.

Education

	Below Third Level	Third Level +
Local	47.9%	52.1%
County	53.3%	46.7%
National	66%	34%

Figure 4

3.7: Infrastructure/services

The area has a network of well maintained public roads which includes access to the sea and also a wide range of services. The following is a sample of the main ones within the district.

Transport: Bus Eireann provides a twice weekly service through the region to Galway City (Bus Eireann). Currently four direct daily bus services from Clifden to Galway. Train service Galway and Westport (50 miles). Air transport from Knock and Shannon airports, cars in the region number more than houses occupied, only 16% of houses without any car (CSO, 2011).

Education: National and play schools located in the region including a crèches. A 2nd level education service in Clifden and 3rd level in the district - Letterfrack Furniture College and also NUIG and Galway/Mayo Institute 75/90 Kilometres' away.

Health service: Hospital in Clifden (mainly respite) with a limited x-ray service, three medical doctors in the town and another in Roundstone and Letterfrack.

Garda/Fire Brigade/Lifeboat: Garda/ Fire Brigade are old services, with the Lifeboat relatively new (1990s) are all based in Clifden.

Support for the elderly: A Daycare centre, retirement nursing home, centre for disabled in Clifden provides an essential support for the senior citizens. Meals on wheels are also available at centres throughout the district.

Hospitality Industry: Clifden Town is currently the main shopping centre; it has three modern supermarkets in addition to normal urban outlets, with food stores dispersed throughout the region. The area has an array of upmarket accommodation including hotels and restaurants and licensed liquor public houses. It has also three upmarket mobile Home/camping parks and financial services.

Youth/Sport: Naomh Feichin and Renvyle Gaelic football clubs caters for the football and Connemara rugby also covers the area. There are two gyms and swimming pool in Clifden town. Connemara Golf Club is based in the district.

Social: Community halls provide Bingo, set dancing, and music tutoring on a weekly basis and there are serviced churches Roman Catholic and Church of Ireland open. Clifden and Inishbofin Arts week, Letterfrack Bog/Sea weeks and several pony shows including the All

Ireland Connemara annual Pony Show are just some of the ongoing social events. There is also a community radio station within the district.

Section 4: Methodology

4.1: Introduction

The methodology applied in any given research task varies according to the reasons for the initial research. In this instance the primary objective is the social and economic well being of segments of rurality and their benefit to the overall society. It could be argued that to do anything constructive it is necessary to research and adopt a structure to achieve a given aim. Notwithstanding that research may be original to the researcher, it is rarely new. It is primarily a contribution to existing research and/or exposes the necessity for additional research? It is referred to by Cohen et al (2000) ‘as how the researcher views their world(s), what they take understanding to be, and what they see as the purpose of understanding’.

The way research is conducted varies from study to study including its targets. There are primarily two ways, which are referred to, as quantitative and qualitative research. The quantitative focuses primarily on, ‘all knowledge stems from factual numerical estimates of the quantitative relationship between a causal variable and an outcome variable’. This approach deliberates on how accurately estimates of a relationship in the researchers sample reflect those in the population as a whole (Gill and Johnson 1997). The qualitative approach focuses on the development of explanations and theories based on observations of the real world. ‘There is in this approach an emphasis on the analysis of subjective accounts which are generated by ‘getting inside’ situations and involving the investigator in the everyday flow of life’ (Gill & Johnson, 1997). There are those who advocate the use of a mixed research combining the qualitative and quantitative, for example Bechhofer (1974) identifies that utilising different research philosophies within the one research study, offers the researcher greater flexibility thus ensuring that the complexities of the real world can be accurately studied. This is supported by Morse (1991) – ‘Researchers who purport to subscribe to the philosophical underpinnings of only one research approach have lost sight of

the fact that research methodologies are merely tools, instruments to be used to facilitate understanding.’

This research has focussed on a stratified theme, concentrating on selecting groups or categories ‘based on their relevance to the research questions’ (Mason 2002). Drawing from a determined section acknowledges ‘existing opportunities for intensive studies’ (Stake 2000). Based on initial interactions and observation, the study research used a mixed method incorporating the qualitative and quantitative methods. The qualitative will encompass the Interpretive Paradigm, involving case Studies and observation. The quantitative questions have primarily evolved from the qualitative approach. It is generally acknowledged that the mixed method is appropriate for a relatively small imbalanced population and better results will be achieved.

This will be also relevant for this research as it embraced not only different types of farmers, but also the broader populace, who are associated, entwined, in the research objective. For example in addition to the farmers, who are primarily responsible for management, it will also encompass samples of the social, environmental and economic beneficiaries. The following is the overall objective which is already included in the introduction to the thesis

(A) To establish the suitability of co-op management for a Special Area of Conservation (SAC).

(B) Develop an understanding of the needs/motivations of the (SAC) farmers.

(C) Do the current existing/proposed structures from the Irish State pertain to a demographic sustainable populace and management (SAC regions)?

4.2: Research Approach

This research takes a practical approach to understanding the factors that are required, to establish a co-operative alliance, with different segments of society. All of whom potentially benefit directly or indirectly. The chosen methodology supported a structure that would provide a broad description of the factors, impinging on the development of inclusive co-operative management. The qualitative focused on delivering through a case study format which will attain the opinions through a stratified approach, with the main emphasis on the ‘why’ the current situation evolved and the ‘how’ it could be transformed. ‘Commencing with a broad outlook, and advancing gradually to a narrower subject area (Yin, 1994). The case study is also supported by Johns & Lee-Ross, (1998:58) as a good way, when the

researcher has no control over influencing inconsistencies. Case studies are also important when relying on, multiple and not singular sources of evidence (Yin, 1993).

The quantitative theme was established primarily from the qualitative approach. The qualitative was completed prior to the quantitative questionnaire being established. Based on the study, it was necessary to use the mixed, 'because the study cannot rely on a single data collection method, but will likely need to use multiple sources of evidence' (Yin, 1994). The case study is also dealt with by Sarantakos (1998) when he states that case studies can be used for gaining more information about the complexity of the research object when significant information is not available; to assist conceptualisation; to help in the development of hypothesis. Yin (1994) states that the case study 'is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context'. He also suggests that this contrasts with other research methods which can be somewhat removed from the actual context of the investigation. The importance of the case study is also important as it facilitates the researcher in accumulating data from a number of different sources within the same research site. This is referred to by Yin (1994) as the 'all-encompassing method' that relies on 'multiple sources of evidence.' Because the researcher is present it allows flexibility and scope for the researcher to prompt, elaborate, and seek clarification in relation to the study. This is supported by Hakim (2000) when he concludes that case studies can be a very useful research tool offering great flexibility and the opportunity to delve deeply into a few relevant examples.

The case studies focused on five people with an in-depth knowledge of commonage/land management attained primarily through the agrarian mores of rural residence. They were selected by knowledge, observation and several preliminary interactions prior to the actual case study. This also enabled to develop a stratified approach and eliminating much duplication, which may occur if all were farming at the same levels. For example part time full time and equivalent demographics.

The recreational questionnaire focused on a selection of potential users incorporating both local and visitor. The main aim, to determine what the benefits of a common pool resource are and how it should be best managed for social/economic benefits. Once again the research focused on a stratified approach in selecting segments and age profiles/status. The inclusion of twenty people gives it a broad view of the overall question the research poses. Although the number was only twenty, it incorporates a broader number as the vast majority were in

effect tourism recreational interests. So in effect would be speaking of the same ilk as the overall group that they were involved with.

The researcher deliberately applied the direct approach to ensure that there was 100% response in each segment. This was achieved by visiting and or meeting directly with all respondents/interviewees and completing the response in the presence of the interviewer/interviewee. This method has also ensured that the actual respondent was the actual intended stratified person. Although some argue that this method is time consuming and expensive in relation to resources and is not the easy way. It could be equally argued that 'the easy way is not always/usually the best way'. The final case study took an average of one hour and twenty five minutes, while the recreational took in general twenty minutes per person. However two interviewees took one hour and one and a half hours respectively as it required a detailed explanation of all aspects of commonage. All times are excluding travelling time.

4.3: How was data collected and analysed

The information was collected by first the qualitative, carrying out interviews/actions. This involved first making contact with the interviewees on a number of occasions and discussing about commonage management in general. The final case study involved visiting each of the five farmers in their own homes and discussing the list of questions and finally asking the respondent to give an answer. Four of the houses were relatively easy but one house respondent was challenging as his wife was present and on some occasions initially differed with her husband who was the main official respondent.

The quantitative questionnaire was also carried out in the presence of the respondents by getting the sample to complete the survey tool. The methods used are suitable because in both cases the researcher is individually involved, and ensured that the interviewees were the ones that responded to all the questions. The qualitative results were analysed by assessing the field notes and developing the themes that emanated in creating a master document. They were initially incorporated into a manual coding system. The quantitative was transferred and analysed using Excel, figures and graphs are used in the thesis.

4.4: Ethics

When one is dealing with people in an attempt to acquire information, it is important to embody their response in the context of their natural privacy. Notwithstanding that being ethical limits the in-depth interaction that would deliver a more comprehensive response; ‘which limits the researcher’s options of attaining the truth’ (Bulmer, 2008). It is well documented that the main ethical fear relates to the potential damage that may be inflicted on the respondent/s in relation to the delivery of information. Especially when obtained without the interviewee/s awareness of its potential risks. So it is important that the respondent/s is/are aware of the purpose of the research and the right to remain anonymous in all or part thereof. This also imposes on the researcher, its impartial delivery, referred by Tashakkori & Teddlie (2008) as the degree to which credible interpretations have been made on the basis of the results. Therefore this research is accomplished by the author with the knowledge of the ethics and trust required in its delivery. In Ireland a common phrase in relation to trust is –‘in most cases, people just won’t open up to those they don’t trust. Trust must be earned; demanding it rarely works and people will forgive many things but will rarely forgive where a trust is broken’.

4.5: Utility of the research

There are many reasons why research is carried out but generally because it will add to existing research, and/or highlight the necessity for future research. But in this case the author selected the topic, because the problems in commonage management have evolved from a local issue to a national one. It is being suggested by many including the current Minister of Agriculture, that it is imperative that the issue is addressed, to protect the environment for the common good, in addition to that of its owners. This is especially important in the current climate, as Ireland is depending more and more, on its natural environmental heritage resources, to deliver opportunities for employment expansion, in this case through tourism. It has also the potential to reinvent the co-operative culture that embodied Ireland in a different era, in relation to the management of rurality.

This research has delivered the potential axis for a new management system in co-operative management embracing the State, farmers and tourism interests. To develop a natural resource for a social/economic and environmental benefit for all potential actors and beneficiaries.

4.6: Limitations of research

The main limitations in relation to this research are it is based on one section/region where tourism has a significant role to play in the sustainability of the district. However it would have a

compatibility with other regions, especially along the west Coast of Ireland. In relation to farm income, and also farm support aid which has uniformity for disadvantaged regions, throughout Ireland as a whole. Although qualitative research is deemed weak by many, because findings cannot be extended to wider populations with the same degree of certainty, that quantitative analysis can. However it may be counter argued that it compensates by giving clear guidelines, especially if the research has a local significance. It also could be disputed that local research is not an end in itself; because it has a similar inference, in relation to broad segments of society, especially within the State. It could also be suggested that small sections of society apply a positive response, when it relays to their personal well being. But this research has deliberately expanded the study to include diverse actors to give a better balance to the findings.

The research is also limited because of the research ethics in relation to the privacy of respondents. This also includes the response to personal benefits for example financial income which is rarely accurate in any study? However as the researcher is local and aware of income levels, based on observation and also the uniformity of agricultural support aid schemes, it was relatively easy to calculate an average if required. However it was decided on ethical grounds not to include financial evaluations.

Section 5 A: Analysis of Case Study/Tourism Questionnaire

5.1: Introduction

The case study involved a response by five farmers to almost forty headings relating to their farming background and future management of commonages. It involved an open format and also a closed questionnaire. The main emphasis was to relate the overall theme to the research questions. The analysis will be addressed by first giving the profile of the case study participants. This will be followed by the nature of the relationship between the first research question, literature review and the respondents. The same method also applies to the second and third research questions.

The public questionnaire will be addressed in section B. This section will assess the responses of twenty people who are primarily not owners of commonage but have a recreational interest. Once again it will be stratified and will include hotel, walking, holiday home owners and rentals as well as casual visitors. It will also include personnel that organise/allow sporting events on their commonage. This section will close with a short

conclusion. As commonage **is in effect private land**, section B is relevant because the owners are open to the development of a common pool management for the common good.

All references in the analysis are extracted from the literature review: unless otherwise stated.

5.2: Profile of Participants

Case Study: The participants for the case study were deliberately selected through a stratified approach. This was achieved by sourcing people that are actively involved in farming management practices on the commons. This involved an expansive observation over time and concluding with a diverse selection of five farmers. The profiles are portrayed in general to protect the anonymity of the farmers.

The age/gender/family profile: All the farmers are male because there are no females actively, directly involved in the region being assessed. The farmers age profile is as follows (A) mid sixties (B) late fifties and (C) early fifties (D) in the region of forty years (E) in the region of thirty years. Farmer (A) is married (B) married with a family at different levels of education achieved to date which is ongoing, (C) has also a family of four, almost all have completed third level education, (D) married with a young family of five and (E) is still single, but intends to live locally and farm the commons.

Farming education experience: All the farmers developed their primary commonage farming management skills through a hereditary attainment. However four of the five have done environmental courses. Their formal education ranges from lower second level to a university degree achieved by one.

Principal category of employment: Three farmers are also involved in other labour related activities in a part time capacity. One other is on a government sponsored scheme and one is classified, as farming being his main occupation.

Farms/animals: The commonage farms range in size from 40 to 200 hectares incorporating single and multiple shares. The main stock is sheep and range in numbers from 100 to multiple of hundreds. All the farmers have also other stock incorporating bovine and equine which are primarily maintained on the enclosed farms.

5.3: First research question: The suitability of co-op management for a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) commonage farming community.

This was discussed with each of the respondents and quite surprisingly all five agreed with the Minister for Agriculture Dail statement: that commonage management ‘would not be an easy task but it was achievable if everyone worked in a **co-operative** basis. Four of the five were aware also of the minister’s comments. However they also stressed that it may not be suitable for all commonages. Four farmers said they would agree to co-op/collective stock management, with the other one saying he would agree to its principle; this generally supports the theory of Di Falco & van Rensburg, (nd), Bleasdale, (1995) and the field research of IT (college) Sligo in Scotland, discovered co-op stock management in practice. They also stressed the importance of collective stocks in reducing mechanical traffic on the commons especially quads as fewer would be required.

All five also stated that they would agree to a co-op/collective management plan for the common including tourism interests. However they also agreed that a top down approach may be necessary to generate same. This concept is also suggested by Hardin (1968) who believes the only way ‘is to have an external body impose a management structure’. The response from one farmer and generally supported by all-

It is better to have the recreational/tourism interests included, that would mean we could set ground rules. The present scenario is the worst possible situation, with tourists trespassing all over and in conflict at times with farmers. Also the Scottish open access is a bad idea. I am aware of its introduction which was one of the first things the new parliament in Scotland did – purely political and nothing to do with tourism/recreational activity. Access should be achieved by cooperation/consent.

Buckley (2008) also refers to the ‘the rise of conflict between landowners and recreationalists (particularly walkers) in the Republic of Ireland. Uncontrolled access is also referred to by Hardin’s (1968) theory ‘that pastures or public spaces such as national parks open to all without restrictions degrade the resource’. The problems with open access is also dealt with by Buckley et al (2007) when they acknowledge the open access policy in Scotland appears to impinge on farming business privacy and citing Horsburgh (2003) that just because - ‘This approach to land management worked in country x, so country y should do the same’. Each

nation needs to find its own approach. Three farmers said that recreational/tourism alliances should be with local groups while two believed it should be with a national body, for example Failte Ireland.

Summary

All the respondents agreed in principle to the co-op management of the commons while acknowledging that it may not suit every commonage. They also agreed to recreational/tourism included in a collective management structure. However they also agreed that it may need a top down approach to stimulate it. The environmental benefit of reducing quad damage to the commons by collective farming was also highlighted.

5.4: Second research question: The needs/motivations of the farmers.

The needs/motivations of farmer's beneficiaries are stifled by the EU land designation that is their collective view of the SAC designation. They also believe that it has impinged on pluriactivity needs in relation to income from farming as stock numbers and progressive farming is hindered. Three of the five farmers cited it as stagnation, with the other two describing it as regressive and depriving the farmer of motivation. The restriction on turf (peat) cutting was also quoted. All five farmers stated that the designation would also speed up depopulation. The EU land designation was described as by one farmer as '*Stagnating the land and giving priority to flora and fauna over people*'

The utilisation of the common to generate alternative energy was described as interesting but was unlikely to have any impact under present planning laws as they believe development on SAC land in Ireland is only theoretically possible. So they do not see the co-operative benefits of Samso Island in Denmark developing on SAC land in Ireland; especially in a high amenity area like the case study area.

Summary

All respondents believe that EU land designation is causing serious problems and in effect is stagnating the district. They view the reduced numbers of stock in farming leading to a cessation by some as it is not practicable to farm just a handful of stock. In addition they believe as a result, the flight from the land will speed up. They also believe the generation of employment/income from additional sources, for example windmills/turbines will not develop because of planning restrictions.

5.5: Third research question: Do the current existing/ proposed structures from the Irish State pertain to a demographic sustainable populace and management

The respondents were critical of Government policy to date in relation to management and believed the Government are working in a self imposed vacuum and detached from practical management. This is their response to some of the questions relevant to this section. All respondents agreed that farmers should be compensated for SAC land designation, however they also agreed that it should not apply to farmers that prohibit tourism/recreational activity. In addition they also agreed that penalties should apply to farmers that do not co-operate with commonage management.

Four of the farmers agreed that the state agencies personal dealing with commonage management should have experience/qualification in agriculture stock management. They all agreed that the state should acquire and disperse unused/abandoned commonage shares amongst existing commoners. However, only three of the five respondents agreed that public liability was an issue in open access. In relation to the state supplying additional assistance to farmers through the Rural Social Scheme; all agreed with the concept but expanded by suggesting that this would generate employment and training for especially young farmers.

If we do not train the young farmers and also give them the chance to generate a worthwhile living they will vacate the region and who will manage the SAC then. The management of sheep flocks on the mountains/hills is complex.

This was the forceful contribution of one farmer. The complexity of flock management is also dealt with by IT Sligo when they refer to the hefting in relation to sheep flock management. The respondents also suggest that the State system in relation to grant aid is really affecting the environment, for example not paying the farmers for gross areas in SAC lands and penalising for not dispensing with traditional flora - This is the view of another respondent --

Under the REPS scheme gross areas were deliberately included so farmers would not be trying to generate extra land and affecting the environment by doing so. Burning/removing traditional flora, for example Furze and Reeds is destroying the commonages and more importantly affecting the traditional scenery and also affecting the fauna. We need people with traditional

farming traits to manage the commons. The present situation is a contradiction – designating land because of its unique benefits to flora and fauna and then penalising farmers for having same on their lands?

Wild Furze and Reeds



Figure 5

The experience/knowledge issue is also addressed by McGurn (2011) when he cites ‘The importance of local knowledge in the management of a ‘common pool resource and the benefit of Biodiversity is also recommended by’ Feehan *et al.* (2005) and Visser *et al.* (2007). Although the respondents were generally critical of government policy, **yet four agreed that farmer’s lack of positive engagement has led to the present impasse.** This is also supported by the Burren Life Project who attributed failures to ‘lack of farmer engagement’. But three of the respondents also **blamed this impasse on a lack of interest by the Irish Farmers Association.** However they all agreed that the State was responsible for the lack of youth engagement and a positive response to grant aid by applying a meaningful positive discrimination, would generate a constructive response.

Summary

All respondents were critical of the State interaction in the management of the commons. They cited many examples where farmers should be **compensated and also penalised** for non cooperation. They also expressed the view that only State personal with farm

management skills/experience should be allowed an input to commonage management. They also blamed the state policy for lack of youth engagement; however they also apportioned some blame to the farmers and IFA for lack of engagement with State agencies. They were also critical of the calculation of the land within the SAC, citing the damage the current system is causing.

Section B: Tourism/recreational

5.6: Profile of participants

The participants were once again deliberately sourced to get a stratified system to ensure a broad response from diverse users/promoters of commonage. The main emphasis in this section was to get the opinions/attitudes of people who are by and large not the owners of commonage.

The age/gender profile: The twenty respondents are comprised of twelve male and eight female. Their age profile is as follows; there are two under twenty five years of age, with eight in the age category 25 to 44. There are six in age category 45-64 and four in the 65 and over section. 16 of the respondents are based in the case study area with four residing permanently in external urban areas. However two have holiday homes in the area.

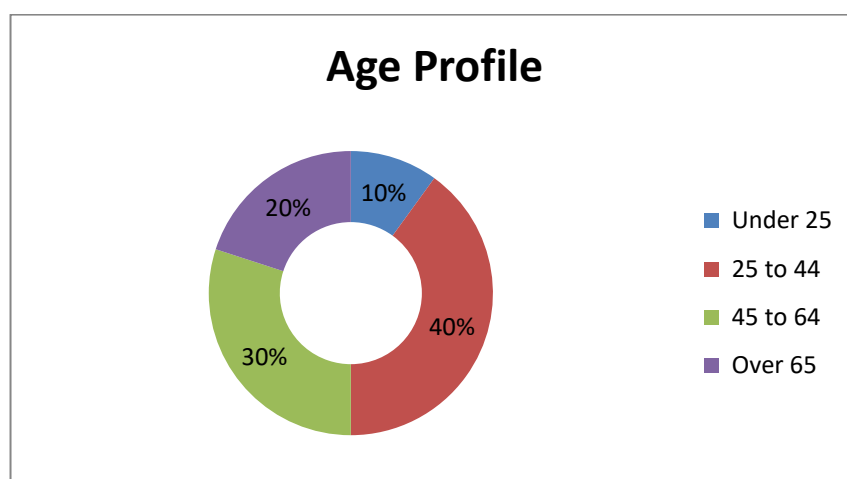


Figure 6

Education/experience: Two of the interviewees have a formal level of primary education. However they have also achieved unaccredited qualification in the service trade. Eight have

completed second level and ten achieved third level status; four of which was achieved in the hotel/hospitality field.

Principal category of employment: Eight are involved in full employment; two of whom are engaged in the tourism field. Ten are in part time/multi employment including farming, fishing and tourism. The final two are involved in State employment schemes.

5.7: Attitudes/Beliefs of Respondents

The vast majority of respondents 70% were not aware of the meaning of EU land designation and 50% were not really aware of commonage definition. All respondents agreed that they had used commonage for recreational purposes and 85% had also promoted its use by others. They also intended to keep using the facility, however only 30% were aware it was private property.

Only 15% were very aware of the benefits of open access to commonages, 20% somewhat aware, 50% not aware and with a 15% don't know. Just 35% were aware that EU taxpayer contributes to maintenance of commonages through farm grant aid.

All respondents believed that if there is uncontrolled access to commonage it would damage its environmental/recreational value. The following figure 7 gives an example of damage, because of **uncontrolled access** to a designated grassy beach land, caused by vehicles.

Damage to a Designated Commonage



Figure 7

It was suggested by 75% that a range of facilities from toilets/ car parking/designated pathways would protect the commons. The vast majority 75% also believed that if official recreational access was allowed, it would greatly improve social/economic benefits for the area for both local residents and visitors. Uncontrolled management is also discussed by Ostrom (2012) in relation to potential common pool resources, she suggests *'that all common pool resources suffer, because in many instances there is no overall responsibility and no individual will have the incentive to conserve'*. Di Falco & van Rensburg, (nd) also suggest that co-operative management *'has a positive and important impact on commonage conservation'*. This could also include *'exploitation and valuation of common pool resources based on their extractive use suggested by Hardin'*, (1968); Bromley, (1991) and Ostrom, (2000)

All respondents believed that if a co-op alliance was in place the State should promote the designated areas for the common good. The tourism/recreational interest should be represented by local groups; this was suggested by 75% with 15% suggesting both local and national bodies combined.

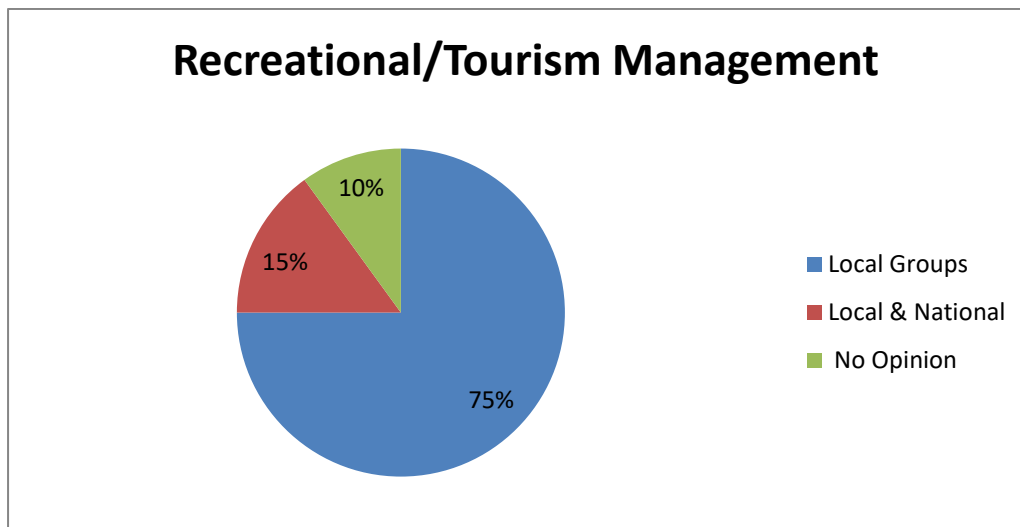


Figure 8

One tourism respondent cited:

'How can we promote property that is in effect private?' This is also supported by a quote from Failte Ireland, (2003) - *'Without agreed access to the countryside, Ireland does not have a Walking Product to market'*.

An equal number were involved in tourism promotion and not for profit recreational activity on the commons. The tourism interests ranged from hotels/restaurants employing 60 to 80 people to self employed personal. This section also included self catering, water sports and camping. In addition 20% also promoted not for profit events on the commons.

The only question that split the respondents equally was the question in relation to the erection of wind turbines with 50% for; believing that it was necessary to sustain a population and 50% against saying that it would destroy the present high level income from tourism.

One respondent cited –

Windmills are a disaster, they will ruin the countryside. They will also affect tourism and by extension employment. It's the last thing we want in this area. I will oppose any windmill development.

However another had a counter response –

Windmills can transform the area, it is well researched that the area is ideal especially along the coast. It will generate jobs and keep the young people in the area. If the drain of youth continues the area will die.

The ageing population and new demands on conservation, heritage maintenance is also referred to by Hynes, Buckley and van Rensburg (2007) in relation to increased affluence, mobility, ageing of the population and changing values.

Development of Wind Turbines

For	Against
50%	50%

Figure 9

Summary

The vast majority were not aware that commonage was private land and by extension were constantly promoting its use to the general public. However, only a small number were aware of the current position of general open access. All agreed that uncontrolled open access would damage the commons and would prefer an input to management through local recreational/tourism groups. The only real division was the development of windmills with an even split in relation to for and against.

5.8: Conclusion

The overall findings have delivered a positive in relation to the primary question of co-op management of the commons together with the inclusion of tourism/recreational interests. This is evident in the response from the case study and tourism/recreational questionnaire when both surveys agreed that uncontrolled access/management would degrade the commons. It also shows that farmers are critical of State policy and citing examples in areas they believe this could be improved. However they also stated that farmer's lack of positive engagement is also affecting the management. They also believe that current policy will reduce the population still further in the case study region. The studies also convey the unawareness of the public in relation to commonage definition.

Section 6: Discussion/Recommendations

6.1: What have we learned?

The definition and history of the commonages in this research demonstrates the complexities of common ground collective farming. It is quite obvious from the research that communal type farming was perceived as a failure. The various enclosure acts in the UK and throughout Europe in the period from the 12th century onwards demonstrates the actions of governments in dividing common grazing ground. This was described by DeMontvert (1789:52) as the progressive individuals and that all 'remnants of ancient habits and traditions had to be eliminated, because only the complete, direct and individual ownership of the land could allow both its improvement and the introduction of innovations'. However Clark & Clarke, (2001:24) argue that the UK enclosure acts in later centuries, arose in part because of the great increase in the English population after 1760. Which drove up the value of land; even to this day common land is much more valuable when partitioned?

The research also shows that Ireland was no different with the Irish Land Commission also encouraging subdivision. However it could be argued that all good agriculture land in Ireland is now partitioned and all that remains is primarily the marginal land which is generally situated in the mountainous regions, especially on the west coast. The research also shows that the security of this land is now the main priority of environmental protection in both the EU and also the Irish Government. The imposition of EU directives in this case to ensure its protection was/is delivered through the SAC instrument.

The investigation also shows that traditional management of commonage in Ireland is no longer practicable in the current environment. For example herding stock on the commons, because the human resources are not available and also the cultural change. However the research by IT Sligo discovered that there are a number of cooperative sheep flocks in Scotland operating successfully which have evolved from traditional husbandry (The author also applied the collective principle in a limited way during the duration of this programme).

The study also shows how some researchers see the commons as a potential important resource that could be utilised as public goods; through recreational/tourism activity and also citing examples in Africa. It also refers to the problem of Failte Ireland in marketing the resource because of its present legal structure and using the following quote - **'Without agreed access to the countryside, Ireland does not have a Walking Product to market'** (Failte Ireland, 2003).

The field exploration discovered that **farmers are in agreement with a co-op management of the commons incorporating recreational/tourism activity**. It also discovered that farming and tourism/recreational personal are interested in the overall management as they collectively agree that uncontrolled access can/may damage the resource. However it also discovered that Government policy was delivering a serious impediment to human sustainability and having a serious effect on the motivation of the farmers.

Farming interests also primarily believe that the State is not playing a positive role in promoting the management and also the utilisation of the facility for the common good. The tourism section emphasises the importance of tourism to the area and by extension why the resource should be promoted as public goods, to help generate a sustainable population. An overview of the education levels demonstrates the high level of achievement, with a sample of the DEDs discovering that education levels were higher than both the county and nationally.

6.2: Recommendations

The management of the commons is a challenge that has faced many over the years. Generally there is no simple solution, at least which can be meaningfully applied; because some farmers will not cooperate. However the literature review has focused on segments of research that has attempted to understand the complexities of commonage management. This has been combined with the case studies which are based on the experience of a heredity accumulation. So based on the cumulative, the following recommendations are suggested -

- **The State:** Must play a positive role in promoting a co-op application of commonage management through a top down co-op promotion. This is the view of the case study farmers and also suggested by Hardin (1968) who believes the only way 'is to have an external body impose a management structure'.
- **The State:** Must also make provision for co-op farming through a business management plan which will include owners/representatives and recreational/tourism nominees. This should also provide for collective flocks to deal with the hefting and would in effect mean that several farmers could own sheep in individual flocks on the commons (Research by IT Sligo discovered this in practice in Scotland; a number of cases have adopted a co-op approach through stock clubs. This means the flock is managed as one flock but collectively owned).

- **The State:** Must also use its powers to deal with unused commonage and repossess- redistribute to active shareholders and also penalise farmers that fail to comply with the co-op management principle; however not depriving any farmer of the right to individually comply.
- **The State:** Must pay farmers for gross areas in SAC land (a practice that was built in to the REPS schemes) Payment to be classified as environmental based payment. This will ensure that the SAC environment will be retained in its traditional mode.
- **The State:** Should allow only supervision by State personal with qualification and or experience in farm management administration.
- **The State:** Must train young farmers through a scheme for example the Rural Social Scheme to retain and maintain the SAC commonages in conjunction with farmers.
- **The State:** Must use positive discrimination to provide young progressive farmers with meaningful grant aid payments (giving to the young at the expense of others).
- **The State:** Must support/promote SAC designation lands as productive; encompassing tourism/recreational activity and absorb public liability.

6.3: Was the Research Justifiable

It is well documented that the co-operatives played a major role in assisting segments of society to counter poverty. This was especially evident in England during the 1800s when the main emphasis was on creating small co ops to deal with unemployment mainly attributed to the Industrial Revolution. However some progressive farmers operating in Ireland decided to use the system as a business innovation to advance farming commercially, this was ‘originally the vision of William Thompson’ (Ward, &Brisco, 2005:24) but brought to the forefront by Horace Plunkett in the late 1800s and early 1900s. The main aim was ‘Better farming, better business, better living’ (ICOS, 2012). So in effect the co-op system was used successfully by two different types of beneficiaries - poor/unemployed workers and potentially rich commercial farmers.

In addition it could be argued that Nora Herlihy and associates used another tier; the credit union through a social co-op structure. This is referred as ‘Credit unions are usually considered to be co-operatives but are also sometimes categorised as social enterprises’. This is also supported by the manager of a prominent credit union in Galway when he stated that the vast majority of members invest in the credit union as a loyalty to their local community;

despite the fact that they can attain a higher investment premium elsewhere. He also cited examples of people who invested more than the State guaranteed amount because they wished to support their local community (in a personal interview with the author).

This research thesis has supported the hypothesis of Briscoe, McCarthy, Power and Ward, (2012:3) in relation to its focus on developing/expanding ‘new types of co-operatives/social enterprises to meet the changing needs of our own communities’. The research clearly demonstrates that the environment in the first instance can/may be managed by a new co-op development. This can be delivered in a unique way; for example based on the research a new co-operative structure can be created by producing a development plan by all collective associates. It is not necessary to register as a legal entity because each farmer can/may be part of a co-op appliance and operate his/her farm interests independently, this may also include recreational/tourism interests. For example it is possible to have farmers with different numbers of stock operating in the same co-op (example in Scotland already given). With expenses and profits paid/received on a pro rata basis. The pro rata system is already in operation on Samsø Island Denmark (already featured in the research) in relation to the wind turbines. However the collective association may also be registered as a co-op if required, this would be especially necessary if the concept was extended to alternative energy provision.

Summary

The research was justified on the basis that it has potentially added a new layer to the co-op application; in this instance the environment – the potential unique management of SAC commonage. It can also potentially fill the void referred to by Harris, (2006:4) in Co-operative Social Responsibility - ‘It is fair to note that the environment is conspicuously absent from the co-op Principles, suggesting that co-ops do not have a clear advantage for managing or enhancing their environmental bottom line’. It was also justified as it delivered a response to the theoretical stimulation of developing/expanding ‘new types of co-operatives/social enterprises to meet the changing needs of our own communities’ that is also supported in practice by stock management in Scotland and pro rata management of the wind turbines in Denmark.

Section 7:

Conclusion

The development of the hypothesis that ‘Co-operatives can play a Constructive Role in the Management of Environmentally Designated Commonages’ was primarily achieved by an expansive examination of all aspects of commonage in both Ireland, rest of Europe and Africa; while at all times focussing on the primary co-op theme evolving from the Ministers speech - *‘It was achievable if everyone worked in a **co-operative** basis’* and the stimulation from UCC - *‘New types of co-operatives/social enterprises to meet the changing needs of our own communities’*.

The formal -op concept is primarily new and it was necessary to place a special emphasis on the case study to answer the prime question. The research has delivered a positive which is summarised in ‘What have we learnt’ 6.1: and ‘Was the Research Justifiable’ 6.3:

The research also delivered an overview of the education levels in the area and highlighted the importance of tourism to the area. The research has clearly demonstrated that marginal designated land has an important role to play in the social economic benefits it can deliver. It is also quite evident that the resource should be classified as productive in relation to public goods.

The overall findings clearly support the concept that a co-op structure is suitable for the management of a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) commonage farming community resource. However it also shows that the SAC designation is stagnating the needs/motivations of the farmers and that the current existing/proposed structures from the Irish State need change to develop a demographic sustainable populace and management in SAC regions.

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