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NETWORKS AND NETWORKING IN ECOTOURISM PROMOTION: EVIDENCE FROM IRELAND’S GREENBOX ECOTOURISM DESTINATION

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BA, MPLPSD

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the discipline of Geography

NUI Galway
Supervisor: Dr. Mary Cawley
December 2013
ABSTRACT
This thesis presents the results of a study of the Greenbox, an ecotourism destination, situated in a geographically and economically marginal rural area on the northwest border between Ireland and Northern Ireland. The initiative, which existed from 2003-2007, was funded primarily from European Union sources and administered by a management board consisting of representatives of local authorities, national tourism bodies, regional and rural development groups, and ecotourism providers. An ecotourism provider network was established which providers could join for a small fee. The International Ecotourism Society definition of ecotourism was adopted and modified slightly for use by the project and the EU Flower was adopted as a method of certification.

Representatives of support organisations (21) and ecotourism providers (37) were selected purposively for interview. Four research questions structured the research. These investigated: the relationship between ecotourism as a particular form of rural tourism and the local resource base; how appropriately embedded and disembedded networks and networking among organisations operate to promote ecotourism; how appropriately embedded and disembedded networks and networking among providers operate to promote ecotourism; and, how ecotourism as an appropriately embedded and disembedded phenomenon, operating through networks and networking, contributes to balanced rural development.

The Greenbox project was established as a ‘top down’ network led by government rather than growing organically, a circumstance which appears to have contributed to its short lived nature. However, a range of benefits arose in terms of increased awareness of ecotourism and the potential of the selected area for this form of tourism, incorporation of ecotourism into policy documents, awareness of the positive role of networks and networking in promoting and developing ecotourism and the emergence of a provider led promotional group. The experience suggests that even short term networks and networking can have more positive outcomes than is sometimes recognised.
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DECLARATION
I declare that this thesis is an original piece of academic research composed by me (Therese Conway) and the research within has been conducted by me.

Signed....................................

Date.....................................
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<td>BMW</td>
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<td>Cavan County Council</td>
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<td>CML</td>
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<td>NITB</td>
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<td>Sligo County Council</td>
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<td>Tourism Ireland</td>
<td>TI</td>
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<td>Western Development Commission</td>
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

“It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is most adaptable to change”.

Charles Darwin

What I have learned over the last three and a half years is that conducting PhD research does indeed change you, and sometimes not for the best! There are a number of people who have been instrumental to this research and as a result have seen me move through the various guises of an individual consumed by research. I am forever grateful for your guidance, help and support.

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To my parents; a line in a thesis will never be enough to thank you for how much you have sacrificed for me to get this far, but I hope it goes some of the way to letting you know how appreciative I am.
Finally, to Niall... what can I say, you taught me how to believe in myself and were always there when I wavered. I could not have completed this without your love and support... now let our adventure begin....

x
For mum and dad
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

CONTEXT
This chapter introduces the research topic, discusses its planned contribution to the research literature, and presents the research questions and the study area. The thesis addresses key themes in tourism relating to ecotourism, embedded and disembedded networks and networking and how these constructs find expression in an ecotourism destination in a peripheral area of northwest Ireland. The objectives of the research were to gain a better understanding of: (i) the links between ecotourism as a niche form of tourism and the natural, economic and socio-cultural environments in which it is located; and (ii) the role of appropriately embedded and disembedded networks and networking in promoting ecotourism. Arising from the research it is hoped to identify if and how ecotourism can contribute to a more balanced rural development.

The term balanced rural development, as discussed by Marsden (2003), can be defined as striking a balance between the needs of economy, society and environment. In that sense it shares features in common with sustainable development as defined in the Brundtland Report (World Commission on Development 1987; McDonagh et al. 2009). Achieving sustainable rural development has become a key focus of international, national, regional and local policy across the EU since the late 1980s, as part of broader regional development policies (Storey 2009). Tourism has been assigned a role in this context in peripheral rural areas where traditional landscapes and ways of life have survived which are attractive to postmodern tourists in quest of ‘authenticity’ (Hall et al. 2003; Urry and Larsen 2011). Tourism has, for example, received particular attention in the EU (European Union) Leader programme (links between activities for the economic development of rural areas) since the early 1990s. Tourism is long established in Irish rural development policy and the rural landscape forms a central element on the promotion of Ireland internationally, although a rural tourism policy as such is now only emerging (Commins and Keane 1994; Rural Development Advisory Group 1997; White Paper on Rural Development 1999; O’Connor and Dunne 2009).
Internationally, ecotourism is receiving increased attention as a form of tourism that is particularly appropriate in sensitive physical environments in developing countries, which also serves to protect these environments and local cultures (Ross and Wall 1999). Che (2006), based on her work in the north-eastern United States, has illustrated that ecotourism also offers potential for contributing to local economies in peripheral areas of the developed world. The designation of an ecotourism destination in northwest Ireland (known as the Greenbox), in the late 1990s, reflects recognition of a potential to transfer principles relating to ecotourism from the developing to the developed world. This experiment provides an interesting context in which to explore the potential for ecotourism promotion in a marginal area of a developed country. A management network was established in order to promote ecotourism in the Greenbox, following what has been increasingly recognised as good practice in tourism more generally, internationally (Michael 2007). The management board functioned between 2003 and 2007 when external funding was no longer available. Nevertheless, the study of the Greenbox provides an opportunity to interrogate the appropriateness of a network approach to ecotourism promotion in a developed world context and its short-lived nature assumes additional interest.

Understanding of ecotourism is important due to the growth in ecologically conscious tourists and the growing demand for new travel experiences which are different from traditional sun, sea and sand packages (Hall and Page 2006). Ecotourism is advocated in both developing and developed areas of the world because it can not only offer these experiences but can contribute to environmental conservation and balanced rural development (Che 2006). The reported research examines ecotourism as a niche form of tourism that is promoted as more sustainable than mass tourism and encourages tourists to become more environmentally aware. Ecotourism in the international literature has been explored in terms of its definitions, origins and application in developing and developed world contexts. Examining ecotourism as a contributor to economic and social developments, through an imposed network, as in the Greenbox, offers another dimension to the international literature and is comparable to network and networking studies in tourism more generally in Ireland, the UK and Australia (Griffin 1999; Dredge 2004; Saxena 2005; Ilbery and Saxena 2009; Kelliher et al. 2009).
Ecotourism is socially constructed and many definitions have been published (Fennell 2001). Bjork (2000), Fennell (2001), Donahue and Needham (2003) have notably compiled approximately 100 definitions in each of their studies, and have analysed the components that are contained within these accepted definitions. The results found that many, if not all, of the definitions have a number of commonalities. These are that ecotourism occurs in primarily natural areas, with the purpose being to visit and appreciate the area. The focus of the tourism is nature and the tourist behaviour should be non-damaging. Enmeshing in local environment, culture and society is a feature of ecotourism. This enmeshing has parallels with Oliver and Jenkins’s (2003:303) description of local embeddedness in the case of integrated rural tourism: “embeddedness can be said to exist where tourism activities are part of the local social and recreational life; when products enhance and commodify the local landscape; and where attractions are based on the existing natural, built historical and cultural heritage of the region”.

Following increased attention to ecotourism and the development of products labelled and promoted as ecotourism, the need to regulate this type of tourism has been highlighted (Font 2002). Certification through labelling is advocated as a means to distinguish genuine ecotourism products from ‘green washed’ products, which are labelled as ecotourism but do not meet required standards (Medina 2005). Certification indicates high quality and environmentally and socially conscious products (Haaland and Aas 2010). Certification usually involves features of built structures and use of water and recycling criteria, known as ‘grey’ features, as distinct from the ‘green’ or natural environmental features of ecotourism (Buckley 2001).

This research adds to current scholarship in ecotourism as it considers definitions of ecotourism that are selected by ecotourism projects and how these definitions are, at times, based on the natural environment and they do not equate or relate to the procedural, technical aspects of many ecotourism labels. The research highlights the difficulty associated with having ‘green’ criteria definitions and ‘grey’ criteria labelling schemes. This complexity creates problems in terms of developing and promoting ecotourism products and understanding ecotourism more generally.
Networks and networking are attracting particular attention as structures for promoting small business development including in ecotourism (Michael 2007). A network in its simplest form is a structure made up of nodes or actors that connect for a variety of purposes (Lynch and Morrison 2007). In essence a network is the overarching structure within which the individual parts function (Pavlovich 2003). Networks therefore refer to a way of fostering communication which is known as networking (Lynch and Morrison 2007; Michael 2007). Just as ecotourism is conceptualised in terms of its embeddedness in local environment, society and culture, so also are networks and networking (Kneafsey et al. 2001). It is recognised also that appropriate disembeddedness to extra local levels is required to source funding and attract tourists.

Networks in ecotourism have not been well documented. This research illustrates that they either develop organically or are imposed due to funding. The central network of focus in this study was the Greenbox, which was a top down, imposed network developed in direct response to external funding. The results of this thesis highlight the importance of informal, organic, unimposed networking in ecotourism and how an imposed network (like the Greenbox) can have benefit but the real value appears to be contributed by informal networking.

Embeddedness and disembeddedness have particular geographical connotations, although the origins of the concepts are positioned in economic and sociological theory. Embeddedness in local systems has been found to benefit the promotion of tourism and ecotourism. Therefore, a focus on who actors are linking with and why, in terms of resource use but also in terms of the transfer of information that supports the development of joined up experiences for the tourist (i.e. packaged holidays), is important for understanding ecotourism development. Embeddedness relates directly to the local network connections and how enmeshed the network and the actors are in the local area; and how they interact with others in using the available local resources. Disembeddedness relates to extra local network and networking connections to levels outside of the study area and is defined as how removed these connections can be. Disembeddedness has been considered in terms of its role in sourcing resources not readily available locally such as funding and tourists (Oliver and Jenkins 2003; Cawley et al. 2007).
AIMS AND OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS
This research assesses embedded and appropriately disembedded networks and networking and how they assist with understanding the development and promotion of ecotourism in a defined geographical location. Ecotourism networking in Ireland has not yet been documented in published literature, although Hanrahan (2007) has written about eco-certification. Relatively few published studies relate to ecotourism in developed countries (Nowaczek and Fennell 2002; Weaver and Lawton 2002; Che 2006; Buckley 2007; Ryan 2009). The research therefore seeks to contribute to knowledge in an original way, relating to Ireland, and to ecotourism in peripheral areas of developed countries. In doing this, it is innovative in assessing an ecotourism network, established by government, in a response to available funding which had a short lifespan.

Considerable research has been conducted relating to the role of networks and networking in promoting balanced development, through tourism, in peripheral rural locations (Tinsley and Lynch 2001: Pavlovich 2003: Saxena 2005: Dredge 2006a, 2006b; Ilbery and Saxena 2007). Less is known about networks and networking in ecotourism in developed countries (Anderson 2009). This project adds a new dimension as it considers their operation in ecotourism as a niche form of tourism in a relatively unknown tourism area.

Two groups of respondents, representatives of support organisations (21) and ecotourism providers (37), were interviewed. Four research questions were developed which structured the research:

1. What is the relationship between ecotourism as a particular form of rural tourism, and the local resource base broadly defined?
2. How do appropriately embedded and disembedded networks and networking among organisations operate to promote ecotourism?
3. How do appropriately embedded and disembedded networks and networking among providers operate to promote ecotourism?
4. How can ecotourism as an appropriately embedded and disembedded phenomenon, operating through networks and networking, contribute to balanced rural development?
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODS
The research was situated within an anti-naturalist approach, adopting a hermeneutical and interpretive theoretical framework. The framework of interpretation engages with understanding of phenomena (in this case relating to ecotourism, networks and networking, and embeddedness and disembeddedness) (Reily and Love 2000). Interpretivists are concerned with how the respondents construct and understand the world around them. Following Rose (1997: 305), this approach was adopted as I was interested in the “situated knowledges” of the selected respondents.

Based on this need for understanding, the method of data collection focused on words rather than quantification, following Bryman (2010). The method of semi-structured face-to-face interviews produced a rich textual base for analysis and as an approach was concerned with how the social world was interpreted, understood and produced by the interviewees (Bryman 2004). This methodology used was hermeneutical in the most basic terms, and involved analysis of interview transcripts and sought interpretation and understanding of events by analysing textual statements. The approach sought a ‘thick’ description in order to have significant data to analyse through a thematic analysis.

In pursuit of the objective of obtaining understanding of the adoption and operation of ecotourism in the Greenbox, purposive sampling was used to select respondents whereby the selection was on the basis of certain characteristics that they exhibited which were pertinent to the research objectives set out above and stated previously by Lo (2009). It is a strategic form of sampling, through which an attempt is made to link the sample to the questions and the information sought (Bryman 2004). There were a number of stages of sampling and the phases differed slightly between the organisations and the providers. The thematic analysis produced understanding of the statements made at interview and how the central concepts were finding expression.

STUDY AREA
The study area is the Greenbox, Ireland’s first ecotourism destination established in 2003 (Figure 2.1). The area occupies a cross border location in northwest Ireland and
covers parts of six counties, five in Ireland and one in Northern Ireland. The area has been the focus of development initiatives for some time, due to a history of political and civil unrest during a thirty year period from the 1960s to the late 1990s. Following the Good Friday Agreement of the 10th April 1998, which was signed by the Irish and British Governments, a number of projects received considerable funding from external sources, such as the EU Interreg and the Peace Programmes (Appendix A). It also benefited from governmental support, from both sides of the political border in order to foster development, in an area that suffered from under development, out migration and a poor reputation following the period of unrest. Funding was available for projects that would specifically foster economic development in this peripheral and underdeveloped region. Tourism was one of the areas considered suitable and therefore over €3 million euro was made available through Interreg IIIA and the Peace Programme to develop an ecotourism destination.

The project was developed as a “training and learning organisation” to facilitate enterprises and organisations in reaching the ecological standards that the Greenbox area strived for (http://www.greenbox.ie). The objectives of the Greenbox included: grant aid to suitable businesses; the development and management of a network of producers in the area; and the marketing and promotion of the Greenbox region throughout Ireland and internationally (OI #1). The EU approved ecotourism Flower award was adopted as a certification method for accommodation providers in the area, because certification is cited as being central to ecotourism and important to prevent ‘green-washing’ (OI#1). The EU Flower certifies accommodation based on grey criteria such as water and energy use.

In order for the project to function, a number of administrative structures were established. The Greenbox was administered by a management board consisting of eight organisational representatives, a CEO of the project, and a small number of provider representatives. The organisations were local authorities, regional and local development bodies, a public private partnership in the tourism sector in Northern Ireland and the national tourism authorities in Ireland and Northern Ireland. The project included a separate ecotourism provider network which providers could join by paying a membership fee.
THESIS STRUCTURE
Chapter 2 develops the concepts that underpin the research by reviewing pertinent literature and provides a brief overview of relevant Irish tourism policy. Chapter 3 presents the theoretical framework and the methodology used along with a profile of the study area (the Greenbox). Chapter 4 profiles the organisations and the tourism businesses, including the characteristics of the organisational representatives and tourism business owners/managers. The results relating to both the organisational and provider views on ecotourism and its operation in the Greenbox are contained in Chapter 5 and contribute to answering the first research question. Chapter 6 relates to the findings in terms of organisational networking and addresses the second research question and Chapter 7 discusses the provider networking and the third research question. Chapter 8 discusses the fourth research question and presents the conclusions arising from the research and makes some recommendations.
CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

INTRODUCTION
This chapter provides the contextual basis for the research. It defines the concept of ecotourism and discusses the literature which is central in setting the foundation for an examination of the concepts of embeddedness, disembeddedness, networks and networking and how they find expression in tourism destinations. The chapter does not provide an exhaustive literature review of these concepts, as this is not feasible because of their multiple meanings and uses. The focus is instead on their use in rural tourism. Some historical context is provided from various schools of thought, but the main concern is with the theories that are pertinent to rural areas and, in particular, studies that relate to tourism and ecotourism. The chapter presents a review of academic literature relating to the central concepts. A brief review at the end, assesses the extent to which ecotourism has been assimilated into tourism policy as it applies to the study area. The conceptualisation of ecotourism as a distinct form of tourism is discussed initially. Following this embeddedness, disembeddedness, networks and networking are defined prior to an extended discussion of each.

EMBEDDEDNESS AND DISEMBEDDEDNESS
In order to understand both ecotourism as a niche form of tourism and networks and networking as organisational constructs, within which ecotourism development and promotion take place, it is necessary to recognise the roles of embeddedness and disembeddedness. In a geographical sense, embeddedness relates to how enmeshed activities are in the environment, culture, economy and society of a particular location and disembeddedness relates to (appropriate) links to socio-economic systems in external locations (Murdoch 2000). Disembeddedness must be appropriate in that it should serve to support ecotourism locally rather than detract from it. It is not therefore interpreted as a disruptive influence, although that may appear to be the case from the prefix ‘dis’. Ecotourism per se, as will be demonstrated, is deeply enmeshed with local environmental and socio-economic systems. The formation and operation of networks and associated networking are
also recognised as involving local embedding and appropriate disembedding (Cawley et al. 2007). Whilst embeddedness and disembeddedness have particular geographical connotations, the origins of the concepts lie in economic and sociological theory. A brief review of these origins is presented to situate the discussion of ecotourism, networks and networking that follows in the broader academic literature.

Polanyi (1944) is widely cited as the father of embeddedness, although his limited use of the term itself has been noted (Block 2003; Hess 2004; Krippner et al. 2004; Jones 2008). Polanyi’s central argument is that economic exchange is embedded in society and the systems of exchange that take place are based on shared values and social norms (Polanyi 1944; Hess 2009). His main focus was to highlight the connections between economic and social life (Hess 2009). He perceived the market view of the economy as being focused on exchange that involves price only, and therefore being disembedded from society and culture (Hess 2009). He sought to re-establish the embeddedness of the economy in social and cultural systems by recognising their mutual interrelationships. In the case of rural tourism, embedding has been used to refer to the ways in which tourism is integrated into the local environment, economy, society and culture through the use of local raw materials, craftsmanship and local ownership of small businesses (Saxena et al. 2007). In a similar way, in the context of local foods, Heinrichs (2000) has used ‘embeddedness’ to represent the fact that resources or activities are directly linked to place and relationships are formed within particular social and cultural formations in specific localities. Embeddedness has been described by Riley (2000: 197) as a “useful framework” for understanding processes in tourism and can also be used to understand ecotourism as a niche form of tourism, as ecotourism gains its distinctive characteristics from the particular environmental, cultural, economic and social systems in which it finds expression (Buckley 2008).

The sociologist Mark Granovetter (1973; 1985) expanded on Polanyi’s thesis relating to a need for the re-embedding of the economy in broader systems. Granovetter’s focus in explaining embeddedness is on personal relations, through networks, and how these relationships can frame economic behaviour and actions. Like Polyani, Granovetter argues that the use of embeddedness as a concept can avoid under and over socialised views of economic actions (Granovetter 1973, 1985;
Embeddedness in its most straightforward form relates to how enmeshed or networked actors are in a specific group or society (Granovetter 1973, 1985; Hess 2004). It implies that relationships are formed within particular locations and relate to social and cultural contexts and available resources are linked to this. Embeddedness incorporates the connections (networks) between the actors involved in developing the tourism product such as local providers (Saxena et al. 2007; Ilbery and Saxena 2009). Mutual contacts become established and allow different groups to come together and share information and knowledge for common purposes (Pavlovich 2001). ‘Trust’ forms an important element in these relationships and in attaining goals (Hess 2009).

Because of being applied to relationships at a local geographical scale, embeddedness has been referred to as involving ‘horizontal’ relationships between the actors involved in tourism and also their relationships with the local resource base (Kneafsey et al. 2001). The embeddedness of local relationships extends also to those between providers and local public organisations from which the former obtain supports of various kinds. Organisational embeddedness in local systems is also known to be conducive to the more effective promotion of tourism and ecotourism. Therefore a focus on who actors are linking with and why, in terms of resource use, but also in terms of the transfer of information that supports the development of joined up experiences for the tourist (i.e. packaged/bundled accommodation and activity holidays), is important for understanding ecotourism development. Embeddedness relates directly to the local network connections and how enmeshed the network and the actors are in the local area; and how they interact with others in using the available local resources.

Embeddedness is not without its critics, particularly of over-embeddedness which can restrict local activities in various ways. This may take the form of over-reliance on a particular form of tourism service which increases vulnerability to changes in market preferences or in environmental conditions, for example angling in areas at risk from water pollution (Oliver and Jenkins 2003). Over-embeddedness may also take the form of reluctance by established businesses to admit newcomers, resulting in negative competition (Jack and Anderson 2002). Another example relates to a reluctance to incorporate new ideas which may contribute to reduce the attraction of a product or area (Pavlovich 2003).
Polanyi also discusses disembeddedness in a non-geographical sense, as the separation of institutions from a political or government centre. His argument is that market economies were removed from the social and cultural elements of society and he advocated their re-embedding in those structures. Giddens (1990) uses the term in a more geographical sense, as part of contemporary globalization, involving distancing in terms of space which he sees as being more dependent on trust than spatially proximate relations are. Such distancing is often necessary in order to access essential resources. Ilbery and Kneafsey (1998) and Cawley et al. (2007) discuss how some rural tourism products are marketed as niche products locally and are recognised as such; however these markets can be small. Therefore, accessing external markets becomes essential if businesses are to survive and develop. Business development and expansion is also often dependent on extra-local information, advice, training and funding. For example ancient craft skills may have died out in some regions and expertise may have to be sourced from extra-local locations in order to maintain the craft as part of the local tourism attractions.

Disembeddedness is important for contact with customers, suppliers and distributors, which Kneafsey et al. (2001: 299) state is “fundamental for long term success of a marginal rural location such as west Wales”. Organisations also engage in disembedded networking in order to develop the tourism product within a specific region by linking with other relevant organisations, funding bodies or others important for tourism development.

Like embeddedness, disembeddedness is a feature of networks and networking. The published evidence to date suggests that, in both instances, the actions undertaken, if appropriate, are conducive to the more effective promotion of tourism. This study seeks to identify the extent to which the merits of embedded and appropriately disembedded networks and networking extend to ecotourism. Before discussing concepts relating to networks and networking, ecotourism is introduced including the extent to which it is imbricated with local environmental, economic and socio-cultural systems. Ecotourism as a form of locally based and managed tourism in developed world contexts is defined as being dependent upon and supportive of the local environment, culture, economy and society (Donoghue and Needham 2006; Smith et al. 2010). The following section defines ecotourism and discusses its origins and presents some types of ecotourism and associated certification methods.
ECOTOURISM

Ecotourism is a concept which attracts academic debate (Björk 2000; Blamey 2001; Fennell 2001; Donohoe and Needham 2003). For Blamey (2001) this interest stems from the increasing dissatisfaction with mass tourism and a general growing environmental and ecological concern. Holden (2008) states that interest in protecting the quality of the environment is growing among tourists and that there has been a resultant increase in ‘green’ consumerism. Weaver and Lawton (2007), among others, discuss how the designation of 2002 as the International Year for Ecotourism was a reflection of the importance assigned to the promotion and development of the concept (Cater 2006; Weaver and Lawton 2007; Fennell 2009).

Ecotourism is considered to be socially constructed and many definitions have been developed (Fennell 2001). Having a definition for ecotourism has been found to fulfil two functions, the first being to clarify the meanings of the term and the second to clarify the use of the term for those who manage, or wish to develop, destinations. Björk (2000), Fennell (2001) and Donohoe and Needham (2006) conducted similar analyses of the multiple definitions that exist and found that many, if not all, of the definitions have a number of commonalities. Björk (2000) groups these common dimensions under the headings of: characteristics of the area, what the tourists do, and the objective of the tourism. The results illustrate that ecotourism occurs in primarily natural areas, with the purpose being to visit and appreciate the area. The focus of the tourism is nature and the tourist behaviour should be non-damaging. According to Bjork (2000), the major flaw in all the definitions is the absence of cooperation. He feels that all groups of actors involved in ecotourism must cooperate in order for ecotourism to be sustainable. He argues that one single strict definition of the concept would only exist in an ideal world, where all areas are the same, exhibiting exact characteristics with all ecotourism being uniform.

Many of the definitions discussed by Fennell (2001) similarly have unifying factors such as preservation of the natural environment and contributions to conservation and sustainability of an area and tourism that does not exceed the local carrying capacity (Bjork 2000). Like Bjork (2000), Fennell (2001) developed what he felt were the core criteria of these definitions. The variables identified were: tourism occurring in natural areas, conservation, culture, providing benefits to locals and a form of tourism that offers an educational component. Donohoe and Needham
(2006) more recently conducted a similar study and their finding support Fennell’s with their unifying factors being: nature based tourism, with a focus on preservation and conservation with an educational remit. They also highlight the importance of ecotourism providing gains or benefits to the host community. Smith et al. (2010) discuss ecotourism as tourism that takes place in unspoilt environments and focuses on learning in connection with the existing resources of the area, highlighting that contemporary studies are still citing the same unifying features. Therefore, previous studies have highlighted unifying factors that find expression in definitions of ecotourism. These criteria are: tourism based in natural areas, involving conservation and culture, providing benefits to locals, and a form of tourism that offers an educational component. Several of these elements are present in early definitions of ecotourism.

One of the earliest accepted definitions of the concept was by Hetzer (1965), an academic and adventurer from California, who led the first ecological tours through the Yucatán peninsula in southeast Mexico in the early 1970s. Hetzer did not use the word ‘ecotourism’, but he is commonly cited as one of the first to promote this form of tourism, as these trips focused on the elements defined earlier. He introduced a form of tourism which is based on the natural resources and associated wildlife sites of interest in a destination. His approach was underpinned by four pillars: minimal environmental impact; minimal impact on and respect for host communities; maximum economic benefits and maximum recreational satisfaction for the tourists. These four pillars are developed upon in many contemporary definitions of the concept especially, according to Fennell (2009:372), in the work of Ceballos-Lascurain, a Mexican architect, environmentalist and ecotourism expert who was the first to coin the phrase internationally. Ceballos-Lascurain defined ecotourism as “travelling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas with the specific objective of studying, admiring and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals as well as any existing cultural manifestations (both past and present) found in these areas” (Ceballos-Lascurian 1973: 44). The English language tourism literature posits that Romeril (1985) was the first to use the term in English where he discussed how ecotourism could offer a new type of tourism that would aid sustainability, but Ceballos-Lascurain is generally recognised as the original source.
While Hetzer (1965) is sometimes discussed as the father of the concept of ecotourism, Wall (1997) states that ecotourism always existed as tourists were continually visiting natural landscapes, and the concept is now being branded as a marketing strategy. Miller (2007) posits that the concept emerged with the legalisation of hunting in 1950s Africa. When hunting became legalised there was a need for regulation which led to the development of game and safari reserves which provided places for the hunters to stay and led to the development of ecolodge destinations and ecotourism. This origin is now somewhat contested as hunting is not often associated with ecotourism, following Weaver and Lawton who posit that “less understood is the relationship between ecotourism and extractive industries such as recreational hunting and fishing, assuming that the latter do not qualify as ecotourism” (Weaver and Lawton 2007: 1174). Other researchers suggest that the concept emerged much later via the eco development literature of the 1970s and possibly through the increased interest in the sustainable development movement of the 1980s (Fennell and Weaver 2005; Fennell 2009).

Fennell and Weaver (2005) discuss ecotourism in terms of three core criteria of being nature based, learning focused and exhibiting holistic sustainability. More recently, at an organisational level, ecotourism is defined by The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) (2008) as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the wellbeing of local people”. This stream of definitions demonstrates that there is not one universally accepted definition of the concept; however, there are unifying features.

It has also been argued that the definition should be developed to correspond with the geographical context. Some scholars believe that there is a need for different definitions for various ecological and environmental areas (Cater 2006). This has particular validity for developing versus developed world areas and also for protected and non-protected landscapes. Ecotourism has been discussed in many geographical contexts from developed and developing countries and in urban and rural settings (Campbell 1999; Hernandez and Baltazar 2005; Che 2006; Ryan 2009). The concept was once only synonymous with areas of the developing world, such as Central America, the Caribbean, Indonesia, Nepal and parts of Africa; however it is now being used as a rural development tool in developed countries such as the USA, Italy and Ireland. It is understood as an innovative development method in areas that
traditionally would have been reliant on agriculture, natural resource production or extractive industries (Che 2006).

Like many forms of tourism, ecotourism has been criticised (Lawrence et al. 1997). Although many scholars discuss ecotourism as positive, on the basis that it is less environmentally invasive than mass forms of tourism (Buckley 2004), others are critical of the concept (Carrier and MacLeod 2005). The main points of contention surrounding this form of tourism relate to its sustainability, degradation of the environment which it is trying to maintain and the tangible benefits to host communities (Cater 2006). Also disputed are the problems surrounding certification and how some ecotourism labels are promoting weak products, as will be elaborated on later (Buckley 2008).

Confusion pertaining to the term ecotourism is also sometimes voiced. This confusion is found to be mainly related to the concept being used interchangeably with terms such as ‘alternative’, ‘green’ and ‘adventure’ tourism. With regard to this, Fennell (2001) discusses how the educational role of ecotourism differentiates it from adventure or alternative forms of tourism and this problem should not exist if the educational component is correctly developed and evident. Cater (2006) has also stated that ecotourism can be criticised, in some cases, due to its prohibitive costs and a relatively low return to the local population. To illustrate this he proposed the example of Tiger Mountain in Nepal where the costs to tourists are very high but the benefits accrued by the host communities are questionable.

The application of the term ecotourism to destinations and products, as part of labelling, has also received much attention from scholars as the 1990s saw the concept grow further with the development of certification programmes worldwide (Potter and Hinnells 1994).

**Certification**

With the increase in attention to the concept of ecotourism and the development of products labelled as ecotourism, there were calls for regulation in order to ensure that products being promoted were ecotourism compliant, in terms of their adherence to the concept as defined. Certification is advocated as a means to distinguish genuine
ecotourism products from ‘green washed’ products, which are labelled as ecotourism but do not meet required standards (Medina 2005). Buckley (2002) believes that an ecolabel should incorporate four elements which are: (i) global brand recognition, including monitoring and information on the implications of the label; (ii) detailed criteria for the different products and services; (iii) each label should include at least two levels of attainment; and (iv) the labels should be transparent with an educational remit for tourists (Buckley 2002). Certification indicates high quality and environmentally and socially conscious products (Haaland and Aas 2010).

Honey and Stuart (2002) posit that there are now over 100 eco certification programmes and labels worldwide. Buckley (2002) discusses the development and evolution of an ecolabel over a variety of stages from: identifying the environmental issue; raising media and government awareness; development of the label; the incorporation of cost increases, in the case of some products (which lead to complaints and legal action); and finally the formulisation of the label. Certification schemes for ecotourism were widespread by the early 2000s and had become somewhat routine and uncoordinated (Buckley 2002). The proliferation of labels means that many tourists choose to ignore them. Some labels are poorly defined and others can exist without a monitoring process (Fennell 2009: 376). These labels have been established at various levels from individual businesses to groups that include large businesses, voluntary organisations, government agencies and private enterprise. Ecolabels can be used as a marketing mechanism and a method of analysing consumer choice and can lead to ‘green washing’ (the marketing of products as ecotourism that may not comply with ecotourism as defined or reach the required standards of technical criteria) and some have argued that there are no methods to prevent ‘green washing’ in certification (Font 2002). However, the use of these labels allows the tourism provider to become competitive in terms of providing an ecotourism product (Buckley 2002).

Font (2002) has tracked the development of ecolabels from their origins. 1985 saw one of the first eco certification schemes being developed in the form of the Blue Flag award for beaches. This certification was developed to encourage those responsible for the beaches to meet the standards set down by EU Legislation in terms of quality of bathing water. Ecolabels promoted worldwide include the Green Globe, developed in 1998, which is an international label which certifies entire
destinations. The Australian NEAP (Nature Ecotourism Accreditation Programme) relates to the certification of ecotourism providers and the EU Flower, which is very broad, applies to a variety of industries including the production of cleaning fluids, detergents, chemicals and insulation of buildings. The EU Flower was developed in 1992 as an EU wide voluntary environmental scheme and certifies a range of products including tourism. In ecotourism it currently only certifies accommodation providers. As of January 2012 there were 356 EU Flower certified accommodation premises across Europe (http://ec.europa.eu).

There are various processes that take place in the development, awarding, and monitoring of an ecolabel (Buckley 2002; Font 2002). This involves an examination of the initial standards and criteria, the assessment criteria and the process of certification. Standards with regard to eco certification have to be clearly documented, otherwise interpretation will differ (Font 2002). Also Font discusses problems in terms of the managing of the labels themselves. Ecolabels “require verification by an independent third party, they are linked to technical advice, the label can be regained through a cyclical review, and criteria evolve in stages” (Font 2002: 198). When discussing the Green Globe, he notes that almost the same logo is awarded to companies that made a commitment to become eco certified and to those which are actually eco certified (Font 2002). Weaver and Lawton (2007) have discussed how quality control mechanisms, like eco certification, are methods of assuring that products and services comply with high standards which, in ecotourism, should be related to the principles and practices set down in many contemporary definitions. In order to ensure eco certified products are compliant with the standards, Font (2002) has called for the results of certification to be published to allow for a clear and transparent process. Labels rely on external funding in many cases and when this funding is not available their growth becomes stunted, as research by O’Cinnéide (1999) relating to an EU Life environmental label illustrated also.

There is widespread confusion surrounding eco certification due to the proliferation of labels worldwide (Buckley 2001; Sharpley et al. 2001; Font 2002; Honey and Stuart 2002). Certification has the potential to reduce tourism’s negative impacts and develop accountability (Font et al. 2003). When Medina (2005) analysed ecotourism in Belize, Central America, she discovered that there was a lack of understanding of
key terms in ecotourism, which inevitably impacts on certification and its understanding. Proponents of ecotourism argue for certification labels that have more stringent criteria, reflecting the definitions of ecotourism in terms of the four pillars discussed in 1964 by Hetzer or related to other contemporary definitions of the concept (Honey and Stuart 2002; Medina 2005). The Synergy (2000) report, which analyses the Green Globe Label, states that there are many criticisms of eco labelling, the central ones being that they are expensive, they require considerable time input, and they focus on environmental management not performance. Ecolabels are difficult to regulate and there is evidence of loose systems of regulation with providers falsely labelling products as ecotourism (Font 2002).

The International Standards Organisation developed ISO standards in 1947 which are awarded to whole organisations for technology and business performance. The 1400 series relates to positive environmental performance. Brown et al. (1998) discuss the experience of small and medium enterprises with ISO certification in Australia. The paper focuses on benefits and disappointments associated with certification. Like ecotourism certification, many obtained the ISO 1400 standard as they hoped it would increase customer numbers (Brown et al. 1998). It was found that the ISO certification did not guarantee future success or viability of businesses and excess paperwork and onerous review processes were cited as negatives (Brown et al. 1998). Morrow and Rondinelli (2002) illustrate that there is also concern surrounding the ISO and the tangible benefits associated with it for SMEs, by discussing an example from an Ohio (USA) food plant. In terms of positives, as part of obtaining the ISO the plant reduced its packaging, boiler ash and water consumption to increase environmental performance and save money. However statements were made in regard to the lack of interest in the certification by staff and consumers. This can be compared to certification in ecotourism, as some of the findings relating to SMEs and the ISO are comparable to findings in tourism businesses, in that cost saving is also central to eco labelling, and with this motivation the actual understanding of the label is questionable.

In general terms, ecotourism businesses are those where premises are developed on sound ecological principles such as waste minimisation, sustainable building techniques and reduced resource consumption (Carter and Lowman 2004). Tourism
based in the natural environment that is not extensively invasive such as hiking and angling can also be considered as ecotourism (Page and Dowling 2002). Accommodation that is low density and locally owned and operated, and attractions that are unique with natural and cultural features, utilised by tourists and locals, and that highlight the local sense of place, are also deemed to meet the core characteristics of ecotourism (Weaver 1995). These businesses should also make contributions to conservation and provide environmental education for tourists (Page and Dowling 2002).

Types of ecotourism
Ecotourism can exist in a variety of ways and has been discussed in terms of ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ and ‘comprehensive’ and ‘minimalist’ forms most commonly (Weaver and Lawton 2002; Weaver 2005; Fennell 2009). Weaver (2005) discusses minimalist as a type of tourism which exhibits superficial learning experiences whereas the comprehensive type engages with a holistic and deep understanding. Some believe the minimalist approach is easier to provide due to the ability to facilitate larger groups and engage the services of conventional tour operators (Weaver 2005). Hard ecotourism involves more dedicated environmentalist travellers who are seeking mentally and physically challenging experiences. These tourists choose to stay in non-serviced accommodation allowing maximum contact with the host environment. Soft ecotourism refers to larger groups of travellers, who stay at well serviced sites, and have a shallower encounter with nature. These groups will have more developed links with conventional travel agents (Weaver and Lawton 2002). Both the hard/soft and comprehensive/minimalist approaches are comparable but they are not considered the same. The hard/soft model relates to the scale of the tourism with soft being large scale and hard small scale, whereas the comprehensive/minimalist approach relates to the levels of sustainability (socio-cultural, economic and environmental) achieved in the approaches (Weaver 2005).

Linked to this variation in the type of ecotourism, it is known that destinations of particular types appeal to different groups of people and the destinations’ popularity can change over time (Plog 1974: 2001). This may be due to the fact that as destinations grow they change and lose the appeal that made them attractive at the
outset. Plog (1974: 2001) has developed typologies of tourists on the basis of their willingness to travel. The spectrum includes those who are psychocentric or dependable, and prefer a predictable lifestyle and are not drawn to foreign travel. At the other end of the spectrum are the venturers who have an exploratory tendency and like to try out new experiences. It is possible that ecotourism and, in particular, hard ecotourism may fit this typology. These types of tourists avoid crowded mass tourism destinations, prefer unusual and underdeveloped locations and will easily stay in unconventional accommodation (Plog 1974). These elements reflect the reasons behind ecotourist motivations to travel (Weaver 2005). The early stage of a destination’s development is also more attractive to these allocentric types (Plog 2001).

Summary
Ecotourism is constantly evolving in terms of how it is defined and practised. The preceding paragraphs have discussed its multiple definitions, origins, relationships with certification and the type of critique that surrounds the concept. It has illustrated that as a concept ecotourism has multiple definitions, but comparable meanings and disputed origins, and links to safari tourism and eco development literature are widely highlighted. Certification has been found to provide benefits in terms of avoiding green washing and reducing running costs for providers but the concept has also been criticised due to the onerous processes associated with obtaining some labels. The following section will engage with the concept of networks and networking.

NETWORKS AND NETWORKING
Scott et al. (2008) argue in the introduction to their edited text that tourism has always been networked because of the relationships that exist between national tourism offices, hotels, activity providers, transport providers and other stakeholders in tourism (Charlton and Essex 1996). While they are correct in this assumption, as there is evidence of a physical and established network structure in tourism in many countries, the amount of activity occurring in this network cannot be assumed. Nonetheless, as Scott et al. (2008) mention later, networks are complex sets of
relationships that require significant analysis. This section will present an analysis of networks and networking as constructs by first discussing networks, their use in tourism and their type and function, followed by a similar discussion of networking.

Networks

The term network is used in many different contexts and holds many meanings, depending on the context. A network in its simplest form is a structure made up of nodes or actors that connect for a variety of purposes (Lynch and Morrison 2007). The network concept is based around relationships between entities such as organisations or people (termed nodes), and the properties of networks studied by researchers relate to the structure of these relationships (Scott et al. 2008: 1). In essence a network is the overarching structure within which the individual parts (actors) function (Pavlovich 2003).

Historically networks have their origins in mathematical theory, economics, transport and logistics and sociological theory (Scott et al. 2008). In these instances networks were used to understand sets of interlinked nodes and comprehend values attributed to them. Graber (2006) attributes networks in sociology to the work of Simmel where he assigned different values to the connections in webs and graphs. In these cases networks were used as a framework through which a more socially based understanding was sought, with regard to the individuals and their relations with others in these networks (Graber 2009). Networks have been studied in a range of contexts in economic geography, in particular, and geographers have continued to analyse their impacts (Hess 2009).

Networks in tourism have been understood in different ways; most commonly they are understood as connections, relationships and links between the actors involved (Gibson et al. 2005; Saxena 2005; Dredge 2006b). Network theory in tourism evolved in the 1980s and the 1990s and is now applied more frequently to tourism studies (Dredge 2004; Saxena 2005; Dredge 2006a, 2006b; Dredge and Pforr 2008; Campos 2009; Wray 2009; Beaumont and Dredge 2010). Networks have been found to have various roles in tourism. In the 1970s networks were first used as a method of implementing tourism policy (Richardson 2004; Dredge 2006b). Dredge (2006b) points out that two streams of literature have emerged when discussing networks in
tourism. The first relates to the work of scholars such as Tinsley and Lynch (2001) and Pavlovich (2003) which discusses social interactions in firms and the role of networks in this. The other set of literature relates to public-private relationships in developing tourism policy (Dredge 2003, 2006a, 2006b; Dredge and Pför 2008). The adoption of tourism as a development strategy in rural areas depends on the extent to which networks have been developed (Kneafsey et al. 2001). Tourism networks have been cited as having an impact on successful tourism destination development (Morrison et al. 2004). Network studies in tourism have examined networks that are established under various conditions. Some networks are issue specific (Pför 2006), whereas others can be seen to be policy focused (Dredge 2004; Vernon et al. 2005). Pför (2006) discusses how networks can explain the process of tourism development and the associated interactions of those involved in the process. Morrison et al. (2004) in their study of international tourism networks discuss benefits accrued from being a member of a network in terms of business activity and developing an associated community. Other studies have also alluded to the benefits of networks in terms of how they are successful because of trust, leadership and their lifecycle (Morrison 1994; Morrison et al. 2004).

Scott et al. (2008) argue that the increase in networks is due to globalisation because it encourages connections and collaborations in order to increase ease of communication and assist in the development of tourism products. Multiple actors are involved in rural tourism such as tourists, business owners and managers, organisations and agencies (Cawley and Gillmor 2008) and some or all of these can be involved in tourism networks.

Some networks have been established with the aim of creating a learning forum for network members (Saxena 2005). Networks promote sharing of knowledge and information along with innovation (Costa et al. 2008). This forum allows for the passing of knowledge and information between members but can also create practical benefits because it allows for the passing of business from one operator to another (Curren et al. 1993). Networks in tourism are important because successful destination development depends, in part, on the interactions between those involved in tourism and also the learning value which is created through networks (March and Wilkinson 2009).
Ilbery and Saxena (2009), when assessing integrated rural tourism using a network approach in the England Wales border region, examined the process of sharing and connections in tourism and how it influences the tourism product. They discuss the network’s role in bringing people together from different levels (international, national, regional and local) and how these links develop the tourism product. In the three networks discussed, the importance of these links in developing the tourism product by assisting with knowledge transfer is stated.

Tinsley and Lynch (2001) discuss networks between small tourism businesses and how they may contribute to destination development. Networks involving tourism businesses may also allow for complementarity and allow for participants to obtain some benefit from being involved (Wen Pan 2008). Networks in small businesses, like those in operation in rural tourism have been discussed in terms of the interaction of the firm with the external local environment (Lynch 2000).

Dredge (2004) and Pför (2006), in examining how the behaviours of different groups shape local tourism policy in two separate local level Australian case studies and, more recently, Tyler and Dinan (2010) who examine a national tourism policy network in England, explore the role of networks in the formulation of tourism policy. These studies have found that networks can be made up of complex webs of actors but they can be used to understand the processes that surround policy development (Dredge 2006a, 2006b; Pför 2006). However they also highlight how different levels of participation in terms of active and less active network members can lead to the network being unsuccessful in part (Dredge 2006a). Other studies examine how networking can be useful as a construct in understanding collaboration between different groups when dealing with tourism development (Dredge 2006b).

**Formation of networks**

Some networks have been referred to as ‘top down’ (formal) or ‘bottom up’ (informal) networks (Lynch and Morrison 2007). Variations have been discussed in terms of what can be defined as formal or informal (Cawley et al. 2007). Gibson et al. (2005) discuss a formal network as a prescribed set of actors who engage for the purpose of an identified aim. In essence, many of the definitions state that formal networking is rigid and structured, whereas informal is more fluid in nature. Formal
networks can be seen to exist at board levels (Saxena et al. 2007) and can include face-to-face meetings (Costa et al. 2008). Therefore, as LeHeron et al. (2001) posit formal networks exist at a professional level.

Graber (2009) suggests that informal networks are based on shared experience arising from repeated contact and exchange. Graber (2009: 407) proceeds to state that because they are formed by repeated contact they have ‘long term horizons’. LeHeron et al. (2001) also discuss informal networks as friendship based. Saxena (2005) outlines how networks have different systems of communication or exchange and it is through this that she distinguishes between formal, organised networks and informal networks which are those not associated with any particular structure and appear more “open-ended” (Saxena 2005: 283). For the purpose of this research levels of formality will be considered in line with Saxena (2005).

Networks have been found to exist in a number of formations (Saxena 2005; Saxena et al. 2007) including horizontally, vertically and diagonally (Michael 2007). Local level horizontal networks have been discussed in terms of their role in local policy development and getting all relevant parties involved (Dredge 2006b). Connecting with the earlier discussion of embeddedness, networks with horizontal formats mean they are enmeshed or embedded locally through local membership of the network (Oliver and Jenkins 2003). Horizontal embeddedness relates to how entwined the network members are in the area where tourism or ecotourism takes place through local ownership and the use of available local resources (Oliver and Jenkins 2003; Kalantardis and Bika 2003; Hess 2004; Saxena et al. 2007). At the level of the firm this is important for contributing to the economy, providing employment and promoting the sustainable use of natural resources (Cawley et al. 2007). Vertical networks are networks that have extra local reach outside of the study areas (Oliver and Jenkins 2003). They have extended extra-local links in order to reach funding supports and access external tourists (Cawley et al. 2007).

Saxena (2005) and Ilbery and Saxena (2007) examine how networks can be cross-sector and can relate to organisation-to-organisation contact (Griffin 1999). Lovelock (2001) discusses the importance of inter-organisational relationships in allowing closer stakeholder relationships. Like Saxena (2005), Dredge (2004) considers how cross-sectoral networks operate. Dredge also discusses features, such as building
relationships between interested parties, that impact on local level tourism networks, and how networks and communication within the network can evolve over time. The influence of the network in creating or maintaining public-private interactions is also considered. These connections can exist between exclusively private or exclusively public groups but can also span relationships between these sectors and can organise and promote action on issues such as tourism policy formulation (Dredge 2006a; Graber 2009). Pavlovich (2001: 498) referred to this as “structural coherency” which is established based on the multi sector make-up of participants, and the ensuing mix of ‘strong’ (closely bonded group) and ‘weak’ (acquaintance) ties and how a myriad of knowledge can permeate through the multi-sector and multi-tie approach.

Networks in tourism have been found to exist in different guises and have been assessed at different stages of their lifecycle (Gibson et al. 2005; Dredge and Pforr 2007; Pforr 2008). Networks are also discussed in terms of their development over time (new or established), their age (young or old), their longevity (long term or short term), by whom they were developed government-led (‘top down’) or locally driven (‘bottom up’).

Important to this study are young networks which have been assessed in terms of their use at early stages of tourism destination development (Gibson et al. 2005). What Gibson et al. (2005) discuss in the context of the Leith Initiative for Tourism in the United Kingdom is the conflict that may arise between public and private values and the value systems to which members ascribe. How networks could develop more effectively and how the effective development and longevity of networks depends on suitable participant behaviour are also discussed. The findings of this study illustrate that the start-up and growth of young networks can be unclear but that some benefit can emerge from the networks in the form of learning. Fragmentation and loss of networks can occur when the network identity is weak. This element of identity has been linked to young less developed networks (Gibson et al. 2005). Short term networks, which exhibit short lifecycles, due to reasons such as lack of funding or lack of commitment, are assessed by others (Morrison 1994; Dredge 2006b). Notwithstanding their short term nature these networks have been found to have benefit in terms of learning, knowledge transfer and policy formulation (Gibson et al. 2005; Wray 2009).
A network can also go through phases and episodes of forward momentum and decline and sometimes stagnation (Dredge and Pforr 2008; Wray 2009). Dredge and Pforr have examined how networks move through phases of development and decline and the levels of network activity could therefore impact on embeddedness as the local network provided access to available local resources. Research has also found that networks can be very large, encompassing multiple actors; or they can be small, only involving a few individuals (Dredge 2006a).

Networking
At this juncture it is important to discuss the process of networking that occurs through networks. The loose application of both terms has led to confusion and conceptual mixing of the terms (O’Donnell 2004; Lynch and Morrison 2007; Michael 2007). Networking, put simply, is the process of communication and information exchange which can occur within a network or independent of it. Networking refers to communication within the network in order to reach certain goals (Lynch and Morrison 2007; Michael 2007; Conway and Cawley 2012) (Appendix J). Networking can be understood as the method through which the benefits of the network are realised (Michael 2007). Networking varies based on those in the network and their commitment to the network (O’Donnell 2004). Networking, however, can also occur between tourism providers, organisations and other actors independent of any network structure.

Costa et al. (2008) discuss the various types of contact, or networking, in terms of face-to-face, telephone and letter. Telephone and face-to-face contact emerged as being important in fostering active networking and findings illustrate that networking can assist with the diffusion of information through face-to-face methods (Costa et al. 2008).

Networking in tourism can be seen to occur in the same context and for the same purposes as networks. Networking has been found to benefit rural tourism areas by increasing attendance at local events, increasing marketing and promotion and has also been found to result in increased membership of local tourism groups (Cawley and Gillmor 2008). Networking activity in business contexts may be influenced also by the functions of the various organisations involved in the process (Griffin 1999;
Saxena 2005; Timor and Getz 2008). Therefore, the role of the organisation or the individual representing the organisation in the network can impact on why they are networking and what they wish to gain from or add to the process. In a study of small businesses it was found that “networking is a process through which business activities, resources and actions are developed” including products and relationships (Ford and Mouzas 2013: 434).

Formal networking can be understood in a similar way to how Saxena (2005) discussed networks as organised contact, sometimes occurring through a network structure. Informal networking is less structured, similar to informal networks discussed earlier, and in the terms of tourism businesses can include informal contacts such as business referral (Ryan and Mottier 2010).

Saxena et al. (2007) discuss horizontal networking by businesses to local institutions and resource providers in order to develop the local tourism product. Murdoch (2000) discusses horizontal networking as a more distributed form in terms of linking food into other sectors. Horizontal networking is reliant on levels of embeddedness which promotes greater integration into the local rural landscape (Oliver and Jenkins 2003). Vertical networking is important in terms of linking the local to the national and the international levels for sourcing funding, promotion and marketing and involves appropriate disembedding (Saxena et al. 2007). In tourism, funding is often sourced externally and promotion and marketing usually take place to external clients. Vertical networking allows for the tourism product to be exported through connections with those outside of the local area. Wray (2009) in her study on the destination system in operation in Byron Bay, Australia, mentions the importance of looking at the multiple layers (vertically disembedded and horizontally embedded) that are involved in tourism destination development, in order to fully understand the connections that happen between the various actors involved. Levels of networking and embedding and disembedding are recommended as being helpful in achieving sustainability in local and extra-local collaboration by Cawley and Gillmor (2008). In terms of this collaboration embeddedness has also been discussed in relation to personal ties in networks and how this affects the operation of the network (Granovetter 1973, 1985; Hess 2004). A third form of networking discussed in the literature and of relevance to this study is diagonal networking. Diagonal networking or clustering, applies to firms working together to
provide a ‘package’ by bundling products and services together so that a single product or experience, in the case of tourism, can be purchased (Michael 2007).

Kneafsey et al. (2001) assess levels of networking in four different market types. The results illustrate different levels of networking, both horizontal and vertical in all four and reveal that, in the particular study area, the lamb/beef and organic sectors exhibit strong vertical networking (disembeddedness) with cheese and crafts exhibiting strong horizontal networking (embeddedness). The paper suggests that a central challenge for communication longevity depends on institutional commitment and associated policies. In an Irish study, Griffin (1999) used networks and networking in this way, to understand the local operation of tourism in Lough Derg. Connections between those involved in tourism development were mapped, in order to gain an understanding of the importance of the connections to the development and promotion of the tourism product. Saxena (2005) focused on a different use of networking by using the concept to understand the interactions between actors from different sectors and their social contribution to learning across the sectors and consequently how networking can shape collective learning.

Summary
Networks have been defined as structures containing nodes (individuals) through which information (networking) can travel. Embeddedness has been found to relate to local level enmeshing in a particular area through networks and networking locally and developing links so as to develop and promote products. Disembeddedness has been found to be a useful method of allowing these products to grow through external connections to promotion, marketing and funding supports and access to external markets and tourists. These concepts have been assessed in terms of their use as constructs in understanding the development and operation of rural tourism destinations. The following section discusses the policy context for the study.
ECOTOURISM IN IRISH TOURISM POLICY AND PLANNING

The natural environment, history, and culture are central elements in Irish tourism and are used widely in promotion (O’Leary and Dineen 2008). The establishment of the Greenbox was the first formal initiative supported by the state to promote ecotourism as a niche activity in a marginal rural area in the island of Ireland with a high quality physical environment attractive to tourists. Certification of ecotourism is promoted by private entities (EcoTourism Ireland) and conducted by public bodies (the National Standards Authority in Ireland [NASI] and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development in Northern Ireland [DARD]). The main form of certification pursued in the Greenbox was the EU Flower label. As the following brief review will illustrate, ecotourism has emerged only recently in tourism policy documents in Ireland and Northern Ireland. Networks have also been introduced relatively recently as a method of creating collaboration between tourism providers (Gorman 2005).

Ecotourism is promoted as a type of tourism experience available in Ireland on the websites in both states by Fáilte Ireland (FI), the Irish tourist board, and the Northern Ireland Tourist board (NITB). The term itself is not used in the policy documents of either organisation but the documents do include statements that can be understood as ecotourism, such as environmentally friendly ‘grey’ criteria and outdoor activities based on ‘green’ criteria. Although ecotourism has not been mentioned specifically in official policy documents until relatively recently, the quality of the natural and cultural environments is well recognised as a key attraction of Ireland for tourists.

From the early 1990s, increased attention was given to protecting these resources. For example, Bord Fáilte (the predecessor to FI) published Developing Sustainable Tourism – The Bord Fáilte Tourism Development Plan 1994-1999 which outlined a strategy to foster continued success in tourism development and stated that “a policy of sustainable tourism development is required which will leave this physical and social environment undiminished and ideally enhanced, as a resource for future enjoyment” (Bord Fáilte 1994: 3). The Plan identified potential to promote the northwest region as the “greenest part of Europe’s green island” illustrating an awareness of the environmental capital available to develop niche forms of tourism such as ecotourism (Bord Fáilte 1994: 6).
A major review of Irish tourism was conducted in the early 2000s and the resulting document, *New Horizons for Irish Tourism* (DAST 2003), provides a framework for action over the following ten years. Although the document does not refer directly to ecotourism, actions highlighted in the document relate to environment conservation and the importance of building design principles and other initiatives, such as reduced waste production, water use and energy expenditure for the future of tourism. The report outlines that central elements of appeal in attracting visitors to Ireland are the unique selling points of people, place and pace which tourists can engage in when staying. Many of the products are forms of ecotourism run by local people.

One of the important actions in the *New Horizons* document, central to this project, is the proposal to develop product clusters similar to diagonal networking as described in the literature (Michael 2007). The product cluster action related to collaborative marketing of single (i.e. golf) or multi product (i.e. heritage, outdoor activities and culture) offerings in order to develop the tourism product in areas where the products were being offered. Academic literature refers to the importance of such a clustered or networked approach in fostering longevity in tourism (Saxena 2005; Michael 2007; Cawley and Gillmor 2008).

NITB has an environmental policy on its website which mentions that they will promote environmentally good practice across the tourism sector. In its *Operational Plan 2008-2011* it also mentions that it will endeavour to increase ‘green’ consciousness in terms of water use and waste production which is similar to ‘grey’ criteria as discussed in the literature and in the Irish plans. The NITB refers generally in its *Operational Plan* to promoting clustering in growth areas. This relates to promoting the development of bundles of products in areas such as heritage or activity tourism in order to offer the tourist a complete experience. These documents illustrate an awareness of the importance of environmental protection for tourism. Networks were also referred to and the benefit of these in assisting tourism development is cited, in particular in relation to product clustering or diagonal networking.

The most recent document that relates to tourism in the North West Tourism region is the *North West Regional Tourism Plan 2008-2010*. “This plan is intended to
provide a road map so that all key players from both the public and private sector can most effectively contribute to the further development of sustainable and economically beneficial tourism in the region” (Fáilte Ireland 2008: 6). The northwest regional plan like the national plans outlined above also states that now is time for a ‘new beginning’ in tourism.

“The northwest region has underperformed in the Irish tourism industry for some thirty years due in part to the Northern Ireland political and security situation which has recently been transformed and which now provides opportunities for future growth on a scale not possible for many years” (Fáilte Ireland 2008: 15).

The cross border focus of this document is important. The plan clearly outlines the opportunity for a cross border focus and how co-operation can develop a shared experience for the visitor and deliver a seamless quality experience (Fáilte Ireland 2008). This plan was developed about ten years after the Good Friday Agreement, illustrating that cross border collaboration was established as a method to develop the area more fully.

In 2000 the Western Development Commission (WDC), a regional development organisation, produced The Blueprint for Tourism in The West. The blueprint calls for a sustainable approach to tourism development which seeks to reconcile “tensions between the people and environment of the host areas and the needs of visitors and the tourism industry so as to minimise environmental and cultural damage, optimise visitor satisfaction and maximise long term economic growth for the region” (WDC 2000: 6). The key findings of this report state that the environment is a central element to the product of the area. In terms of marketing there is a low awareness of the area, poor access is a problem and there is a need for greater coordination of the activities and products offered to the tourists. Although the report discusses sustainable tourism, the definition above is essentially a definition of ecotourism as defined in the literature (Hetzer 1965; Ceballos Lascurian 1988; Fennell 2001). It is comparable to many academic definitions except that education is not discussed.
With regard to local tourism policy, in 2000, the provisions in the new Planning and Development Act required that each local authority in Ireland prepare a county level development plan (CDP) that would last for a period of six years. Local Authorities and in particular their Planning and Development Departments, have a role in managing and controlling development which does not negatively impact on the environment. These local plans were assessed and are discussed in Chapter 4 in connection with the profile of each organisation. In general these plans do not use the term ecotourism either but also refer to the importance of protecting the natural environment for tourism.

An *Ecotourism Handbook for Ireland* was produced by Fáilte Ireland and the Greenbox in 2007. This document discusses all elements of ecotourism in Ireland including establishing, marketing and developing ecotourism products. The Handbook states that the future for tourism in Ireland is ecotourism. “Ecotourism is a rapidly growing movement towards creating a greener and more ethical form of tourism worldwide” (Failte Ireland and The Greenbox 2007: 5). The handbook also outlines that the principles of ecotourism were being obeyed by certain people for generations prior to the whole green movement becoming both popular and accepted. Nonetheless “many people say that achieving a perfect ecotourism product is impossible. But no one is asking for perfection. If the Irish tourism industry acts together in a collaborative way to instil some of these ecotourism practices into our everyday businesses, we can aspire to an excellent tourism product en masse” (Failte Ireland and The Greenbox 2007: 6). The handbook also reiterates that the literature states that the demand for ecotourism is growing, as discussed earlier, and points out difficulties with the concept in terms of green washing (Font 2002).

**Summary**

National policy clearly sets out ambitious goals with regard to tourism development and the importance of increasing tourism numbers in the northwest region of Ireland. However, its attention to ecotourism is minor. This can be attributed to the national tourism authorities’ role in attracting tourists to Ireland and Northern Ireland more generally, rather than focusing on attracting niche ecotourists specifically. However, statements made relating to the natural environment can be connected to ecotourism.
as discussed in the literature and the national websites promote ecotourism directly, illustrating that it is given consideration. At a regional level, the focus was greater primarily due to the fact that the Greenbox covers a high proportion of the tourism region and the organisations responsible for policy formulation at this scale had board level membership of the Greenbox. Local policy differs on a county basis but a focus on ecotourism is evident, although limited in many cases and will be discussed in Chapter 4. The Ecotourism Handbook produced by FI and the Greenbox provided clear guidelines for establishing and promoting ecotourism.

TOURISM IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT
An objective of the research is to assess the potential contribution of ecotourism to more balanced rural development. This objective relates not to conducting an in depth analysis of the specific contribution of ecotourism to rural development policy or its application in the study area. Instead, it is interpreted as a broader evaluation of the extent to which ecotourism as a niche form of tourism, based on sustainable use of natural and cultural resources, can contribute to rather than detract from local economy, environment and society. This evaluation will be based on the results arising from the analysis of ecotourism per se in the Greenbox and the role of appropriately embedded and disembedded networks and networking in its promotion. The accumulated evidence will be reviewed in Chapter 8.

van der Ploeg (2000: 391) suggests that rural development is a “multi-level process which is rooted in historical traditions”. The concept relates to general economic restructuring and offers a new model for agricultural families and rural dwellers, based on local traditions but offering new employment opportunities. Rural development, in its simplest sense, is a response to modernisation. It involves the adaptation of the countryside, and its resource base, to meet the new demands (in terms of economic, environmental, social and cultural pressures) which face areas of the countryside (Marsden 2003). Rural Europe has, for some time, been moving through a period of change and, the countryside has become a “valued resource”, a large commodity and a vast playground (O’Connor et al. 2006). The countryside, which was once synonymous with agriculture, is now diversified and is comprised of a range of sectors and industry types which include commodity and non-commodity
outputs, which include tourism (Cahill and Shobayashi 2000). Rural tourism provides a means of capitalising on natural resources that are attractive to tourists who seek outdoor recreational experiences and contact with older cultures in place of sun and sea experiences (Hall et al. 2003; Garrod et al. 2006). It provides a means of using farmland which is no longer involved in production, or where use is restricted as part of reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) in the EU, and adapting under-utilised farm buildings to new uses (Hall et al. 2003). Rural tourism is also an important, if limited and often seasonal, source of employment in areas where few alternatives are available, particularly for women. For these reasons, among others, tourism has occupied a central place in the EU Leader programme since the early 1990s and is supported as a key element in the diversification of rural economies (EU 2013). The quality of the natural and the cultural environment is being protected as part of this process through agri-environmental schemes. The designation of areas of land and water as Special Protected Areas, Natural Heritage Areas and Special Areas of Conservation and as UNESCO Geoparks is also increasing. Such forms of environmental protection serve to enhance the value of the natural resource base for ecotourism.

The inherent features of ecotourism align closely with concepts relating to sustainable development, as advocated in the Bruntland Report (World Commission on Development 1987), in that it should meet the expectations of environmentally sensitive tourists whilst conserving rather than detracting from the physical resource base and culture, and provide income for local populations. Potentially, therefore, ecotourism may be viewed as having a contribution to make to sustainable rural development (Fennell 2008). Ironically, in Ireland, although rural tourism is promoted as a contributor to rural economy and society, there is at the time of writing no rural tourism policy as such (Dunne and O’Connor 2009) and the potential of ecotourism is only beginning to be recognised by the national tourism authorities. It is hoped that a better understanding of this potential contribution will emerge from the analysis of the operation of ecotourism in the Greenbox and the effectiveness of networks and networking in promoting appropriate incorporation into the local environment, social and economic systems.
CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

CONCLUSION
This chapter has presented the conceptual framework on which this research is based. It has discussed the concept of ecotourism, its definition and origins in developed world contexts and how it has been contested in terms of achieving some of the elements as defined, such as minimal impacts on environments and host communities and gains from providing an educational basis. Ecotourism is socially constructed and has been defined many times, but all definitions have unifying factors which relate to tourism based in nature, gains to host communities and education. The concept has been used in developing and developed world contexts and the latter is the focus here in discussing its application in destination development.

Also presented were the concepts of networks, networking, embeddedness and disembeddedness and how they operate as constructs in order to gain an understanding of the development of an ecotourism destination.

Networks are structures containing nodes through which information is shared. Embeddedness can be linked to local level enmeshing in a particular area through networks and networking locally. Disembeddedness has been found to be a useful method of allowing these products to grow through external connections. These concepts have been used to understand the development and operation of rural tourism destinations. Embeddedness and disembeddedness relate to understanding the relationships between ecotourism and the local resource base, but also to the operation of networks and networking and the level of enmeshing in the local communication structure and extra locally in appropriate ways. Embeddedness according to previous studies is important to connect actors to the locality and through this allows for referrals and various types of communication to take place. This familiarity with the locality also leads to sustainable local resources use, which is important for ecotourism product development. Appropriate disembeddedness is necessary to access funding support, external tourists and in instances to access expertise not available in the area where the tourism takes place. Networks have been found to be developed for policy and tourism destination development. Networks are important for knowledge transfer through the process of communication between actors, or networking, as much literature posits. Networking can also occur, independent of a network structure and is important for business
referral and learning. The existence of a limited policy context on ecotourism in Ireland was discussed which serves to highlight the innovativeness of the establishment of the Greenbox as an ecotourism destination. Chapter Three presents the Methodology and the Area Profile.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY AND STUDY AREA

INTRODUCTION
This chapter presents the theoretical framework and the methodologies used in the project. The philosophical and theoretical background to the research is discussed, including the associated ontology and epistemology. The methodology is then presented and the use of qualitative methods is justified. This is followed by a discussion of the collection and analysis of information relating to the research questions with reference to the methods used in scoping, sampling, contacting interviewees, interviewing, transcription, coding and analysis. The Greenbox study area is then introduced.

PHILOSOPHICAL FRAMEWORK
Philosophy is important in human geography research (Graham 2005). Philosophy is concerned with how things in society are, the way they are, and also how people are. It reflects how we consider our relationships with others or with objects (Pryke et al. 2003). Therefore, philosophy is not removed from us; it is an internal connotation and should act as a frame of reference for the researcher (Williams and May 1996). The philosophical context for the research leads the researcher to consider the research paradigm or model (from factual scientific naturalism to interpretive anti-naturalist approaches) in which the research should be situated. To engage with philosophy one must consider ontology and epistemology which essentially relates to belief systems and how a person sees the world. Philosophy impacts on methodological choice and, consequently, on how research is conducted and underpins all research. Paradigms are essentially belief systems which are based on the researcher’s ontological (the nature of reality), epistemological (the meaning of knowledge) and methodological (the processes engaged) approaches and illustrate the ‘worldview’ of the researcher (Guba and Lincoln 1998).

This research engages with the postmodern research paradigm based on the need to understand the motives for adopting ecotourism and the roles of appropriately embedded and disembedded networks and networking in its adoption and promotion.
Postmodernism is based upon the view that there is no one answer and there is no truth outside of interpretation (Kitchin and Tate 2000). Jamal and Hollinshead (2001) discuss the connections between postmodernism and interpretivism. Interpretation engages with understanding of phenomena and moves away from a positivist approach (Reilly and Love 2000). Interpretivists are concerned with how the respondents construct and understand the world around them. Following Rose (1997: 305), “I chose this method because I was interested in the situated knowledges of the group of people I interviewed”. The research seeks to gain insights into the lived experiences of participants in the study and it uses an interpretive approach to achieve this and applies qualitative methodologies.

A researcher’s ontological perspectives relate to their view of the nature of reality and the relationship of this reality to the research questions (Guba and Lincoln 1994). The ontological perspective is related to the social ‘reality’ of the study. The ontological viewpoint that was used in this research is constructivism. Constructivism is linked to the postmodern paradigm and deems that social phenomena are in constant states of revision (Bryman 2004). In other words, nothing is static not even a specific organisation or culture; they are subject to constant change and evolution (Bryman 2012). Therefore, it is accepted that this research represents viewpoints voiced at a certain time and place which may alter in future or under different research conditions. The views presented are representative of the organisations and providers at a particular time period, after the cessation of the Greenbox management structure, and differing information may have been conveyed at a different time period.

The epistemological viewpoint relates to the nature of knowledge and what the researcher believes to be knowledge (Kitchen and Tate 2000; Schnelker 2006). I adopted an interpretative epistemology. Interpretivism, the study of the social world, requires a different approach to that of the natural sciences and in essence is anti-positivist. In contrast to positivism, where social scientists grasp the objective meaning of social action (Bryman 2001) understanding is central to interpretivism. The quest for understanding underpinned the need to answer the four central research questions by fully analysing and understanding the statements made by the interviewees. In order to reap the benefits of using an interpretive philosophical
approach a qualitative methodology was chosen. A framework for the research was developed and is described in Figure 3.1.

Research paradigm
The quest for understanding as part of this research meant that the selected approach had to be capable of providing a framework within which this understanding could be gained. Attaining this understanding required being conscious of positionality and engaging in reflection as part of the research. Reflexivity is a method for situating knowledge (Rose 1997). In order to fully engage with reflexivity a reflexive journal was maintained during the fieldwork. This journal documented my expectations prior to, and my observations during and after, each interview and also documented my thoughts at the various stages of the research project. This was used to contextualise the research findings in terms of any observations I had noted.

Linda McDowell (1992) wrote that a researcher must recognise their position as well as that of the participants and write this into the research project. Positionality inevitably arises in interpretivist research as the associated methods usually include interviews or other face-to-face forms of engagement with the respondents and the researcher has to distil this information and there is usually a subjective element associated with this (Rose 1997). Therefore, the knowledge is in some way related to the location and situation in which it is gathered. Haraway (1988), McDowell (1992) and Rose (1997) have all discussed this idea of ‘situated knowledges’. Situated knowledge recognises that knowledge is produced and the researcher’s own life experiences always leave a trace or a mark on the research. No one can claim to possess fully objective knowledge (McDowell 1992). Situated knowledge has a relationship with subjectivity as highlighted above. In order to be aware of our own subjectivity we must consider the positionality which we bring to the research.

Positionality “describes a person’s position within the midst of complex, shifting and overlapping political, economic, cultural, social, sexual, gendered, and racialised processes” (Longhurst 2009: 580). Positionality can affect the way in which the researcher views the research topic. Awareness of interpretation of certain events and also of the subjective nature of much of what we witness in the field is a consideration that was carried through the research. I was focused on representing
the views of the interviewees by using qualitative methods that would allow their voices and opinions to be heard. This will be elaborated on later.

Figure 3.1 Theoretical frame of reference and conduct of the research

It was important to be aware that research cannot be entirely objective; because having chosen a topic and methods of investigation a researcher has already been somewhat subjective (Philip 1998). Many in the human sciences have discussed how as researchers we bring our own set of circumstances to a research project (Rose 1997). Even if some posit that you can be impartial or fully objective, I would argue
the opposite in that one’s viewpoint or positionality has to impact on the research process in some way. Having a MA in Planning and Sustainable Development and a working background in a local authority setting in both technical (town planning) and administrative settings (2008-2009), I was aware that negative views existed in regard to public bodies and public sector employees in 2010-2011. In particular there was a view at the time of interview that they had played a role in the exacerbation of the economic recession in Ireland because of being involved in the over expansion of the housing supply. High public sector wages were also criticised widely and consequently public sector pay reform was developed. Therefore, as I was assessing in some cases, the role of public sector organisations in a funded project (the Greenbox), I felt that some may initially have been reluctant to participate on the basis that I may have used their responses in a negative light. I felt that by highlighting my previous professional experience the respondents may have understood that I was empathetic to their views and was not going to use them for any purpose other than the research project. However, this is only a general observation and I fully understand that someone without similar experience may have gained the trust of respondents also. As my professional experience was in planning and not tourism it did not influence responses.

Another aspect of positionality and the situatedness of research relates to the fact that I stayed in some premises owned by interviewees during the research, but not in all. I stayed in those chosen as they were convenient on the basis of travelling around the area but also on the basis of cost, as I needed to work within the confines of a data collection budget. Therefore, I gained some insight into the area, and the types of accommodation and facilities available in terms of compliance with EU Flower criteria mainly. I had to be fully aware, however, that I did not stay in all premises so could not generalise on the basis of a small number of premises.

The relationship between a chosen research paradigm, the ontology, epistemology and the chosen methods must be strong and fully understood in order to develop a robust methodological framework. The preceding sections have discussed the relationship between the postmodern, non-positivist tradition and the need for interpretation in a research project which seeks to obtain understandings of the establishment, development and evolution of an ecotourism project over a specific time period. The need for interpretation was best obtained using qualitative methods.
which are discussed in the following sections. First the ethical considerations associated with the research will be presented.

**Ethics**

The National University of Ireland Galway requires that all research complies with the ethical principles that it has developed. These research guidelines were consulted at http://www.nuigalway.ie/research/vp_research/ethics.htm. The NUI Galway Ethics Committee states that ethical approval shall be sought on a voluntary basis by researchers and students. The committee endeavours to provide advice to those conducting research with human participants. An outline of the project and a synopsis of the groups that were selected for interview were submitted to the Ethics Committee. They believed that the research did not need to go through the full ethics review board but written consent for the research was sought and obtained.

A fieldwork research protocol was then developed. This was based on the university guidelines and was developed in line with the procedures set down by the Ethics Committee. The protocol covered the data collection and storage of all recorded and text transcripts and the protection of the anonymity of respondents. These will be maintained securely in paper and electronic form, as appropriate, for a period of ten years. All respondents were adults and could have opted out of the research whenever they wished to do so. Participants were informed fully of the purpose of the research. This involved the sending of an initial letter and a follow-up telephone call. Participants were also asked if the interview could be recorded and only when they were agreeable was the voice recorder engaged. Transcripts of the interviews could be forwarded to participants if such a request was made. Participants were also assured that the data they provided was treated in the strictest confidence and their names would not appear on any report or document arising from the research. The interviews were anonymised in order to comply with this assurance and the approach used relates to the standards set down by the UK Data Archive through the use of pseudonyms and access is limited to the researcher. Clear and accurate records were maintained of the research procedures followed and the results obtained.

The research did not involve hazardous activities, by being based on interviews with respondents who were identified in advance and with whom meetings were
scheduled. Weather conditions did need to be taken into account in relation to health and safety. A research plan was developed which involved mapping the locations of the selected organisations and the businesses (Figure 3.2). Research trips and the dates of interview were then organised around these locations, and the availability of participants had an impact on the organisation of interviews. The research was conducted on a phased basis with the organisational representatives being interviewed first so as to inform the provider interviews and to ask the organisational representatives about the suitability (in terms of their adherence to ecotourism principles) of the selected ecotourism businesses for the research. Fieldwork commenced in February 2011. The initial interviews were with those in locations which could be arrived at safely and by main roads during bad weather as set out in the health and safety protocol (Appendix B). Locations that were more difficult to access were then visited in the milder spring months. Following the research plan the providers were interviewed later and a similar approach was taken. Interviewees who were easier to access were visited in the winter months and the more rural locations were left until there were periods of milder weather. All providers were interviewed before the busy summer season when they would have been more occupied with work.

QUALITATIVE APPROACH
Following the interpretive approach a qualitative methodology was adopted in the research. This involved particular sampling procedures and survey instruments.

Qualitative research focuses on words rather than quantification (Bryman 2012). By utilising qualitative methods researchers can explore a wide array of dimensions of the social world. They can build understandings of everyday life and also develop a visual image of the experiences of their research participants (Mason 2002). The methodology is therefore the procedures used to investigate what can be known, according to the researcher, and the rationale behind the choice of these methods (Schnelker 2006). This research predominantly involved a qualitative approach. However, some quantitative data was collected which related mainly to the participants’ personal information such as age, gender and education, the history of the business or organisation, turnover and budgets, the networks belonged to and the
types of networking that took place. Therefore, in order to profile the respondents and their organisation or business and elicit their views on the issues being investigated a mixed methods approach was adopted to formulate the interview schedule. “Mixed methods may be taken as referring to a situation whereby two or more methods are used to address a research question at the same stage in the research process, in the same place, and with the same research subjects” (Philip 1998: 264; McKendrick 2009). This differs from a multi-method approach in which the qualitative and quantitative data are collected at different times using differing methods.

Figure 3.2 Locations in study area

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The research methodology is hermeneutical in the most basic terms, as it involves analysis of interview transcripts and seeks an interpretation and understanding of events by analysing textual statements made at interview. The research seeks a ‘thick’ description in order to have significant data to analyse through a method of thematic qualitative analysis. The qualitative approach was used in order to gain the understanding required as outlined in the theoretical framework. The chosen method of semi-structured, face-to-face interviews produced a rich textual base for analysis. As an approach, qualitative research is concerned with how the social world is interpreted, understood and produced around us (Bryman 2004). The research was designed to obtain opinions on the Greenbox, on ecotourism more generally and on the process of networking and the associated networks.

Two separate interview schedules were developed, one for the organisations and another for the tourism businesses. While these two schedules were different they did contain some common questions in order to gain an understanding of the various processes at work and permit comparison of the views expressed by both sets of respondents. The schedules were developed in order to investigate the central issues in the research relating to ecotourism, networks and networking and their embeddedness or disembeddedness. Both interview schedules were piloted before the surveys proper. The organisational schedule was piloted with a local authority representative in a county neighbouring the study area. A similar process was undertaken with the provider schedule with a respondent within the sample area being selected. Minor modifications regarding the wording and order of questions took place in the case of each schedule. It was considered appropriate to pilot with one organisational representative and one provider as the themes were in essence predefined; therefore the refining that was necessary related to the understanding and wording of the questions. There had also been a number of previous drafts prepared in consultation with the research supervisor which reduced the need for an extensive piloting process. In order to protect the identity of the respondents, as promised in eliciting their participation in the research, they are identified as OI (organisational interview) followed by a number (1,2 etc) which denotes the order in which the interview took place and BI which stands for business interview (e.g. BI#1).
In pursuit of the objective of obtaining understanding of the adoption and operation of ecotourism in the Greenbox, purposive sampling was used to select respondents, whereby selection is on the basis of certain characteristics that they exhibit which are pertinent to the research objectives (Lo 2009). It is a strategic form of sampling, through which an attempt is made to link the sample to the questions (Bryman 2004). There were a number of stages of sampling and the phases differed slightly between the organisations and the providers and therefore are discussed separately below.

**Selection of organisations**

Organisational representatives were selected on the basis of their role in tourism and their involvement with the Greenbox project. The focus of the organisational sampling was on entities that had a clear tourism remit relevant to the northwest region but also on organisations which had a role in the Greenbox establishment and development or in ecotourism more generally. A meeting with the former CEO of the Greenbox served to identify the board members and other organisations that were involved in the development of the project. Further scoping based on organisational websites and the geographical locations of organisations was conducted. In total 22 organisations were selected for interview. One organisational representative of a local authority within the Greenbox declined to participate stating that she had little or no involvement with, or understanding of, the Greenbox. Twenty-one representatives were therefore interviewed.

The selected organisations represented geographical scales of operation from the local to the international relating to tourism and they had various roles relating to ecotourism (Table 3.1). The person in each organisation who was most pertinent to the research was identified in advance of the interview in terms of having primary responsibility for tourism and, or, ecotourism as it related to the Greenbox, the wider region in which it is located, or for Irish tourism nationally and internationally. In most cases, this was the tourism officer; however in some instances the interviewee who held the tourism remit was not a tourism officer but an engineer or a town planner, in the case of some local authorities, and a rural development officer in the case of Leader companies. They were all interviewed on the basis of their role in tourism.
At the local scale, the interviewees included the Greenbox CEO, tourism officers of four local authorities in Ireland and one in Northern Ireland, which fell within the Greenbox, four Rural Development Programme (Leader) employees who had a tourism remit and a representative of a public private partnership (Table 3.1). At a regional scale, a representative was interviewed from each of, one Regional Tourism Authority, two regional development agencies (the Border, Midland and West Regional Assembly [BMW] and the Western Development Commission [WDC]) and the Irish Cross Border Area Network (ICBAN), which represents councils in the border area. At a national scale a representative of each of the national tourism development authorities in both Irish states was selected (Fáilte Ireland [FI] and the Northern Ireland Tourism board [NITB]) as were representatives of private membership organisations, Irish Tourism Industry Confederation (ITIC) and the Family Homes of Ireland (FHI). The National Farm Tourism Representative from Teagasc (National Agriculture and Food Development Authority in Ireland) and a representative of Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI), the state agency responsible for Ireland’s inland fisheries, were also interviewed. To document the international context in which Irish rural and ecotourism take place, a representative of Tourism Ireland (TI) was interviewed.

Table 3.1: Organisations surveyed by role

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Organisation</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Greenbox Ecotourism Representative</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Develop and market ecotourism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader Companies</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Funding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County Councils and District Councils</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Promotion and marketing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Tourism Authorities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Enterprise support and destination marketing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Tourism Authorities/boards</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Development of tourism, marketing and promotion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Food and Agriculture Development Authority</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Assist farm families relating to tourism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Tourism Organisations</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Marketing and promotion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Regional development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Therefore all spatial scales from the local to the international were included and so too was a range of different functions or roles relating to tourism and ecotourism (Table 3.1). These roles were to develop an ecotourism product, develop tourism more generally, promotion and marketing, funding and regional development.

The detail of the organisations in terms of their role and remit are discussed further in Chapter 4. The organisational interview schedule was divided into seven main sections (Appendix C):

- The profile of the respondent and the profile of the organisation;
- The organisational role in tourism and ecotourism and their role in supporting providers;
- The organisational view on the natural, built, social and cultural environments and their importance for tourism;
- The organisational understanding of the Greenbox;
- Budgets for tourism and ecotourism;
- Links with other organisations with regard to tourism and the marketing and promotion of tourism businesses;
- Future plans with regard to ecotourism and other issues including their view on the future of ecotourism in the Greenbox.

**Selection of providers**

The Greenbox had 80 members listed on its website at the time of sampling in 2010. Approximately 30 were stated to hold the EU Flower. The sampling also involved reviewing the FI and NITB webpages. Providers on these webpages who stated or suggested that they provided ecotourism experiences were identified. Analysis of their websites was conducted to see if they complied with ecotourism. This involved examining the businesses according to a number of principles: if they were closely integrated with other activities that occur in the host region (McKercher 1993); if the premises were developed on sound ecological principles such as waste minimisation, sustainable building techniques and reduced resource consumption (Carter and Lowman 2004); if activity tourism based in the natural environment, that is not extensively invasive, such as surfing, hiking and angling, was promoted (Page and
Dowling 2002); if accommodation was small-scale and locally owned and operated; and if the attractions were based on natural and cultural features, utilised by tourists and locals and highlight the local sense of place (Weaver 2005).

Under each of these categories the majority were accommodation providers. In order to represent the range of different types of businesses in the Greenbox it was decided to sample from the range of provider types across all three categories. On this basis 21 EU Flower holders were identified, with 16 selected and 14 agreeing to be interviewed and of the Greenbox members who did not hold the EU Flower 27 were selected and 22 interviewed. Of the non Greenbox but ecotourism compliant providers 20 were selected initially and 15 were interviewed in order to represent the range of business types. Therefore, the sample of 37 providers included 22 Greenbox members of which 14 held the EU flower. The remaining 15 were not Greenbox members but were selected based on their promotion of what can be defined as ecotourism on their websites (Table 3.2).

Once the lists were compiled they were forwarded to the tourism officers from some of the selected local authorities and their views were sought on how well they complied with ecotourism. The tourism officers were given the opportunity to suggest others but none did. The businesses were mapped in preparation for interview and 10 clusters were apparent (Figure 3.1). Interviews were conducted on a cluster-by-cluster basis. Certain areas corresponded more to ecotourism than others. Consequently, the distribution of providers interviewed in each cluster varied. Leitrim and Fermanagh were more integrated with the Greenbox and the clusters reflect this with greater numbers of ecotourism providers interviewed in these areas.

Ten businesses refused to take part in the study for various reasons (Appendix D). Five declined on the basis that their business was no longer functioning (because of economic recession in the case of two B&Bs, an activity website and a pet farm), and due to the owner suffering from terminal illness in the case of one B&B. One self-catering cooperative manager refused to participate on the basis of being too busy and did not recommend another possible interviewee from the cooperative. An activity centre manager declined to participate on the basis that the business was going through a tendering process and she felt it would be an incorrect time to participate in the research. A fishery owner and a boat charter owner failed to attend
at the appointed time of interview and could not be contacted by telephone in order to rearrange a meeting. One yoga centre owner agreed to participate but was not contactable at a later date in order to arrange the interview. The owner never returned telephone or email messages. The providers who opted not to participate were not replaced because the types of businesses they operated were already represented in the sample. It was also expected when the sample was developed that some would not participate and more than one example of most business types was included (where possible). It is felt that the 37 respondents represent the range of ecotourism businesses in the Greenbox well (Table 3.2).

Table 3.2 Provider sampling procedure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Selected</th>
<th>Interviewed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Greenbox</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of which held the EU Flower</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non Greenbox eco credentials</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Provider interviews were undertaken between October 2011 and September 2012 at intervals depending on the availability of the respondents. As the geographical area was quite large, the interviews were conducted in groups on research trips of a number of days at a time in towns or villages. This was suitable because businesses were generally clustered around the main towns and villages and it also facilitated the identification of local networks and networking, as well as maximising on the use of time and controlling travel costs.

The providers are profiled in detail in Chapter 4. Owner were interviewed in most cases but managers were interviewed in six cases where they were recommended as being the primary person responsible for the business and as a result were the most knowledgeable in terms of its operation. The majority of the interviews were conducted in the place of business. This was considered the optimum location due to being the place where a person may have felt most comfortable. The remaining interviews were conducted in other locations chosen by the interviewee which was usually a local cafe or restaurant.
The provider interview schedule covered seven main sections (Appendix E):

- The profile of the business owner/manager and the business;
- The business role in ecotourism;
- Understanding of the Greenbox and ecotourism;
- Network membership and networking with other providers and organisations;
- Marketing and promotion of the business;
- Future plans with regard to ecotourism;
- View on the future of ecotourism in the northwest of Ireland.

Table 3.3 Providers interviewed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Provider</th>
<th>Number Interviewed</th>
<th>Greenbox members</th>
<th>EU Flower Holders</th>
<th>Non GB</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B&amp;B</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boat Charter</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caravan Park</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country Homes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fishery</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guesthouse</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hostel</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Centre</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outdoor Activity</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centre</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thalassotherapy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baths</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Catering</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Hotel</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spa</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surf School</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>37</strong></td>
<td><strong>22</strong></td>
<td><strong>14</strong></td>
<td><strong>15</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interviews with the providers were in general conducted without difficulty but a minority of respondents, who were experiencing financial or personal difficulties, voiced these concerns during the interview. Therefore, it was time-consuming and challenging to keep these interviewees focused on the purpose of the research. One respondent did not wish to be recorded, as they felt that they may have been limited in what they felt they could say but I was permitted to take extensive notes by hand.
**INTERVIEW PROCESS**

The selected organisational representatives and business owners and managers were contacted by letter initially explaining the purpose of the study and inviting their participation (Appendix F). As described earlier, in both cases the interviewing was scheduled on an area basis to minimise on travel and maximise on obtaining insight into local networks and networking. The letter outlined the research project and also provided details relating to the length of time the interview would take and a brief description of the topics that the interview would engage with. Letters were mailed three to four weeks on average before the proposed interview dates seeking involvement in the study. The respondents were asked if it would be possible to meet with them on one of the proposed dates or if they would nominate another relevant organisational representative, owner or manager, whom the researcher should speak with instead. It was explained that a follow up telephone call would take place approximately one week after dispatch of the letter. Contact was then made by telephone in order to arrange a mutually suitable time for the interview. Seven organisational representatives and two providers contacted me on receipt of the letter to state that they would be willing to participate. Some declined at the telephone contact stage as detailed above. A ‘thank you’ email was forwarded to all respondents following each interview in order to express appreciation for their participation in the project (Appendix G).

Five organisational respondents asked for the questions to be forwarded to them prior to interview. These represented two local authorities, one regional tourism authority, one public private partnership and one cross border network. I did not want to engage in this practice in order to avoid getting prepared answers. Therefore, a broad list of the topics which the questions would cover was forwarded and all were happy to participate on receipt of this list.

As discussed in the theoretical framework, a reflective journal was also used to record notes and observations on the fieldwork more generally. This journal contains hand written excerpts about each interview relating to my views on how the interview progressed and documenting asides of significance such as hesitancies or enthusiasm in answering questions. This was useful in terms of supporting the analysis of the transcripts. It transpired that discussion around ecotourism and the Greenbox was more difficult for some respondents, in particular those who cited...
negative experiences with the project. Therefore, while being recorded some did not divulge certain feelings; however, when the dictaphone was switched off some of the richest data emerged and the notebook was helpful in order to record this information. In order to comply with ethics protocols, permission was always sought for this information to be noted. An offer was made to forward transcripts to the respondents once they were completed but the interviewees did not request for this to occur.

**ANALYSIS**

Transcription of the recorded interviews verbatim and initial analysis began during data collection; they were stored in Excel data files in order to permit coding of quantitative variables and thematic analysis of text. When all of the organisational interviews were conducted and transcribed, analysis commenced. The interviews took between one hour and one and a half hours on average to conduct and took between five and seven hours to transcribe verbatim. Transcribing verbatim was time consuming but allowed me to become very familiar with the data set and functioned as an initial stage of analysis. This also aided in fulfilling the requirements of an interpretive approach, as detailed in the research framework, as the process allowed me to begin to understand how the concepts under investigation were emerging and finding expression in the area and how these manifestations varied between the two samples. As this research was designed to gain understandings of how certain phenomena expressed themselves in the Greenbox (networks and networking, embeddedness, disembeddedness) analysis was conducted question-by-question to allow for connections between the various statements to be examined. Analysis was conducted using thematic analysis (Bryman 2012).

Analysing qualitative data is not a straight-forward process and requires a well-developed set of guidelines to conduct successfully (Bryman 2004). “Analysis is the search for patterns in data and for ideas that help explain why these patterns are there in the first place” (Bernard 2006: 452). Thematic analysis was chosen as it allows the richness of the data to be fully understood and used. As a method it involves the analysis of themes and patterns from the interview text. Thematic analysis has been
criticised for its flexibility. However, it is also very useful because of this flexibility (Braun and Clarke 2006).

In order to extract the greatest depth and richness from the text, analysis was conducted manually, by hand (pen and paper) instead of using a programme such as NVivo (Boyatzis 2009). Each question was analysed separately and then themes were developed and responses relating to these themes were analysed together. This involved analysing printed transcripts and then handwriting notes and using colour coded markers in order to illustrate connections between statements. Subthemes were identified at this stage and analysed in the same way. Subthemes are those that were not identified by the interview questions and also include those that may have been overlooked in the initial coding but emerged as important as they were common to different respondents.

Following a broad-stroke initial thematic analysis which enabled key words and phrases to be identified the text was ‘coded’ for analysis. The following discusses the methods of ‘coding’ that were used. This involves discussion on the function of ‘codes’ and ‘coding’, the various methods used and the overall role of ‘coding’ for the research. By the very nature of semi-structured research some ‘coding’ already existed due to the themes in the questions being asked; therefore some codes were added automatically and the text was examined for the presence of these themes. Saldaña (2009) has written: “a code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative salient, essence-capturing and/or evocative attribute for a proportion of language based or visual data” (Saldaña 2009: 3). The function of codes and coding is to break down data into manageable subsets. This was helpful in gaining a rich understanding of the data in line with the interpretive tradition and allowed for small passages of text to be analysed first before graduating to the analysis of larger segments.

Researchers disagree in terms of how much of the total body of text to code (Saldaña 2009). Some argue for all the text to be coded whereas others state that only very important segments of data should be coded. All of the interview material was coded for this research including field notes (Saldaña 2009). However levels of coding differed based on the type of statement. For example, broad brush coding was used
for statements of fact such as networking direction whereas other segments of texts were coded a number of times to obtain a concise meaning for extensive accounts.

Similar to thematic analysis, coding can be conducted manually (by hand with a pen and paper) or by using a computer aided programme. Many recommend the use of the manual approach. Bazeley (2007) and Saldaña (2009) recommend that early career researchers use manual coding, provided that they have smaller more manageable datasets, as manual coding allows for deeper immersion into the data set than some computer programmes permit. Using computer programmes such as NVivo or ATLAS after this initial experience is permissible. Manual coding for this research was undertaken by printing interview transcripts and examining them along with the field notes. A space was left on the printed transcripts for inclusion of a column that allowed for codes to be written along with any other statements that added to the coding process.

Pre-coding was conducted after the initial analysis. Some attribute great value to the process of pre-coding (Layder 1998). This is achieved by highlighting, colouring-in or, marking in another way, any significant quotes. These “preliminary jottings” may be very useful during later stages of coding (Saldaña 2009). This method was used in the initial analysis of the data and changes to the codes were documented as the process of coding progressed. There are many ways of coding the raw data or thematic text in this case. Saldaña (2009) discusses how some recommend coding participant-by-participant where others prefer to code question-by-question. This research coded question-by-question, similar to the analysis, in order to engage with the various understandings of each question posed. Coding “leads you from the data to an idea” and back again (Richards and Moore 2007: 137). Therefore, coding, like thematic analysis, is a cyclical act and you must go through a number of cycles before you will generate the information required (Saldaña 2009).

Saldaña (2009) proposed a very useful method of coding which this research project utilised. The method proposes setting up the page with three columns; column one included the raw interview data, column two the preliminary codes and column three the final codes. Types of coding include but are not limited to: pre coding, lumper coding, descriptive coding, in vivo coding, value coding and magnitude coding. The types of coding used here include first cycle coding, lumper coding and attribute
coding. Coding was broken down into cycles where first cycle coding was the initial attempt at developing a coding method and second cycle coding refined this method, with the final code ultimately being reached. Coding is an interpretive act. What and how I coded may differ significantly from how another researcher interpreted the data and hence coded it. Lumper coding (was the first cycle coding used) and involved broad brush coding into general codes such as ‘ecotourism’ and ‘networking’ which initially emerged from the research questions and themes in the interviews. This code was refined during the second pass of the data. They were refined into more specific codes such as ‘positive view on ecotourism’ and ‘active networking’, arising from analysis of the responses received.

Some text was double coded when certain statements were relevant to one or more code. Descriptive code is a type of coding method that describes the primary topic of the excerpt being analysed, which was used in the analysis (Saldaña 2009). In vivo coding was also utilised when the title of the code was taken directly from what the interviewee said and was put in inverted commas. An example of this code was the term ‘preserve and protect’ which was used by a number of ecotourism providers when discussing ecotourism.

Attribute coding, which is a descriptive code which assigns traits to interviewees in this case, was used to code the quantitative data and unique characteristics of each respondent such as age, gender and education. A coding sheet was developed and codes were used to organise this statistical information about the profile of the interview respondents. This was also entered into the Excel file with the qualitative data for further analysis. The above process of coding forms a significant part of the analysis and, as stated by Bernard (2006), analysis is the search for patterns and by developing a robust coding scheme these patterns began to emerge at the coding stage and allowed for deeper analysis such as happened when certain excerpts of text became double coded or when overall codes were refined from a first order code to a final code.

Many researchers have written about the importance of reflecting on the codes used in analysing information (Mason 2002; Bryman 2004). In order to do this some suggest writing analytical memos (Saldaña 2009). Mason (2002) states that reflecting on the analysis in this way will allow you to think about what you have
done and what information you have drawn from the data. Therefore, coding took place in four phases. Firstly the organisational data was analysed and coded and the preliminary findings were written up. The provider data was then analysed and preliminary findings were written up. These served as a method of becoming familiar with the broad themes emerging. The organisational findings were then returned to and a second pass of the data was conducted and the same action was repeated with the provider data in order to understand the themes more fully and identify sub themes. This process continued until the researcher was satisfied that the maximum richness had been obtained from the data. Therefore the data went through a number of rounds of analysis and coding. In an effort to understand the networking taking place between the organisations and providers, there were phases where the data sets were cross referenced in order to clarify such networking.

**THE GREENBOX**

The Greenbox was established as a pilot project to develop ecotourism and was Ireland’s first ecotourism destination in 2003. The area occupies a cross border location on the international border between Ireland and Northern Ireland and consists of counties Fermanagh, Leitrim, west Cavan, north Sligo, south Donegal and northwest Monaghan in northwest Ireland (Figure 3.3). The area benefits from natural geographical features that make it attractive for people to live in and visit, although it has a history of outmigration among young people. It is surrounded on all sides by water, by the Shannon Erne Waterway, Lough Erne and the Atlantic Ocean and consists of relatively unspoilt natural drumlin landscape and significant limestone uplands, such as Benbulben and Knocknarea in County Sligo. The area also holds the Marble Arch Geopark which is an underground cave system landscape on the County Fermanagh and Cavan border with UNESCO World Heritage Site status, due to its significant and unique landscape value. The presence of low impact activities like walking and cycling were also partial motivators for the designation of this area as an ecotourism destination.

Historically the area was impacted by severe political conflict and violence during a period of civil unrest in Northern Ireland between the late 1960s and the late 1990s, known as ‘The Troubles’, which involved conflict between Protestant Unionists and Catholic Nationalists with regard to the constitutional status of Northern Ireland.
(Muldoon et al. 2007). The Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement, which was signed on the 10th April 1998 between the Irish and the British governments, brought some stability to the area in the late 1990s and “formed the basis of a negotiated settlement for the future of Northern Ireland” (Ginty et al. 2007: 1). The Agreement was designed to foster continued peace through a newly established power sharing government. In order to foster peace and reconciliation, cross-border funding was earmarked for a number of viable ventures, including tourism, which would stimulate collaboration and increase the attractiveness of the region for investment, improve the standard of living and create a more stable living environment following the period of unrest. The Greenbox was one such project.

Figure 3.3 Greenbox area

The project was developed as a “training and learning organisation” to facilitate enterprises and organisations in reaching the ecological standards that the Greenbox area strived for (http://www.greenbox.ie/about-network.php). Ecotourism in the
Greenbox area was administered by a CEO and support staff. The Greenbox had three main areas of responsibility when established, which related to: (i) a capital development programme to provide grant aid to suitable businesses; (ii) the development and management of a network of producers in the area; and (iii) the marketing and promotion of the Greenbox region throughout Ireland and internationally (OI #1 2011). The EU approved eco-tourism Flower award was adopted as a certification method for accommodation providers in the area because certification is cited as being central to ecotourism and important to prevent ‘green-washing’ (Font 2002). The EU Flower is a certification label for businesses that achieve certain environmental standards in their day to day operations. It is a voluntary scheme, established in 1992, to encourage businesses to market products and services that are kinder to the environment (http://ec.europa.eu). The label is monitored nationally by the NSAI and DARD in Northern Ireland. The label was available only to premises that had accommodation.

Funding for the project was obtained predominantly from the EU Interreg IIIA Programme and was administered by ICBAN, a network of ten councils (six in the study area) along the Irish-Northern Irish border, established in 1995 to respond to the unique economic and social needs of the central border region (http://www.icban.com/home). Some 75% of the total initial funding of c. €3 million was obtained from the Interreg IIIA fund. The Greenbox was deemed a suitable project for this funding specifically under measure 1.1 (business and economic development) and measure 1.4 (the regional initiatives measure). The remaining 25% which had to be sourced elsewhere, in order to comply with the Interreg IIIA conditions, was met by the International Fund for Ireland (IFI), Leitrim County Council (LCC), Fermanagh District Council (FDC) and the WDC. The International Fund for Ireland (A Philanthropic organisation) is an independent international organisation established by the Irish and British governments in 1986 and was established in order to promote links between the Nationalist and Unionist communities (www.internationalfundforireland.com ). The Greenbox also received a grant of €250,000 from the PEACE II programme, through a special EU programmes body, under measure 5.4 which was designed to promote joint approaches. The Peace II programme was established by the European Social Fund in 1995 to promote cross-border peace and targeted Northern Ireland border counties. Due to
the lack of availability of funding, mainly attributed to the Irish recession since 2007, the future of the Greenbox administrative structure was at the time of interview, in mid-2011, uncertain and the project has since officially ceased to function because of this absence of funding. It is therefore an example of a short lived project.

The Greenbox project

In order for the Greenbox project to function a number of administrative structures were established. These included an organisational network (board), a professional staff and a network of ecotourism providers. The Greenbox was administered by a board consisting of eight organisations, a CEO of the project, and three provider representatives. The organisations represented local authorities (LCC and FDC), regional (WDC) and local development bodies (SWARD formally Fermanagh Leader), a public private partnership (FL) in the tourism sector in Northern Ireland and the national tourism authorities in Ireland and Northern Ireland (FI and NITB) (Table 3.1). The board made decisions relating to staffing and the administration of funding, while also being responsible for choosing an operational definition of ecotourism and the certification method for the EU Flower label. The definition of ecotourism adopted, following a board level discussion, was based on The International Ecotourism Society definition of ecotourism (TIES 1990) as: “Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people”. The modified version that the Greenbox used was: “travel that is small scale, low impact, culturally sensitive, community and conservation orientated, primarily nature based, educational and capable of broadening people’s minds and enlivening their souls while providing a unique experience, firmly grounded in sustainable principles and practices” (Greenbox and Fáilte Ireland 2007). The Ecotourism Handbook for Ireland was published jointly with Fáilte Ireland (FI, the Irish national tourism development authority) in 2007 at the end of the funding period. The handbook was developed in order to provide information to those wishing to establish an ecotourism business to provide information on ecotourism more generally and the benefits for providers of being involved in this type of tourism.
The project included a separate ecotourism provider network which providers could join by paying a small membership fee. Members of the network were eligible to apply for funding to support ecological upgrading of their premises and application for the EU Flower certification and they received advice and training. The provider network was developed to provide a forum for ecotourism providers to meet and share knowledge but also as a portal through which ecotourism more generally could be developed in the area. From 2003-2004 some 80 producers were registered with the Greenbox organisation and, as a result, formed part of the network; this number dropped to 64 active members in 2007 and during the organisational interviews, in March 2011, it was indicated that only 13 were thought to remain in the network.

The professional staff were tasked with the running of the network and also held responsibility for other administrative duties associated with the project, such as promoting and marketing and providing advice to ecotourism providers more generally. When fully operational in 2005-2006, the Greenbox had 6.5 staff equivalents. In February 2011, there was only one staff member (the former CEO) remaining who reported having to engage in consultancy work in order to earn an income.

CONCLUSION
This chapter highlighted the theoretical framework and methods used in this study and presented the study area. The research was developed in order to answer four central research questions (Chapter 1) and in doing this achieve a deep understanding of the experiences of embedded and appropriately disembedded networks and networking to promote ecotourism, of two sets of interview participants (organisations and providers). An interpretive approach was adopted and qualitative methodologies supported the approach. Two sets of respondents were sampled, 21 organisational representatives and 37 tourism provider (business) representatives. The ethics protocol of the university was followed and anonymity was guaranteed to respondents. Interview transcripts were transcribed verbatim and an extensive thematic analysis was conducted. The Greenbox area where the research was situated and the Greenbox project were also profiled. The Greenbox was established as a method to develop an area which suffered from a period of under development.
following civil unrest and was established in response to available funding. The project had a number of aims which related to the development and promotion of an ecotourism area and administering and awarding funding to suitable ecotourism businesses along with promoting the EU Flower as a certification method. Chapter 4 profiles the organisational and provider respondents.
CHAPTER 4: PROFILE OF ORGANISATIONS AND TOURISM BUSINESSES

INTRODUCTION
This chapter profiles the organisations and the tourism providers who were interviewed in order to inform understanding of their reported involvement in ecotourism analysed in later chapters. The organisations are discussed in terms of their establishment, functions and remits in tourism and ecotourism. The tourism providers are discussed relating to their involvement in ecotourism and their personal and business characteristics.

ORGANISATIONAL PROFILE
Twenty-one organisations were interviewed in total, of which thirteen were located within the geographical boundary of the Greenbox area. Four were based nationally in Dublin and Belfast and the other four were located in the northwest of Ireland outside the geographical boundary of the Greenbox. The organisations were selected on the basis of their involvement with tourism and, or, ecotourism at local, regional (inter-county), national and international levels (Table 4.1). All were involved either directly or indirectly with the establishment of the Greenbox and its operation between 2003-2007 and eight were former members of the Greenbox management board. The interviewee in each case was the person who had primary responsibility for tourism and, or, ecotourism as it related to the Greenbox, the region in which it is located, or for Irish tourism more generally, nationally and internationally. At a local level the interviewees included the Greenbox representative, the tourism officers (TOs) of three local authorities in Ireland and one in Northern Ireland, and Leader employees, including one Leader CEO and two leader tourism officers. Those interviewed at a regional scale were representatives of: NWT, the BMW, the WDC, and ICBAN. The representatives of the national tourism development authority in both Irish states were interviewed, Fáilte Ireland and NITB, as were representatives of private membership organisations: ITIC and the FHI, and FL at a local level. Also interviewed was a tourism representative from Teagasc, the national agriculture and
food development authority in Ireland and a representative of IFI the organisation responsible for maintaining fishing stocks in the region. To document the international context in which Irish rural and ecotourism take place, a representative of TI, the organisation responsible for promoting the island of Ireland internationally, was also included in the sample.

Table 4.1: Organisation by type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Organisation</th>
<th>Number (21)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Greenbox Ecotourism Representative</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County Councils and District Councils</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader Companies</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPP</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Tourism Authorities</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Development Organisations</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Agriculture and Food Development Authority</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Tourism Authorities</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Tourism Representative Agencies</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Tourism Organisations</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross Border Network</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fisheries management</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Establishment, budgets and staffing

The organisations were established over various time periods. The NITB was established in 1948 and FI, the successor of Bord Fáilte, the Irish Tourism Board (1955), dates to 2003. The local authorities in Ireland date to 1898, and Fermanagh District Council (FDC) to 1970, when local government structures were reorganised in Northern Ireland. ITIC dates to 1984. The remainder date from the 1990s with the Leader companies having been established in association with the availability of EU funding for rural development (Appendix H). The organisations fulfil a range of different functions relating to tourism, including ecotourism to varying extents, and rural development more generally in the Greenbox area. These functions pertain to the provision of funding, training, advice, promotion and marketing, and lobbying on behalf of tourism providers.

Respondents were asked to provide information regarding the organisational budget for 2010 (or the most recent year available) and the proportion, if any, assigned to ecotourism in order to gain an understanding of the resources available to support
ecotourism. All, except one, provided budget information for 2010, with one membership organisation refusing because they said that the information was commercially sensitive. The financial support and funding sources of the organisations differed according to the geographical scale at which they operated. For example, national organisations, in general, had larger budgets than local level organisations. An exception to this was the Leader Companies which obtained significant EU funding for distribution to rural development projects. Most had tourism budgets but few had ecotourism budgets per se, but ecotourism providers were eligible to apply for the general tourism funding. Three organisations had a specific annual ecotourism budget which ranged from €30,000 (the Greenbox at the time of interview when its main funding stream had ceased and a national tourism development authority) to €80,000 (a local authority).

With regard to staffing, organisations either had one (the Greenbox at the time of interview) or no staff engaged in ecotourism. The majority stated that they had a role relating to ecotourism but the role was a secondary one in terms of supporting ecotourism as a concept more generally and making reference to it in documents or on websites rather than direct support of any kind by staff. Otherwise it was part of a broader tourism and business support remit.

*Organisational remits relating to tourism and ecotourism*

At in international level two organisations were sampled (TI and ICBAN). TI is a publicly owned limited company established by Bord Fáilte and the NITB, in 2000, in response to requirements set out in the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement of 1998. Its remit and its budget relate only to the marketing and promotion of Ireland overseas. It does not engage in loan funding, grant aid, training or advice to tourism providers. TI was selected in order to ascertain if ecotourism was being promoted as a niche form of tourism which Ireland has to offer and this was found not to be the case, as the focus of the organisation is to attract tourists to the country more generally (OI # 16).

ICBAN is a cross-border network of ten local authorities, six of which are within the Greenbox. Its primary remit relates to administering EU Funding under Interreg
programmes. It was selected because of its role in administering EU Interreg IIIA Funding, received by the Greenbox until late 2007, for which the interviewee was responsible. “From 2003 to 2008, ICBAN was an ‘implementing agent’ for the Interreg IIIA Programme investing over €23 million by funding 72 projects within the eligible area of Northern Ireland and the six border counties of Cavan, Donegal, Leitrim, Louth, Monaghan and Sligo. Twenty one of 72 projects were specific to tourism” (OI # 18). One project focused on developing outdoor activities such as eco trails, heritage and walking trails and was implemented by a partnership of three local authorities. Two projects related to ecotourism and related to: (i) improving ‘green’ standards to EU certification implemented by Greenbox and Responsible Tourism Ltd (the Greenbox parent organisation) and (ii) renovation of properties using eco-friendly material and techniques by a voluntary organisation (OI # 18). No staff member specifically had a tourism or ecotourism role, but they dealt with applicants who came forward with tourism and ecotourism projects, in order to apply for funding.

At a national level, FI’s key areas of responsibility are: to provide direct enterprise supports to providers including financial aid, in the case of larger businesses and business development advice to smaller providers (who obtain financial assistance from other sources such as Leader or County Enterprise boards); tourism product and development, and input to national policy (Failte Ireland and Strategic Advisory Service 2005). FI had a budget of €30,000 in 2010 for assisting ecotourism providers in terms of marketing, advice and training towards product development. The interviewee stated that this budget would overlap with spending on national heritage projects. Therefore, the percentage of the budget that was actually spent on ecotourism could vary annually. Training provision in the case of ecotourism was outsourced to Greenbox Consultancy Ltd, the organisation established by the former Greenbox CEO in order to generate income, when the Greenbox ceased to function as initially developed. Marketing and promotion was carried out primarily through FI’s website and relates to the marketing and promotion of the regions, and the listing of premises of member businesses. The NITB is responsible for developing the tourism product in Northern Ireland and promoting it on the island of Ireland and has no specific ecotourism remit.
The respondent from Teagasc was selected in order to document whether ecotourism was being adopted by farm families. This is important to ascertain as the study area is reliant historically on small farm structures as a source of rural employment. Ecotourism has been advocated as a rural development tool in such areas (DAST 2003). The Options Programme, administered by Teagasc, advises farmers and farm families about the possibilities around creating an increased farm income by diversification. Tourism is one of the options that the programme discusses. The tourism advisor did not feel she had a role in promoting ecotourism and did not have an ecotourism budget, as the focus of the organisation was on rural tourism more generally.

FHI is a national membership based marketing organisation for family homes that operate as B&B providers throughout Ireland. There are c. 200 properties listed with Family Homes; six of these are located in the Greenbox area. The interviewee was not aware of the Greenbox, nor that some of the properties that they market and promote are located within the Greenbox. The properties that are registered with FHI are usually not registered with FI because they did not apply, because of the cost of doing so, or they did not meet the standards set by FI.

ITIC is the national membership organisation for the tourism trade in Ireland. This interview took place in order to assess the extent to which ecotourism was being discussed by the confederation, the awareness of the Greenbox project among members. ITIC’s main role is to lobby government, with regard to tourism, on behalf of its members. It also carries out tourism research and produces reports on behalf of the members but it does not have a funding, training or product development role. The CEO of the Greenbox had indicated that the project was at one point a member of ITIC but the interviewee did not recall this membership. He did not feel that ITIC had a role in promoting ecotourism, although he was supportive of the concept more generally.

Three regional level organisations were surveyed (NWTA, WDC and BMW) because of their role in ecotourism, EU funding or, in the case of the WDC in assisting with the establishment of the Greenbox project initially. The functions of the North West Regional Tourism Authority (NWTA) were to operate tourism information offices, promote tourism in the region and act as a filter for funding
applications (Fáilte Ireland and Strategic Advisory Service 2005). The interviewee reported that the organisation does not fund providers directly (OI # 15). Budgets are used to market and promote tourism more generally in the region but not ecotourism specifically. Other services such as advice on expansion and establishment are also provided. The interviewee believed that on one hand they had no direct role in ecotourism but that some of their members “just happened to be ecotourism providers” (OI # 15).

The WDC was established in the late 1990s to foster balanced development in counties of Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Mayo, Roscommon, Clare and Galway and therefore is responsible for three of the counties which form part of the Greenbox (Donegal, Leitrim and Sligo). This organisation was “part of the forerunners of the Greenbox”, according to the interviewee (OI # 7). In clarifying this, he stated that the organisation prepared the initial feasibility report and also part funded the project. The budget for tourism was €90,000 in 2010. The organisation employed four staff members who had a remit that potentially included tourism but, at the time of interview (2011), tourism was considered a “watching brief” and there was no staff member engaged in tourism related activities at the time, and no direct spending on tourism (OI # 7). The budget was mainly utilised for promoting the region through www.lookwest.ie by providing a forum through which employment opportunities, places to live and other important facts and figures are presented.

The BMW is one of two regional assemblies established in 1999, by the Irish Government, in order to allow for the division of the country into two regions (BMW and South East region) for Structural Funds purposes. The BMW monitors spending of Interreg Funding and was interviewed as the Greenbox was funded primarily through the Interreg IIIA programme. The BMW has no ecotourism budget and its involvement in tourism relates to strategic trans-European projects, which were not pertinent to the Greenbox or ecotourism at the time of interview. The interview material therefore features in a minor way only in the discussion in the following chapters.

At a local level eight organisations formed part of the sample. Tourism representatives from four local authorities were interviewed; three in Ireland (Cavan, Leitrim and Sligo) and one in Northern Ireland (Fermanagh). Donegal County
Council was omitted as they did not, at the time of the research, employ a tourism officer. Information for the county was obtained from the NWT representative based there. The tourism officer in Monaghan opted not to partake in the study as she stated she had no role with reference to the Greenbox. The local authorities held tourism budgets that ranged from €60,000 to €200,000 (average €70,000). FDC held a larger tourism budget than those in the Ireland (£200,000=€229,000). These budgets were decided at council meetings in all cases and varied slightly year-on-year. In all cases, budgets were used to develop the tourism product in the area. This was achieved through direct marketing and promotion, identification of funding streams and advising tourism providers of them. Individual providers were not funded in Ireland but were in cases in NI. Promotion and development of festivals in the council area was also a function. Staffing numbers differed from council to council but in general only one staff member had an ecotourism remit as part of a broader tourism remit.

The responsibilities of the local authority staff in terms of ecotourism varied with one (SCC) having an ecotourism specific policy in its development plans. The other councils referred to elements such as environmental sustainability, comparable to ecotourism, but did not use the term specifically. Some staff believed they had a central role in ecotourism whereas others were less certain. One local authority representative felt she had a strong role in supporting and promoting ecotourism within the county. Another representative felt his role was minor, as he only had an involvement in developing local walking trails. Another related her role to an involvement with the local UNESCO Geopark, as did her counterpart in Northern Ireland; however, this latter respondent had an extensive role in ecotourism prior to the cessation of the Greenbox project as he was on the management board.

Fermanagh Lakelands is a PPP between members of the tourism trade (who are paid members) and representatives from Fermanagh District Council. There are three staff members employed, only one of whom was full time in 2011. The organisation’s primary role is to market and promote County Fermanagh. Funding is obtained through membership subscriptions from 380 members (June 2011) and the district council. This budget totalled £200,000 (€229,000). The primary role of promotion and marketing of the organisation’s members is achieved through brochure development, the internet, consumer and trade exhibitions, familiarisation trips by
journalists and tour operators, direct mail, event support, and regular newsletters and e-zines. The organisation provides a certain amount of advice, if approached. Two staff members had undertaken ecotourism training provided by the Greenbox in partnership with Sligo Institute of Technology. FL also provided access to ecotourism itineraries for tour groups or individual tourists who wanted an ecotourism holiday or experience. This organisational representative emerged as being very actively involved in ecotourism.

One CEO and three rural development advisors were interviewed in the Leader companies. Leader companies held significant budgets of approximately €13 million and reported that €6 to €7 million was being utilised for the purpose of new tourism product development. However, financial assistance for ecotourism projects was fully dependent on the projects that came forward and there was no budget specifically for ecotourism. For example a flagship ecotourism project in Donegal, an EU Flower holder and Greenbox member (a self-catering development and also promoted outdoor walking trails) was funded through the local Leader company to the sum of circa €250,000. The average number of staff employed in the Leader companies was 13. However, in general, only one has a significant tourism remit. One of the Leader companies interviewed stated that they did not have any specific employee with a tourism title but claimed that most of the staff in the organisation had a role in tourism. SWARD is the delivery mechanism for Axis 3 of the *Rural Development Programme 2007-2013* in NI and is responsible for administering Leader funding in the Fermanagh area which both tourism and ecotourism providers can apply for.

*Summary*
There are various organisations that have international, national, regional and local remits relating to tourism in the northwest region. These remits arise from their broader responsibilities and the geographical scale at which they operate. Internationally TI promotes Ireland but does not promote ecotourism specifically. Nationally the NTAs support ecotourism with one national organisation having a specific budget. Regionally the WDC held a role in ecotourism in the years prior to interview. However, due to economic recession could no longer fulfil that function.
Local support was more significant: Leader companies provided funding and LAs in Ireland could not provide financial support but assisted in terms of promotion, training and advice. Most organisations had a staff member employed directly in tourism but very few had staff members with an ecotourism role and there was an absence of specific budgets for ecotourism in most cases. Ecotourism providers could apply for whatever tourism budgets were available if they fulfilled the stipulated criteria.

TOURISM PROVIDERS
This section profiles the defining characteristics of the selected businesses and their owners or managers. The businesses sampled were part of a number of different service provision categories including serviced and self-catering accommodation, outdoor activities, educational premises and relaxation activities and are illustrated in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Provider types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Provider</th>
<th>Number Interviewed (n=37)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B&amp;B</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caravan park</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country homes</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guesthouse</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hostel</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-catering</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small hotel</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational centre</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surf school</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thalassotherapy baths</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity centre</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yoga centre</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boat charter</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fishery</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Selected businesses: history, staffing and turnover
Twenty three of the businesses were previous Greenbox members, and 14 held the EU Flower Label promoted by the Greenbox. It was an obligation of Greenbox members to be certified with the relevant national tourism authorities; therefore only
those which were registered with FI and NITB were included in the sample. The
dates of establishment of the businesses varied. Only six businesses post-dated the
establishment of the Greenbox. Most B&Bs were established in the late 1980s or
early 1990s, when funding for rural diversification under rural development
programmes was available, with two being established in the early 2000s when the
owners returned from living abroad. Two of the three hotels were established in the
1800s with a third being closed for a period in the late 1990s and then bought,
redeveloped, and opened by the current owners in the 2000s. Activity centres were
mainly developed in the 1990s. One surf school was established in the 1980s, with
the majority dating to the 2000s. One surf school and one B&B were founded
by previous generations of the current owners’ families. Twelve businesses were
established following the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 which promoted peace
and free movement of people and tourists across the international border and
increased funding for business establishment became available.

A range of different ownership and legal structures were present. Seventeen of the
businesses reported husband and wife ownership. These included all of the B&Bs,
two small hotels, two activity centres, one guesthouse, an education centre, a caravan
park and a fishery. Two were owned by non-related business partnerships, two were
owned by different generations of the same family, ten were single owner operations,
one was an estate owned by an absentee landlord, and the remainder were owned by
groups of individuals, and in one case, managed by a community group. Twenty
eight were reported to be sole traders, eight were PLCs (mainly larger businesses)
and one was a Community Interest Company.

All businesses, except one surf school, operated on a full time basis with the owner
of this surf school returning to his home country of New Zealand for four months of
the year, usually from November to February. However, many of the other
businesses stated that they closed for approximately three weeks at Christmas time.
This was particularly true in the case of B&B providers who did not want guests in
their home during the festive period. While the businesses were full time, many
stated that booking levels varied in line with seasonality. In general all businesses
experienced their busiest periods during the summer months.
As previous research relating to rural tourism businesses has illustrated, staff numbers in these businesses were low (Table 4.3) (Cawley et al. 2004). Small scale accommodation providers such as B&Bs and self-catering premises, on average, had full time staff numbers of between two and four (including the owner). The small hotels had larger numbers, averaging 25-30 full time equivalents and the thalassotherapy baths employed 22, who were engaged in harvesting and manufacture of the seaweed products and the running of the bathhouse. In the case of the hotels, a significant number of staff were engaged in various aspects of the business including reception services, bar service and housekeeping. Activity centres employed on average three people. The educational centres engaged the services of part time staff or experts to run courses on topics such as horticulture, in the case of one centre, and more specific courses such as seed harvesting in the case of another. The yoga centre employed people on a part time basis to run courses on specialist types of yoga. Part time and seasonal employment numbers were very low with many employing none. Trained activity staff was hired in the case of two activity centres. One of the country houses employed cleaning staff on a part time basis, whereas the other had staff employed on a full time basis to run a cookery school which formed part of the business and operated as a primary attraction in some cases but also an additional attraction for those staying on the premises.

Nine businesses were reliant on family members to fill posts as part time or full time staff. Five of these were accommodation providers with three being outdoor activity centres and one surf school. In the case of the surf school and the activity centres, these family members were paid staff on a seasonal basis who held relevant qualifications. In the case of the accommodation providers, the family members were adolescent sons and daughters of the business owners who helped out when on holidays from school or college in exchange for payment of a weekly allowance or pocket money.

Most did not report any pressures associated with running their businesses as they stated that they enjoyed the work they were engaged in. However, in some cases financial strain and uncertainty in terms of the future of tourism, due to economic recession, was voiced.
Information on annual turnover was sought as an indication of the business generated by ecotourism enterprises. Fourteen interviewees declined to provide such information. The reasons given included a marital breakdown in one case, where the business was part of a legal dispute, and what the providers termed a ‘tough year’ financially in the other cases. This is understandable due to the economic climate at the time of interview.

Table 4.3 Staffing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type Provider</th>
<th>Ave FT</th>
<th>Ave PT</th>
<th>Ave Seasonal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B&amp;B</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caravan park</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country homes</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guesthouse</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hostel</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-catering</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small hotel</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td>16.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational centre</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surf school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thalassotherapy baths</td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity centre</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yoga centre</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boat charter</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fishery</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Because of the small size of many of the businesses in terms of employment, turnover is relatively modest in particular in the smaller businesses (B&Bs) and where there is a second income. Eight of the providers cited a second income (seven B&B one self-catering). Four of these second incomes were generated in agriculture, three in the services industry and one owner’s wife worked in hospitality. Eight B&Bs provided turnover figures (Appendix I).

One caravan park stated a turnover between €60,000 and €100,000 and the other €280,000 and a country home provided a figure of €160,000. The educational centres (3) and activity centres (2) provided figures circa €100,000. Surf schools (4) and the boat charter averaged between €30,000 and €60,000. The highest turnover was associated with the larger businesses in terms of staffing. Thus, the hotels and thalassotherapy baths reported figures of €1-5 million and €500,000 respectively.
One B&B reported a turnover of between €60,000 and €100,000, one cited €30,000 and three cited €10,000. No hostel provided figures nor did self-catering providers. The recession had a significant impact on businesses with many stating a decrease in annual turnover since 2008. Two mentioned having other tourism businesses, namely self-catering units located close to their primary tourism business which were developed to provide extra income. In over three quarters of the interviews it was reported that the current business was the first business venture. Less than a quarter reported previous relevant experience which included tourism training/education and experience in a similar sector.

Evolution of the business over time

Twenty eight respondents stated that they obtained financial support in order to establish their business. Of the 12 who gave amounts, they varied from €1000- €1 million. Some did not provide figures but did discuss the source of the funding (Table 4.4). Funding was obtained from a variety of sources including from the Departments of Agriculture, the Rural Development (Leader) Programmes, and the statutory tourism authorities of FI and the NITB (in the respective jurisdictions). Funding was sourced locally from County Enterprise boards and the Greenbox. The main funding which was discussed related to more significant amounts that were obtained to establish the business or develop premises initially, from sources other than the Greenbox, as 32 of the businesses predate the establishment of the Greenbox. Eight providers had received financial assistance greater than €25,000 from sources including Leader, the Peace Fund, the International Fund for Ireland and the Department of Agriculture in Northern Ireland. A number had obtained funding from more than one source. This was true in the case of businesses that were based in close proximity to the international border and, following the Good Friday Agreement and the associated Peace Process, were eligible for funding based on fostering continued peace and reconciliation. One provider mentioned gaining a grant from Invest NI of £1 million to redevelop his hotel in Fermanagh after it was bombed in 2000. Interviewees in general cited that obtaining funding was a difficult and bureaucratic process with prohibitive paperwork involved to secure what they considered to be small sums of financial aid and the need to provide 50% of the total
funding amount in instances. These complaints did not arise in the case of obtaining funding from the Greenbox but related to Leader and national level organisations.

Three mentioned having securing financial assistance informally from close friends or family members, in order to establish the business initially. Two providers had not obtained any assistance to establish their businesses directly but did benefit from funding to market the business. These amounts were €1,000 and €5,000 and were sourced from disembedded networking with Fi nationally and the Peace Fund (directly) internationally and Leader companies. Most did not avail of funding to expand their business, as many did not expand because of economic recession. Those that expanded did not enlarge the physical structure but may have upgraded buildings or made improvements to services. Due to the fact that most of the businesses were established for a significant time period, only one respondent mentioned having financial difficulty or still paying back a bank loan.

Based on evidence from interviews with organisations and documentary analysis it was found that the Greenbox funded a total of 16 of the interviewed businesses. However, only four of these providers mentioned this funding directly and these had obtained large amounts of financial aid from the Greenbox, in order to assist with the building of new premises. The other businesses that obtained Greenbox funding mainly obtained smaller amounts (<€10,000) in order to provide ecological upgrades such as water harvesting and wood pellet boilers or for bicycles, canoes and other supplies for outdoor ecotourism activities.

The methods of promotion used by businesses varied from the national tourism authority website to the business’s own website, social media, leaflets, flyers, links with other local businesses and word of mouth. Local imagery was used as a marketing and promotional tool in only a limited number of cases. In general, those who used local imagery did so in a rather subconscious way and the images used were examples of local scenic spots and waterways or points of interest locally.

Owners and managers - personal attributes
The sample included 31 owners and six managers including 15 females and 22 males. As mentioned earlier, sixteen of the businesses were jointly owned and in
some cases the male owner was interviewed and in others the female owner was the interviewee. The age of the providers generally varied based on the type of business they were involved in.

Table 4.4: Details of funding obtained

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Obtained funding</th>
<th>From</th>
<th>€</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B&amp;B</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>CEB</td>
<td>23000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td>LEADER &amp; IFI</td>
<td>250,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td>FI &amp; LEADER</td>
<td>1000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td>LEADER</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td>GB &amp; DARD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caravan park</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>PEACE</td>
<td>70,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country homes</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>NITB</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guesthouse</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>LEADER</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hostel</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>FI</td>
<td>DNP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td>IFI &amp; NL</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td>GB</td>
<td>5000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td>PEACE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-catering</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>FLP</td>
<td>30000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td>DARD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small hotel</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>FI &amp; IFI</td>
<td>60,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td>IFI</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td>INVEST NI</td>
<td>1 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education C</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>PEACE &amp; GB</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surf school</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>LEADER</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thalassotherapy</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>LEADER</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity centre</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>LEADER</td>
<td>50,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td>CEB, LEADER &amp; GB</td>
<td>50,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yoga centre</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>LEADER</td>
<td>50,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boat charter</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>LEADER</td>
<td>25000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fishery</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>GB</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For example the age profile of accommodation owners (45+) was older than most of those involved in outdoor activities, as one might expect. The surf schools were owned by younger people with four of the five interviewees being aged 25-34 years. Many of the interviewees had direct links with the locality where they now live; 28 were from the locality and seven others married someone from the locality. Two had come on vacation to Ireland and had remained and developed a business due to their attachment to the area. One of these was a surf school owner, who saw the potential for a surf school in a Sligo seaside town and the other was an educational centre manager, who developed an artisan cheese making business on the Sligo/Leitrim border.

Eighteen interviewees gained experience internationally before establishing their tourism business in the northwest. In some cases these were husband and wife partnerships who had travelled for some years before returning home to settle. This experience was in most cases relevant to their current businesses and all cited that it was this time abroad that led them to consider establishing a tourism business in northwest Ireland. The owner of the thalassotherapy baths mentioned that the four years he spent in Australia on a sports scholarship helped him to decide to establish his business, as during his studies he examined the benefits of seaweed baths for people who partake in sports. An owner of an activity centre, who was also an athlete, had spent time on a scholarship at a London university, and while there had taken up windsurfing. On completing college he worked as a recreation officer for a local council in the United Kingdom and got involved in the promotion of canoeing and through this experience began to consider developing his water based activity centre.

Twenty-two providers had obtained third level qualifications (Table 4.5). These qualifications were tourism related in four cases. Twenty providers stated that they had taken ecotourism training which was provided by the Greenbox, in association with Sligo Institute of Technology and related to all aspects of ecotourism development and promotion and advice on EU Flower Certification. Other supplementary training included training in business development and marketing which most had completed. This training related to aspects such as social networking, accounting and general business development and was predominantly
provided by the national tourism authorities and the County Enterprise boards. Some of these courses were one day courses with some lasting up to one week.

Table 4.5 Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Third level</th>
<th>Ecotourism</th>
<th>Supplementary (Relevant to business)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B&amp;B</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caravan park</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country homes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guesthouse</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hostel</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-catering</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small hotel</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education C</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surf school</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thalassotherapy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity centre</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yoga centre</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boat charter</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fishery</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>37</strong></td>
<td><strong>22</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
<td><strong>18</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary

The profile of the businesses and the owners/managers has illustrated how roles in tourism and ecotourism, staffing and methods of marketing and promotion used by business owners and managers are closely related to the types of businesses they operate. Funding was mainly obtained to establish businesses but some funding was also awarded for marketing purposes. Most businesses, with the exception of the hotels and thalassotherapy bath house, employed small numbers of staff and the turnover quoted was reflective of the small scale of operation. Many were established before the Greenbox was designated and some obtained substantial amounts of funding to build or adapt structures to qualify for the EU Flower from the Greenbox.
CONCLUSION

Being aware of the characteristics of the organisations and providers interviewed is important in order to fully understand how networks and ecotourism find expression in the Greenbox and the context in which networking takes place. The organisational data demonstrates the different levels at which each organisation supports ecotourism in terms of staffing and budgets. Many of the organisations supported tourism as part of a larger role. Budgets for ecotourism were small or non-existent in many cases with the Leader companies holding the largest funding role. Ecotourism providers had to compete with conventional tourism providers to obtain funds. The provider data is helpful in order to gain an understanding of the products available in the area and how they engage with ecotourism and contribute to local capital. All but one tourism business stated operating on a full time basis, although numbers did vary in line with seasonality. Staffing numbers were low but employing family members or local people did make a modest contribution to the local economy. Many providers had links to the local area, leading them to establish their business. Educational attainment included third level qualifications in 22 instances but only four related to tourism. External international experiences had a role to play in the experience of 18 providers. Being aware of the characteristics of the organisations and businesses and their representatives, is useful to contextualise the finding in later chapters. Chapter 5 presents the findings relating to ecotourism.
CHAPTER 5: ECOTOURISM IN THE GREENBOX

INTRODUCTION
This chapter discusses the evidence relating to the first research question: what is the relationship between ecotourism as a particular form of rural tourism and the local resource base broadly defined? The question was designed to elicit the understandings of ecotourism held by the organisations and their representatives and the ecotourism providers who were interviewed, in the Greenbox area, and the extent to which it was embedded in the local environment and culture. Responses relating to the definitions of ecotourism held, the role of the Greenbox, and the future of ecotourism in the area were analysed. The first part of the chapter deals with the organisational findings and the second part with the provider findings.

The definition or understanding of ecotourism is examined first. The Greenbox adopted and modified the TIES definition (Chapter 1) slightly for their use and consequently defined ecotourism as: “travel that is small scale, low impact, culturally sensitive, community and conservation orientated, primarily nature based, educational and capable of broadening people’s minds and enlivening their souls while providing a unique experience, firmly grounded in sustainable principles and practices” (Greenbox and Fáilte Ireland 2007). An assessment of the role of the organisation or provider, as pertinent in ecotourism promotion and development follows. Finally, the organisational representative and provider perspectives on the role and image of the Greenbox on the future of ecotourism in the Greenbox and the associated threats are presented. A number of themes emerged under each of the broad headings during the analysis and are used to structure the text. Quotes are used to elucidate and contextualise the themes and reference is made to the social and economic attributes of the respondents to provide further insights into their expressed views, where pertinent. In some instances, in the case of the organisations, the organisational perspective was sought initially but most of the respondents provided personal views. Where an official organisational stance was discussed this is referred to. Respondents are referred to on the basis of their involvement with the Greenbox. In the case of organisations this relates to board or non-board
involvement and for the providers it relates to being a former member of the Greenbox provider network or not.

I: ORGANISATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

ORGANISATIONAL DEFINITION OF ECOTOURISM
Researchers have attempted to isolate the core characteristics that make ecotourism distinctive. These are found to include: environmental sustainability, education about ecotourism, tourism based in nature, a conservation mandate and contribution to the local community (Fennell 2009). The concept of ecotourism in the Greenbox was not understood clearly by many of the organisations, according to their representatives who were interviewed. Four organisations defined ecotourism, two in a document or literature such as a tourism plan and two others had adopted the Greenbox definition. The remaining 17 organisations did not define ecotourism and were reported as viewing it as more of an ethos, rather than something that should be strictly defined. Therefore the contested nature of ecotourism, as a constructed versus a natural phenomenon as present in the literature, is also evident in the different views held in the current study area. Eighteen representatives reported that their organisation had a role in ecotourism, illustrating that involvement in ecotourism could be envisaged even in the absence of a definition being held.

Board members
The representatives of the board member organisations, in general, discussed their awareness of the Greenbox definition of ecotourism. One representative whose organisation was a member of the board, but who was not the delegate on the board, was less informed about that definition. By contrast the representative of the LA in Northern Ireland stated that:

“we spent meetings … agonising over the definition … one was eventually found … the focus was about … sustainability and the use of the resource without damage… it was environmental sustainability, social and economic,
you know they tried to broaden it out, so that it was a general sort of definition” (OI # 5).

Their counterpart in the Irish LA (LCC who was not the LA’s delegate on the board) answered:

“that’s a good question… there are 100 different definitions … responsible tourism is the one we would go on, and we would rather promote it as the experience so that people could come and have a full experience, I know you can’t have a full eco experience from the minute you go…we would never promote it as 100% but you know, you are looking at a good 80%…”(OI # 4).

The representative of the regional statutory body understood ecotourism as defined by the Greenbox as adopted from TIES, but his organisation no longer held an active remit for ecotourism. Like his counterpart in a local authority in NI quoted above, he had been present at many Greenbox board meetings. Therefore, a presence at meetings of the board seems to have influenced the definition of ecotourism held. Extensive discussion was reported to have taken place surrounding the definition of ecotourism which was adopted by the Greenbox; however the research has shown that the definition decided on officially was not adopted by all of the organisational members of the board and understandings varied. However, respondents used terms that appear in many academic definitions for example ‘natural environment’ and ‘conservation’. These understandings raise questions with regard to the levels of true investment and interest in the initial network and the actual motivation to promote an ecotourism destination and products.

**Non board members of the Greenbox**

Organisations that were not members of the Greenbox board did not use the officially adopted definition of ecotourism. Some respondents defined ecotourism as tourists viewing local scenery and walking and cycling through the local landscape, where others considered it to be conservation of the local heritage. A Leader
company representative viewed it as enjoying local scenery and environments, a perspective that can be linked to elements of accepted definitions such as tourism that is based in nature and offers satisfaction for tourists (Ceballos Lascurian 1987):

“I would like to think of it more… on practical terms, more conceptually, it’s based on the environment and you can argue that ecotourism is just looking at nice scenery to kind of experience things like you would have … where you can go and do courses in basket making and stuff like that, all kinds of things, as I describe the two loop walks, like to me that is ecotourism, it is as big as you want and as limited as you want” (Organisational Interview # 14).

Two organisations did not define ecotourism as such but the representatives mentioned that it was a form of rural tourism and was referred to in official documents. This response from a non Greenbox local authority reflects this: “the unit itself does not define ecotourism, but it would be referred to in council documents such as conservation plans, and also when discussing areas of architectural and heritage value. Food would also be something in the region that would have an eco-element” (OI # 10). The second respondent from a non-board Leader company mentioned:

“... em… we have it written into our business plan, em, which would be on the basis of communication through the Greenbox, and would really, we would put priority on issues that come forward under that banner, whatever under ecotourism, we'll say like back a few years ago, when you had the Celtic tiger we would have pushed the green a lot harder because there was so much, you know there was a lot more applications coming in to us, we are not getting as many applications now, it is hard work to get anything through, so... em... green or ecotourism would have extra points as such towards achieving, getting grant aid but it is not something that I have seen a lot of come in....” (OI # 20).
Another local authority representative did not define ecotourism and mentioned that it was not referred to in any official documentation although an awareness of the importance of the natural environment for ecotourism was highlighted: “no I don’t think so, not in our development plan or anything like that… now we don’t… we would have em… again there would be references made to the need to preserve and protect the environment and there would be, we wouldn’t actually say ecotourism is the following… no” (OI # 11).

It was also felt by a representative of the national agriculture and food development authority that ecotourism did not need to be defined as there was a limited market for it in Ireland:

“I spent a month in Malaysia …. and as far as I am concerned that is what ecotourism is. That’s what real ecotourism is, I think we think we have ecotourism here, I am not sure we have, we have green, but I am not sure we have eco, eco to me is rain forests, you know that kind of thing, I think what we are calling eco in Ireland could easily be wiped off the face of the earth … They have it much more in abundance everywhere else” (OI# 12).

The concept of ecotourism, in the Greenbox, was not understood simply and was related to membership of the board of the Greenbox and the experience of the executive officers for tourism who subscribed to the definition of ecotourism adopted by the Greenbox. The majority of the interviewees (18) stated that their organisation viewed the concept as more of an ethos than something that should be strictly defined. However, in making this statement many described ecotourism as being “responsible tourism”, “an experience” and primarily based on the “environment”. Therefore, the use of the local environmental resource base for ecotourism was highlighted as an important element by most respondents. Some reference was made to culture and heritage but less so than the physical environment.
THE ROLE OF THE GREENBOX
The respondents were queried about their organisations’ perception of the role of the Greenbox in order to gain understanding of the visibility established by the Greenbox as an ecotourism destination and product. They responded by giving a personal view. A number of main themes emerged as follows:

- To market and promote an ecotourism product;
- The Greenbox has a number of roles;
- Unsure of the role of the Greenbox;
- The role of the Greenbox is to attract ecotourists;
- The role of the Greenbox is to bring businesses together;
- The Greenbox does not really have a role.

Bring to market an ecotourism product
Six organisational representatives referred in particular to the promotion and marketing conducted by the Greenbox (although they also referred to other roles). The CEO of the Greenbox explained: “It has influenced, created and brought to market a green and ecotourism product” (OI#1). She then expanded on what is meant by the statement and how and why it was important when defining the role of the Greenbox. She said that the Greenbox brought “credibility” and “understanding” to ecotourism which was positive because of low awareness of ecotourism among providers and organisations, leading people to believe those involved in initially promoting the Greenbox were “nuts” (OI#1).

A representative of a local authority in Northern Ireland, a former board member who had a role in developing and funding the Greenbox project, also mentioned the function as promotion and marketing. However, he expanded on the broader aspects of the promotion of ecotourism among providers:

“The Greenbox role is ... apart from promoting the area as a green tourism destination it is to try and build up the grass roots (local) involvement and try and develop the buy in of people who are operating...food producers, activity providers and accommodation providers” (OI #5).
This response engages with some of the many functions of the Greenbox. These included: promotion, network development among providers, developing a critical mass and also establishing an ecotourism destination. Therefore this organisation’s representative illustrated a deep understanding of the project due to being over 20 years in post, being very involved with the Greenbox, as a former board member, and having a very positive view of ecotourism and its role in developing the area.

A Leader programme representative in Ireland also stated: “to promote ecotourism in the northwest, that was it really wasn’t it?” (OI # 14). A cross border network representative located in Northern Ireland expanded further: “I suppose it is the promotion of ecotourism, they (the Greenbox) are probably the experts in the region, if not the whole of Ireland” (OI#18). This he stated was cemented by the programme promoting ecological certification. His organisation had also directly supported providers and developed training programmes for providers and organisations involved in ecotourism. Another Leader programme representative in Northern Ireland and a fisheries representative echoed the sentiments of the previous two respondents, stating that the Greenbox role was to promote ecotourism in the northwest and in Ireland more generally. The international tourism representative also highlighted the attraction of ecotourists.

**The Greenbox had a number of roles**

Some organisational representatives reported that the Greenbox had many roles which reflected varying levels of understanding of its objectives and activities. Awareness of some of the limitations associated with the Greenbox project were also voiced. A local authority tourism officer in Ireland who was a former board member of the Greenbox and whose organisation had part funded the project stated:

“I would say they have a few different roles...one would be their standards, their accreditation...lobbying...planning, make sure planning regulations are in fitting with the Greenbox ... the policies of the Greenbox ... that the concept of the Greenbox is still there and it doesn’t turn into mass tourism” (OI #4).
This respondent understood that the Greenbox had a number of functions but over cited the role by referring to influencing planning regulations.

A national agricultural and food authority representative discussed how they felt that it “might bring ecotourism on to the agenda” (OI #12) and clarified this by mentioning the importance of using local knowledge to inform tourists who visit sites of interest, an element which she feels is not being used in the current development and promotion of ecotourism. This the respondent related to a failure in top down approaches to projects like the Greenbox which prevents people fully understanding ecotourism. This opinion reflects documented evidence elsewhere of the weaknesses of government or funding led approaches to tourism projects like the Greenbox (Dredge 2004; Dredge and Pforr 2008).

A representative of a regional statutory body which had a central role in developing the Greenbox said: “my thoughts would be, on balance, what a lovely idea. It moved from marketing through to the EU flower and accreditation and, really, why did it stop?” (OI #7). He clarified later that he was aware that the funding deficit had an impact, highlighting the over dependence on funding which has been identified in other studies (Morrison 1994; Dredge 2006b). A representative of a regional tourism organisation stated that the purpose of the Greenbox related to multiple roles including accreditation, conservation and placing ecotourism “on the national agenda” (OI #15). However, she was aware that the project had lost its “impetus” due to a lack of funding and without funding the project did not have a future, concurring with the previous respondent’s awareness of the loss of funding.

The public private partnership representative in county Fermanagh also considered the Greenbox to have a number of roles but felt that these many roles sometimes led to confusion and a lack of awareness as to what the Greenbox was actually doing: “to be honest at the start it was probably a bit confusing... we weren’t quite sure were they training people, were they advising people, were they marketing people or what were they doing” (OI #6). This respondent felt that the role of the Greenbox became clearer when they began to focus on training and advising providers. This she felt was a “more distinct role” because it eliminated duplication in the services being provided by other organisations, like her own (OI #6). (This duplication of services was also mentioned by providers who discussed the proliferation of organisations
and the confusion that arose due to their multiple roles). The representative of the national tourism organisation in Ireland referred to the position after 2007 when the Greenbox organisation split in two, when funding was no longer available and the CEO had to establish a private company to generate income (OI #2). Her counterpart in Northern Ireland who was a former board member was aware that the project had a role in networking businesses. “I think it was the connections between the businesses, bringing them together to say that ‘we do something that no other area in Ireland does’... a very coherent set of businesses all standing behind the principles of sustainable development saying it is important” (OI # 3).

**The Greenbox does not have a role**

Two organisational representatives felt that the Greenbox did not have any role at the time of interview. A local authority representative in Ireland said: “you are the first person that has mentioned it to me in a long time” (OI # 11). She also stated that because only part of the county which she represented was inside the Greenbox she felt on the periphery of the project and had little involvement with it. The other organisational representative who was of the opinion that the Greenbox did not have a role represented a national tourism body which was not involved in the Greenbox board. Furthermore, the organisation was based outside of the northwest region and did not have a remit that would cause it to be involved directly with the project, although it would have had members in the Greenbox area (OI#17). These organisations felt that ecotourism did not have a role because it was not being considered by them as a specific type of tourism at the time of interview; however they did feel that it may have a future if developed further. Four representatives stated that they were unsure of the role of the Greenbox and could not be drawn further on this view.

The results illustrate that organisational representatives who were members of the Greenbox board were very aware of its functions. Non-members or those whose geographical location meant that only part of the area for which they were responsible was located inside the Greenbox boundary had a more limited understanding. Also, organisation which did not hold a direct tourism/ecotourism remit voiced similar responses.
THE BENEFITS AND DISADVANTAGES OF THE GREENBOX

The interviewees were queried about the perceived advantages and disadvantages arising from the Greenbox, for tourism in the region. Two respondents, one local authority representative and another cross border network representative referred to the positive aspects of ecotourism for its own work, the first stating: “the concept is brilliant and it is something that we can promote...it is an added value to what we are doing already” (OI #4). The second also discussed how the Greenbox was beneficial as it “added value” to the area as organisations could now promote ecotourism as one of the area’s attractions and use the Greenbox as an active example of how ecotourism manifests itself in the region. However, the respondent was aware that projects (like the Greenbox), can have a very short lifespan because of being established in response to available funding, as evidenced in international research (Dredge 2003, Dredge and Pforr 2008):

“Sometimes we get involved in things that are before their time... ten or more years ago I was a director of a similar project, it was a rural tourism initiative...promoting village breaks... and activities, walking and cycling... (in the end) to survive it had to generate income through commission on the sale of the breaks... to make up the funding gap... so it eventually just withered” (OI #5).

Another benefit outlined, related to the EU Flower Certification which the project promoted: “I think it is a powerful label, it seems to be well known...colleagues of mine in England and Wales would be aware of the Greenbox...I think the name is synonymous with sustainable development” (OI # 3). This organisational representative’s choice of the words “sustainable development” instead of ‘ecotourism’ when discussing the Greenbox reflected the fact that the organisation was developing a network of international organisations to promote sustainable development and ecotourism was to be one of the actions included in the network.

Publicity and the fact that the project was considered a flagship example was cited by a Greenbox board member: “from a PR (public relations) platform there was a lot of publicity and good work done by the Greenbox...they won a lot of awards during
the time they were active and I think that was a good thing...because we wouldn’t have got that forum otherwise” (OI #6).

A national tourism organisation representative supported this view by stating that ecotourism would not have “got out there” without the “impetus” which the Greenbox brought (OI #2). A non-board member also mentioned how the project was a “flagship” for their area and a “great source of pride” and it “was such a pity when it finished” (OI#18). The representative of a Leader programme stated that the Greenbox had benefits for the providers more than for the organisation as it assisted with the development of ecological or ecotourism products.

Organisational representatives, in general, did not state disadvantages as being associated with the Greenbox. One interviewee did but these views were expressed ‘off the record’ and cannot be used. Some organisations cited challenges which they felt the Greenbox may have encountered; namely funding and how to establish a board with the relevant participants and gain agreement between them on pertinent issues. The organisational representatives were asked if they felt if ecotourism had a future in the Greenbox. Most felt that ecotourism providers would continue to promote their ecotourism products but, that ecotourism would not grow unless there was funding available or a lead organisation, like the Greenbox, to continue with the development.

Organisations – summary
Organisations in general did not follow a strict definition of ecotourism but they did understand the essence of the concept and many were aware of the role of the local resource base for tourism, in particular the natural environment. It is also clear that some of the organisational representatives that sat on the Greenbox board were aware of the multiple roles of the project. Benefits discussed were promotion and marketing and certification of ecotourism products and of the region as an ecotourism destination.
II: PROVIDER PERSPECTIVES

TOURISM PROVIDERS
This section explores the provider views of ecotourism in the Greenbox, as registered during interviews with them. As discussed in the Methodology, the businesses were selected on the basis of being: (i) a member of the Greenbox and, therefore, adhering to its definition of ecotourism (TIES 1990); or (ii), being judged as having features associated with ecotourism, as defined in the academic literature.

PROVIDER DEFINITION OF ECOTOURISM
Interviewees were asked how they defined ecotourism. Two defined ecotourism using an officially recognised definition, such as the Greenbox/TIES definition. Six defined it in terms of preserving and protecting the environment, five related their definitions to technical criteria, and seven discussed in terms of providing outdoor activities that complied with ecotourism. Seventeen did not define ecotourism (Table 5.1). Some of the definitions given conveyed features in common with accepted definitions, by using terms such as ‘the importance of the natural environment’ for ecotourism. The responses illustrate that the individual understandings of ecotourism related mainly to the type of product promoted and many did not reflect the holism of accepted definitions. The embeddedness of ecotourism in the local environment was apparent from the discourses.

Table 5.1. Provider definitions of ecotourism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Number</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Greenbox/TIES</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preserve and protect environment</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical criteria and EU Flower compliance</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outdoor activities which comply with ecotourism</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not define</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N</strong></td>
<td><strong>37</strong></td>
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</table>
The Greenbox definition (TIES)
The TIES definition adopted by the Greenbox (“responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the wellbeing of local people”) was mentioned by two providers, a hotel owner and an educational centre manager, both of whom had been active Greenbox members. The hotel owner in a Leitrim town stated that he followed the Greenbox definition but he would define ecotourism more in terms of what the hotel did on a daily basis: “I would be aware of (and follow) the Greenbox definition, but I would define it more by what we do” (BI# 2).

This was one of the first hotels in Ireland and the UK to receive the EU Flower and was used as a best practice example by the Greenbox, which possibly influenced the adoption of its definition of ecotourism. The second respondent who adhered to the Greenbox definition was the male manager of an educational centre in Leitrim. He stated that the business would define ecotourism “as the Greenbox does really, that’s in some of our documents” (BI#7). This business had a role in the initial development of the Greenbox which may have led to the use of the accepted definition. Although both of these respondents stated that they defined ecotourism as the Greenbox did they appeared to operate more within the confines of the environmentally friendly practices they had developed themselves. Both represented large well-known businesses, and stated that they had partaken in similar interviews on many occasions previously. This may also have led to a decision being made to adopt the Greenbox definition for the purpose of providing an acceptable and widely understood meaning attributed to ecotourism. The Greenbox definition, as presented, has a focus on local resource use and its importance for ecotourism and was understood by these providers.

Environmental protection
The second way providers chose to define ecotourism was to relate it to the benign impact of the businesses on the natural environment. Statements related to how ecotourism was a form of tourism that had little negative or no environmental impact (Bjork, 2000; Fennell 2001). Providers, whether they were consciously aware of it or not, were discussing a central tenet of many conceptualisations of ecotourism and
understood the potential synergy between ecotourism and the protection of locally available resources clearly. While these providers did not define ecotourism using an accepted academic or industry form of words they did discuss a central aspect of ecotourism as environmental sustainability and were aware that ecotourism could be defined as the promotion of a form of tourism that had limited environmental impact. Getting local stakeholders to care for their environments was a focus of the Life project in the west of Ireland, as discussed by O’Cinnéide (1999), and is comparable to the outcome of the Greenbox as this method of defining ecotourism illustrates.

Those who understood ecotourism in terms of environmental protection were from various locations within the Greenbox, included a number of different business types, and included a mix of Greenbox and non-Greenbox providers, with no one business type prioritising this interpretation of ecotourism. For example, one male B&B owner, in Leitrim, who did not have the EU Flower and was not a Greenbox member stated that: “we see it as the natural beauty of the area, the natural environment, to protect it... people coming from Dublin for the weekend, we have fishing rods... we wouldn’t survive without ecotourism” (BI#15). A female surf school owner in a Sligo seaside town, with no knowledge of the Greenbox, stated that they did not define ecotourism specifically but had an understanding of what she believed ecotourism to be: “we try an preserve and protect the environment and do beach clean ups twice a year” (BI #29). This provider, who held a third level degree in marine science also provided an educational programme, which she considered to be ecotourism, which educated school age children on the flora and fauna of the beach and how to maintain natural environmental and beach systems. Her own experience illustrates how education can foster ecological principles and practices. The manager of a country house in Fermanagh and former Greenbox member mentioned: “it is more what we do here than defined, because of the location here it very much fits, and Fermanagh is becoming greener and greener” (BI#19). The quote is reflective of the understanding of the role of the local resource base.

The terms ‘preserve and protect’, were used many times. The combination of terms was used mainly by non-Greenbox member businesses and usage differed according to the type of business that was operated. For example, the surf schools (non-Greenbox) understood it as carrying out regular beach clean ups, a boat charter company owner understood it as having an awareness of the marine environment,
while B&B providers understood it as providing tourists with an opportunity to experience the landscape but also making them aware of sustaining it. Other respondents who had been Greenbox members, appeared to have a more nuanced understanding of ecotourism; being capable of exploring deeper elements such as the meanings of environmental protection.

Compliance with technical criteria relating to ecotourism labelling

The third type of definition related to technical criteria which were viewed as having cost saving benefits. One caravan park owner, a Greenbox member and EU Flower holder, stated that his definition of ecotourism could be linked to membership of the Greenbox: “I think what happened was we joined the Greenbox really because they were in the area, they were up and running and they were offering things like the EU flower, and plus it didn’t cost us anything... like in the toilet and showers, everything is push button” (BI#4). This provider felt involvement in ecotourism must have a cost saving benefit in order for providers to get involved initially and remain involved. He, however, had developed a high quality ecotourism product through the method of certification, a phenomenon documented in the literature (Haaland and Aas 2010). A B&B owner, who was not a member of the Greenbox, and who did not have as strong an ecotourism remit as their website conveyed, stated:

“Well the main thing I saw from ecotourism was the ratings, your house ratings, your water, your electric usage, all that...they are trying to get the small householders to do all of this to save the environment but they are not looking at the ‘bigger picture’ ... all the waste of water and waste of oil on a huge scale and then they are not doing anything about the big people...and I know people would say well every little bit helps, but unless you tackle the big things there is no point.” (BI #18).

This respondent held a third level qualification in hotel management. Business was quiet for her at the time of the interview and as a result she may have been venting her frustrations towards the agencies and the government whom she felt were responsible. She believed that there was a need for a ‘bigger picture’ approach. What
she discussed here was a concern relating to national policies on waste disposal methods such as incineration and how she felt that the focus should be placed on national policies and large scale businesses (that would have in-house incinerators) and not on individual B&B owners. She felt it was counterproductive requesting small householders to reduce their carbon footprint and improve their environmental practices if government was not going to tackle industries and ensure they improve their practices which were more damaging to the environment.

Many who discussed ecotourism in terms of technical criteria had obtained the EU Flower, with assistance from the Greenbox. The accreditation method is based on calculating water and energy usage of the business. Therefore, the demands of involvement with the label influenced these providers’ understanding of ecotourism. Respondents who used the EU Flower technical criteria as their definition of ecotourism were not completely satisfied with it. There appeared to be a need amongst the providers for recognition of their ecological efforts and a subsequent reliance on technical criteria as a method of illustrating their ecotourism credentials. Using accreditation as a method of defining ecotourism implies that ecotourism is specifically associated with ‘grey’ technical criteria and many of these understandings fail to engage with the green, natural environment and activity element of many ecotourism destinations and products (Buckley 2001). Non Greenbox members, that were interviewed because of their perceived role in ecotourism, did not define ecotourism in line with these technical elements (as they were not certified) and in this regard could be guilty of ‘green’ washing (Medina 2005).

*Outdoor activity based definitions*

The provision of outdoor activities such as cycling, walking and canoeing was also used as a method of defining ecotourism. The response of a hotel owner based in Fermanagh was: “I do get a lot of fishermen myself; I run a coarse fishing competition, it happens there in May and a lot of English fishermen come” (BI#22). Another, a caravan park manager agreed: “Out and about, fishing holidays, cycling holidays...and Ireland has a lot more to offer I think than any other European country” (BI# 27). The reference to activities based locally highlights the resources
available and an understanding among the providers that ecotourism is reliant on
these. Hetzer (1965) discusses the importance of maximum recreational satisfaction
for tourists in ecotourism and therefore those defining ecotourism in this way are
engaging with this element. Some, who provided more holistic definitions,
mentioned outdoor activities as an element, which is discussed in the following
paragraphs.

Holistic definitions
Some respondents who cited sustainable use of the environment as being part of their
role in ecotourism coupled this with other aspects of the phenomenon and as a result
were beginning to formulate a more holistic definition: “We have a lot of people who
go in that lane and would not come out again for the rest of the week, so it is the
rural aspect just as well as the energy saving aspect” (BI # 20). This owner of a self-
catering accommodation property and former Greenbox member and EU Flower
holder, in a county Fermanagh village, believed that ecotourism was more than just
adhering to the technical criteria laid down by the EU Flower. He cited the
importance of providing the tourist with an opportunity to experience the local
landscape by bicycle or on foot, an aspect which he had built into his business by
providing bicycles for use by visitors and also advice on points of local interest that
people could walk or cycle to. He also provided boats for use on the nearby lake.
Customers had to cover the cost of petrol but otherwise the boat was free to use. This
provider illustrates an awareness of the local resource base and how it can contribute
to the ‘green’ aspects of ecotourism. One respondent defined ecotourism as
involving environmental measures, outdoor activities and local food which connects
to other findings, in terms of local resource use in ecotourism being related to the
definition of ecotourism (Bjork 2000; Fennell 2001). The following definition was
the most holistic put forward. “In terms of the environmental measures we have in
place I think like the recycling, but also the outdoors experience and the organic food
which we produce, so it is an all-round experience really, yea” (BI #35). This
respondent owned an Ireland’s Blue Book property (premium quality country house)
in rural county Sligo that had obtained the EU Flower and had been a member of the
Greenbox, features that contribute to explaining his more holistic view.
CHAPTER 5: ECOTOURISM IN THE GREENBOX

Businesses that did not define ecotourism

Seventeen providers reported not having a definition of ecotourism and did not make any attempt to formulate a definition like others did, although some subconsciously had a perception of ecotourism. From the analysis it appears that there were several reasons for this. These were:

- Lack of awareness of the Greenbox;
- No involvement with the Greenbox or ecotourism;
- Did not think their business/area could become part of the Greenbox;
- Negative experience with the Greenbox;
- Not promoting what they deemed to be an ecotourism product.

‘No awareness’ of the Greenbox was reported by businesses along the Sligo coastline in the towns of Strandhill and Rosses Point. Both are prominent tourist destinations. Strandhill is a major surfing destination and Rosses Point has safe bathing waters, blue flag beaches and a championship links golf course. Seven providers were interviewed between the two locations: four surf schools, one boat charter company, one caravan park and one thalassotherapy bath house. Of these only the bath house owner was aware of the Greenbox and had been a member of the project. The manager of the Greenbox had been a customer of the baths before the Greenbox was established so the owner was aware of the project from social conversations which, in part, led to joining the Greenbox. A notable contradiction emerged from the interviews with surf schools in this area. Four of the five surf school owners interviewed mentioned that while they had very strong environmental credentials and considered themselves ‘custodians of the environment’, many of their products are made from petroleum and three of the four stated that they could not promote their business as ecotourism because of this. Two did state that you could purchase eco-friendly surf boards and equipment but these were expensive and difficult to source. The carbon footprint of many surfers who visit Strandhill to surf was considered high (BI# 28). It is possible these dimensions led to their not having been approached to join the Greenbox and consequent lack of awareness of the project.

The boat charter company was promoting ecotourism (on their website) as trips out to visit the local seal sanctuary but had no contact with, or awareness of, the
Greenbox and at interview the owner did not engage with the concept of ecotourism as much as the website did. This suggests that ecotourism was being used as a marketing tool (green washing) and the level of engagement was dependent on the types of tourists who would book a charter.

Other businesses did not define ecotourism because of a negative experience with the Greenbox; this occurred in two cases. One former member gave the reason as being that their standards were too strict, whereas the other mentioned that the Greenbox as a project did not achieve what it set out to do, in that it never fully developed an operational network of businesses. Other businesses thought that they were not eligible to become part of the Greenbox because of their location, as expressed in statements like: “that is a north Leitrim thing” (BI#1). Therefore, this raises questions about the promotion of the project but also about the willingness of people to engage with the project in particular, or with a general ecotourism interest, if they only wished to do so to obtain networking or funding support. Two former members stated specifically that they only became involved in the Greenbox because of the availability of funding support for ecotourism providers.

The evidence of not promoting what the website suggested to be an ecotourism product occurred in four cases. As discussed in the methodology chapter, some businesses were selected using purposive sampling by examining adherence to ecotourism as set out on the business websites. Four of those interviewed, who appeared to have an ecotourism remit from their websites, at interview, were found not to promote ecotourism as strongly as the website led the researcher to believe. As certification is not a legal requirement for promotion of ecotourism certain providers were chosen on these merits of their websites but, as discovered, were using ecotourism as a marketing tool and were not fully engaged in developing and promoting an ecotourism product.

A number of points have emerged from the various definitions of ecotourism provided by the businesses which adds to the discourse surrounding this concept. Even though many did not define ecotourism using a predefined definition, their statements equated to many of the central elements of ecotourism. The definitions given were largely associated with the type of business the interviewee was involved in and highlights previous distinctions drawn between green and grey environmental
criteria, and the importance of the local resource base was recognised. Other respondents discussed ecotourism in a holistic way. The central element of ecotourism to emerge was a commitment to environmental sustainability. Economic sustainability in terms of the availability of funding and obtaining EU Flower certification was viewed as cost saving by some providers. Sociocultural and community sustainability were not included in the definitions of ecotourism provided but did emerge in discussion of networking (Chapter 7).

DIFFICULTIES WITH CERTIFICATION

Certification is central to ecotourism (Font 2004). Involvement with the EU Flower as a form of eco certification was queried during interview. The providers were asked if they were aware of the EU Flower eco label, if they had obtained it and if there were any benefits or disadvantages arising from having it. Certification assumed particular importance for those who held the EU Flower and most had introduced the topic when asked to define ecotourism earlier in the interview. Many mentioned that obtaining the EU Flower accreditation was an onerous and difficult process. Only those who had a well-developed eco product prior to seeking the Flower did not indicate this. Some former Greenbox members had a more positive view of the EU Flower as they had already been working towards various technical criteria required by the Flower. One business manager explained that the owners decided to apply for the Flower because: “99% of things were in place anyway and ... encouraging guests to do this and that and whatever” so there was very little additional work to be done and they then decided to “introduce a bicycle hire service and just more of cleaning products and things like that, brought in more of the eco stuff” (BI #36). One B&B owner who had obtained the EU Flower with the support of the Greenbox mentioned: “we would be very conscious of lighting and water and waste... the fact that the building was new... we didn’t have to do much to acquire the EU Flower (BI #3). Some also mentioned that had the Greenbox not paid for the initial certification they would not have engaged in obtaining it themselves. Consequently, all but one declared that they were not sure if they would apply for the EU Flower accreditation again, when it was due to be renewed, as they did not see any benefit (in terms of tourist numbers). The owner of an activity centre with accommodation who was also supported by the Greenbox mentioned that they had to
upgrade elements like insulation in order to obtain the EU Flower: “...we had to do some stuff for the cottages... increased insulation and of course there was the three areas ... recycling... the use of energy ... and decreasing the water use in the cottages and things like that, that was for the EU Flower” (BI#6). He received support from the Greenbox and Leader to make these upgrades.

A provider, based in Northern Ireland, who was a member of the Greenbox and eligible for funding from them to qualify to obtain the EU Flower certification, discussed other difficulties he had encountered. He discovered, having attended an information and training event in Ireland (because of no convenient session in NI) that the accreditation procedures were different in Northern Ireland. He had a tourism business which was based in a listed building and as a result he encountered some problems relating to the different planning, development and conservation rules and regulations that surround upgrading of listed buildings in Ireland and Northern Ireland: “we were told what to do from a southern Ireland point of view and this was an EU (label), but unfortunately we were told (in Ireland) that if you had a listed building category, you were exempted from the business of insulation, ... this is not true of the UK” (BI #19). This respondent then took issue with the fact that a label that was purporting to be an EU wide programme was interpreted in different ways in different countries:

“you can’t have one country interpreting it one way and another interpreting it another way, but they refused to budge, so I attained an EU Flower for a year, and then on the second year I was asked if I had done any insulation, and I said no, so they took away my EU Flower...” (BI #19).

This response also highlights the issues that are encountered when certification methods only promote one high level of attainment as in the EU Flower. The provider also discussed the Sustainable Tourism Bronze award and that he was at a standard to obtain that certification. Buckley (2002) highlights the importance of certification methods which have various levels of attainment and the Sustainable Tourism award is one such award. With this award businesses can start at the bronze level and then work their way up to a gold level over a period of years.
THE IMAGE OF THE GREENBOX
The image and the role of the Greenbox project were discussed with the respondents. The business representatives were asked “does the Greenbox have an image in your view?” with an add-on prompt to allow them expand on their opinions on the image. The volume of information emerging from this question was lower than some of the previous ecotourism related questions as many were unsure if the Greenbox had an image.

The Greenbox presented a particular image on its web site and through its promotional literature. This related to an area that promoted ecotourism and associated low impact activities and experiences. In discussing an image, I wanted to establish if the Greenbox was understood in a certain way (as an ecotourism project), to have certain characteristics (ecological principles) and if the interviewed businesses were aware if a wider audience knew what this image was. Discovering if such an image existed among non-Greenbox members in particular was important in order to assess the wider reach of the Greenbox and if it was recognised and how it was understood by those who were not certified ecotourism providers. Six themes were conveyed in the responses given. These themes varied from the Greenbox having no image to others believing it had a very strong image.

No image
In total 15 business respondents stated that the Greenbox did not really have an image either locally or nationally by which they meant it had a lack of visibility as an ecotourism destination. Some made comments that: “It doesn’t have a local image, it’s no more than if you went down the street and asked people in the street how many stars the hotel has, they couldn't tell you, they wouldn't have a clue and they wouldn’t care less either...” (BI #2). This provider, a former Greenbox member with the EU Flower felt that the wider community in the local area was not aware of ecological criteria that premises exhibit. He stated that their main concern would relate to whether or not the premises offered good food. Others echoed this sentiment stating that businesses and individuals, who were not members of the Greenbox, did not know what the Greenbox was (BI #5, BI #6, BI #9). This view was expressed by the owner of a small hotel in county Fermanagh, who was aware of but not involved
with the Greenbox, an activity centre owner in county Fermanagh, who was a member and had the EU Flower, and the owner of a small hotel in a Leitrim angling village who had been a member of the Greenbox. Others referred to a national scale believing that people outside the northwest region did not have an understanding of the Greenbox. A Leitrim B&B provider who was not involved in the Greenbox reflects a more widely held opinion: “Em...no, I don’t think it does like, I would say very few people in Dublin, if you asked them, where it is, they wouldn’t have a clue” (BI#17).

Another interviewee who interpreted the image as a particular set of characteristics mentioned that possibly the Greenbox had an image among a small number of tourism businesses, but she did not know what the image was even though she was an active ecotourism provider and former Greenbox member. “I hate saying this but I am not sure could you say that really, maybe among a small few it did (have an image) but I really don’t know, don’t think it did” (BI #36). The reason for involvement with the Greenbox here is questionable. The provider was not sure of the image of the Greenbox but was a member so she may have been motivated by the availability of funding and the overall support being offered by the project to ecotourism providers. All stated that their motivation for getting involved was encouraged by the possibility of gaining funding or the promise of an ecotourism provider network where information could be shared. This connects to earlier statements of organisational representatives who believed that the future of ecotourism in the area was reliant on continued funding to establish an ecotourism network similar to the Greenbox.

Some non-Greenbox respondents did not understand the project, or its image, in great detail. “I don’t think so, we never heard much about it here to be honest, I don’t know” (BI #32). This respondent who had a boat charter business which he marketed as an ecotourism business was located on the Sligo coast. His response raises questions about the geographical reach of the marketing and promotion of the Greenbox.
The Greenbox had an image

The following responses are from interviewees who felt the Greenbox had an image. There were two different viewpoints offered. One related to whether there was recognition of the Greenbox and the second related to what that image was.

Three people thought the Greenbox had a local image among a small group of people; recognisable in the northwest, but which did not have a wider national reach. Those who were members of the project would have considered the Greenbox to have an image: “Yes, but only to those involved, I think, not so much outside the area” (BI#1). A former Greenbox member stated that they knew what the image of the project was “To a very small minority, we knew what it was” and understood the ethos of the project as it was defined and established (BI #4). Another concurred with this view: “Those involved knew kind of what it was about, but it didn’t have a wider image really” (BI #21). The understandings of the image of the Greenbox were similar to the understandings, its role (discussed next) in that many related the image to the promotion of ecotourism, certification and the development of a network.

A Greenbox member who had very strong ecological principle and practices throughout the business, which related to both technical criteria and the promotion of the natural environment and low impact activities, linked the Greenbox image to the image of the Fermanagh Lakelands (the presence of many lakes and associated water based activities such as canoeing and angling) which is widely accepted to be the iconic image of the area. “It has, it is the Lakelands here, and that would be seen as very high quality landscape value” (BI #24). A Greenbox member and EU Flower holder, in the same location, mentioned that the image of the Greenbox was based on the natural landscape and amenity of the area: “How undiscovered and tranquil it is” (BI #25). These perspectives are useful in understanding how the providers developed their understandings of the Greenbox as these statements related directly to criteria which the Greenbox used to market and promote the area and the providers on the website.

Five business representatives said that the Greenbox definitely had an image which related primarily to the promotion of green tourism and the promotion of ecotourism providers. One former member who was involved in the initial development of the Greenbox mentioned that the project had a ‘green’ image which they related to the
promotion of ecotourism in the area (BI #7). This was reiterated by another interviewee who was not a Greenbox member: “To promote greener thinking I suppose” (BI #16). Another who was not a member but who had intended at one point to join the Greenbox initially felt that it had an image (which she did not describe), but that the image was not particularly strong: “Em, I have to say I wouldn’t think it has a very strong image, maybe it really needs to you know really promote itself, a bit more, and then people, B&B owners in the area will know a bit more about it” (BI #12).

It was felt by a former Greenbox member that the image of the Greenbox was fostered by active media coverage of the project:

“I think at the time it was happening there were articles locally in the newspaper you know they did try and promote it at that time. Not everybody, but people within accommodation would have been aware of it and what it was and I think at that time. It was an upcoming force...that would be worth being a part of, I think definitely at the time there was a very strong sense that it was going to do something” (BI #18).

This was also echoed by another Greenbox member, who attributed the strength of the image to its extensive promotion. However this provider mentioned that the active promotion of the project did not result in any benefit for their business: “as a direct benefit I don’t know to be honest does it have one (no tourist has come directly because of the Greenbox)” (BI #22).

No response/no opinion on whether the Greenbox had an image or not

Four respondents, including one Greenbox member and three non-members who were not aware of the project prior to interview, when asked, did not have any opinion on whether or not the Greenbox had an image. On reflection, it appears that the lack of responses from these respondents may have related to a lack of understanding of the question (although they did not ask for an explanation) but also
to having never considered the image of the project before and as a result an unwillingness to answer.

The findings reflect that a small number of providers were of the opinion that the Greenbox had a local image, in that it was understood among the members. Five mentioned that this image of the project could be related to the promotion of green tourism. A large proportion did not feel the project had an image due to a lack of visibility in terms of what the project was doing.

THE ROLE OF THE GREENBOX
Five central themes were mentioned by respondents in response to a question relating to what they considered the role of the Greenbox to be. These were promotion and marketing, funding, networking, education and training, and a more holistic perspective.

*Promotion and marketing*
Eleven providers discussed the role of the Greenbox in this context, with reference to three types of promotion and marketing. Two mentioned that the role was to promote the individual businesses (BI #4, BI #24) with one stating that there was a secondary role of providing capital funding: “The marketing and promotion of an ecotourism product along with the provision of capital funding” (BI #24).

The second more widely held view was that the remit(s) related to the promotion and marketing of the geographical area. In the words of a Leitrim B&B owner who was not a Greenbox member: “Well I suppose it was to promote all the counties: Fermanagh, Sligo, Leitrim, and the others as well” (BI #15). Other respondents supported this view but also stated that a supplementary role was to administer capital funding as in the case of provider promotion and marketing. A former Greenbox member said: “I think its role was to promote the area first and foremost, and then, to promote the facilities and the accommodation, and the facilities within the area, to encourage people to come” (BI #18). The primary function here again is the promotion of the area with the secondary function being the promotion of the businesses.
Raising awareness of the concept of ecotourism was another way in which promotion and marketing was viewed. “To promote and develop ecotourism, that’s what I would have thought anyway (former Greenbox member)” (BI #21). Two non Greenbox members linked the promotion of a more eco-friendly approach with a more eco-friendly place for tourists to visit (BI #16, BI #22). Some other non-members did not use the word eco but used the word green: “to promote the area as green that was it, wasn’t it?” (BI #27). A similar view was expressed by a Greenbox member: “to promote green and eco really” (BI #35). The interchangeable use of the terms ecotourism and green tourism is commonly discussed as a problem with promoting ecotourism as a distinct niche tourism activity that has similarities with but also differs from green tourism (Buckley 2002).

One B&B owner and former Greenbox member was aware of the promotional role of the Greenbox but felt, that due to a dependence on funding, it started to lose focus:

“Primarily I think it was to promote the area, to create an awareness that there was this place that you could go that you could do all these things, then it tried to pull in all the infrastructure that was needed to be able to grow that, and you know that did start happening (and then it stopped) which was sad, because I do think it was going somewhere and it would have (gone somewhere) if it got the funding to do it, I think it went a bit off track....” (BI #18).

Funding provision/administration

Three providers discussed the role of the Greenbox primarily in terms of the provision or administration of funding. This illustrates the links that some providers have made between the image and role of the Greenbox as a source of funding. Some cited funding as the only role. One respondent who discussed funding as a role also discussed marketing and ecotourism awareness: “I was never really sure, was it, funding, administration, marketing, ecotourism promotion...” (BI #6). However, the fact that this respondent stated that they were not actually sure of the role may explain why multiple roles were listed. Another respondent appeared to have more clarity in terms of their perception of the Greenbox role: “the marketing and
promotion of an ecotourism product along with the provision of capital funding” (BI #24) and in essence grasped the multiple roles of the Greenbox.

Networking providers/developing a provider network

The Greenbox staff engaged in networking with ecotourism providers and the project was originally designed to develop links and a network between the providers. Three providers discussed the institution’s role as networking ecotourism businesses (BI #19, BI #23, and BI #25):

“It was a grouping together of eco-friendly tourism providers... and there isn't anything to follow it, there is nothing in its place, so you are on your own, I am trying to do everything plus promote ecotourism and I cannot do it. I need something like Greenbox. Hopefully it will come back or something like it will come back but it will need someone like NITB or FI behind it because individuals cannot do it, and I mean we do an awful lot of press coverage, ourselves, because we have to, and we just cannot concentrate solely on ecotourism” (BI #19).

This provider’s lamenting the loss of the project (as he had to market and promote his ecotourism product singlehandedly) was echoed by others and emerges again in the responses relating to the future of the Greenbox. He was a member of Ireland’s Blue Book network so therefore was already affiliated to a network that promoted eco principles and practices. He was promoting ecotourism because he felt his tourism product ‘fitted’ with what the Greenbox was promoting and how Fermanagh, where he was located, had a growing green and ecological image. This response also alludes to how small a market segment ecotourism attracts and the inability for many providers to rely solely on this form of tourism.

Education and training

One of the assigned roles of ecotourism internationally is to educate providers and tourists about its merits as a form of tourism. The Greenbox had an educational and
training function as part of its actions in promoting ecotourism in northwest Ireland. It is not surprising therefore that these roles were referred to by the providers. One provider, a non Greenbox member who had a broad view relating to promoting sustainability, said: “I think it was to educate people on ... reuse, recycle, all of that” (BI #1). The second respondent, a member of the Greenbox and better aware of its activities, discussed improving the tourism sector and developing ecotourism in the northwest region: “improving the kind of tourist sector in the west or the northwest, and we did one of the first training programmes which resulted in the next phase then being developed in the Greenbox, so...the first point of call then from the... was to develop ecotourism in the area,” (BI #7).

A holistic view
A former Greenbox member who had a very well developed ecological policy, appeared to not have considered the role of the Greenbox previously. He reflected on the implications of the availability of funding and how this may have fostered an interest in joining the project. However, he also mentioned how this is a positive thing because it makes tourism providers consider environmentally sound principles in order to make their businesses more environmentally friendly. This provider, as a result of these combined views, offered an interesting and more holistic view on the role of the Greenbox in terms of environmental protection and education of providers:

“This funding that came and pushing everybody through this environmental system... they are still running their businesses... they are just now running them under environmentally sound principles...to get your label, you have to know the whole thing inside out, and go back to school ...it really does make you know these things inside out... I have to bluff a lot of things in life but I don’t have to bluff that! So I think Greenbox had a role in making tourist providers more environmentally friendly” (BI #33).

These reflections are comparable to the Greenbox objectives in terms of eco labelling and education as presented in Chapter 3 suggesting that membership increased awareness of ecotourism as a niche form of tourism.
THE FUTURE OF ECOTOURISM

Ecotourism is being promoted increasingly in Ireland as a form of tourism that is appropriate for remote rural areas which comply with some of its inherent principles. Although the Greenbox project had formally ended when the interviews took place, it was considered important to obtain the views of the respondents on the future of ecotourism, in the Greenbox area specifically and nationally. A number of central themes emerged from the responses to a question in this context.

The first quote reflects the thoughts of a former Greenbox accommodation owner based a short distance from Sligo city in rural county Sligo. His hostel and B&B accommodation is of an unusual design and used sustainable construction methods and reclaimed building materials. He discussed how, when the Greenbox was first established, there was a belief among the providers that “the whole mother earth were going to arrive on the doorstep” (BI#37). However, he did not have the same view as he stated that he was already involved in ecotourism and felt that the project would not have a significant impact on his tourism numbers. He clarified this by mentioning: “I don’t know if even 10% come here for anything eco … the groups do… I don’t know if there is some nerdy person sitting somewhere in Bolzano (Italy), saying: ‘I will only go to eco places’, I don’t think so, but maybe there are!” (BI#37). He also discussed his belief that he gets a lot of his customers because of the unusual construction of his building, but that the tourists do not realise the ecological measures until they get there:

“They come to Sligo and they go: ‘let’s go to the weird looking one!’
Which… is a sign that they didn’t give a damn, but then there are another bunch about one quarter of the total, that come because they look at the website and Facebook and see all the happy clappy nice things, eco…But it is more the volunteers that come for the nice things and not the tourists but the groups also do” (BI#37).

This respondent was uncertain if ecotourism actually has a future in the area. He stated that it would be hard to predict but because of the fact that his business primarily attracted international school groups, with which he had built up long term
links; he felt that ecotourism would not be particularly important for his business in the future.

Respondents were asked a more specific question about how ecotourism would evolve over the next five years. A number of themes emerged. Six providers, owners of an activity centre, a fishery, two B&B providers, a self-catering business and a boat charter company, said that ecotourism will prosper. All but one, the boat charter company were aware of the Greenbox and four had been members. All but the boat charter business were located in Leitrim and Fermanagh where involvement with the Greenbox was greatest, with the boat charter business being located in Sligo. The following quote represents the broader view: “It should get better... because as the recession is kicking in people will try and recycle more, and reuse because disposable income to buy more is gone. Are people going to be bothered at all? If people had more education about it, so that they could become aware” (BI#11).

Five providers were of the opinion that ecotourism would not progress further than it had already done because of the recession. They comprised of two B&Bs, two small hotels and one outdoor activity centre. All except one of the hotels were members of the Greenbox and had obtained the EU Flower. In the words of the owner of one of the B&Bs and the activity centre: “I do not see it progressing over the next five years because people are just going to try and survive” (BI#3: 55+, F).

Owners/managers of two surf schools, one caravan park, one small hotel, and one self-catering business considered that ecotourism needs to be promoted and marketed further in order to evolve. The caravan park and the self-catering business had been members of the Greenbox and had obtained the EU Flower. Two other providers in county Leitrim (owners of an activity centre and an educational centre), who were former members of the Greenbox, suggested that the development and promotion of new projects may foster a successful future for ecotourism (BI#7, BI#10). One of these providers in particular, reflected on the fact that the future of ecotourism was dependent on lobbying of local politicians by the providers in order to get them to support the development of ecological packages in order to attract tourists into and distribute them in the area. This they supported by saying that there was a considerable availability of accommodation in the area and that the problem related to actually making tourists aware of what was available. This provider also discussed
CHAPTER 5: ECOTOURISM IN THE GREENBOX

a project called the ‘Great Western Way’, a cycle/walk way that extends from Westport to Achill in County Mayo, which cost several million euro to construct and that projects like this, based on the available resources, were the way forward for ecotourism in the northwest. Therefore this provider realised that there are many elements that must be considered in order to develop a successful and sustainable ecotourism region or destination:

“Em, I think the providers will have to probably start realising the value of what they have, and maybe get together more, they need to put pressure on their politicians to lobby more packaged access to the resorts, so that people can come here… there is enough, there is empty hotels, so there is not a problem with accommodation, it’s just a problem with people not knowing where they can go, what they can do, so that has to be addressed, that greenways bike thing cost €10 million, they made €7 million in the first year, so it is a no brainer” (BI#10).

Two providers mentioned the need for a new umbrella group locally, like the Greenbox, which would continue to develop and promote ecotourism. One of these respondents, a Greenbox member, felt that a similar organisation or group was necessary in order to keep the momentum going and promote ecotourism. She linked the future of ecotourism to the presence of the Marble Arch Caves and Geopark in the area:

“I think, with the Geopark, providing more of a link to this area, I would hope that would push the idea that this is still very much a natural area … there are so many different groups and they are there for a while and then next thing they are kind of gone again… you know it would be more kind of consistent if they just kind of kept them there all the time instead of having to bring in new groups and they are being rebranded and all that…. it just makes it very confusing and you know I haven’t heard much about the Greenbox in a couple of years...” (BI#12).
This respondent reflects good awareness of the embeddedness of the Geopark in the natural environment and its attraction of visitors to the area. She also mentioned the proliferation of groups/organisations that is sometimes considered a problem with rural development and tourism. She discussed the need for clarity in this regard and that this could be achieved by having one group/organisation instead of new or rebranded ones that appear to create confusion and duplication of roles. Some other providers stated that they were confused by the multiple organisations present and were unsure which they should contact with various queries.

A country house (Ireland’s Blue Book) respondent who was cited relating to problems with the EU Flower criteria being interpreted in different ways in Ireland and NI also mentioned the need to have a promotional group to assist with promoting ecotourism:

“Our will continue to promote it but we need help to promote this, like an organisation like the Greenbox, so if NITB, FI and perhaps TI, would set up some sort of organisation to promote tourism in Ireland, under some Irish banner of some sort with qualifications, simple, that is the way forward” (BI #19).

What this provider is essentially calling for is an organisation within the island of Ireland which would promote ecotourism in a unified way. If this was to transpire it would change the structure of having one organisation to promote Ireland and another to promote Northern Ireland currently. It could also result in a change to the role of Tourism Ireland which currently promotes the whole island internationally but makes limited reference to ecotourism.

A number of themes were mentioned by individual providers. One non Greenbox provider, a B&B owner in Carrick-on-Shannon, believed ecotourism would have to provide good value before it evolves further (BI#1). A Leitrim hotel owner (former Greenbox member) believed that ecotourism will evolve because people use it to differentiate themselves socially (BI#2), reflecting an understanding of ecotourism as a form of social capital (Shaw and Williams 2004). This owner had used ecotourism
to market his business very successfully on the website and in promotional literature. A county Leitrim B&B owner believed that business people will not stay in ecotourism on a full time basis so this would hinder any further ecotourism development (BI#15). A neighbouring non Greenbox B&B owner believed that there was a need to sell the area (as a destination) and not the standards (associated with certification) (BI#17). Other respondents (a B&B owner in rural Leitrim and a non Greenbox caravan park manager in Sligo) highlighted the need for “incentives (including grant aid) for people to get involved” (BI #27). A thalassotherapy bath owner (former Greenbox member) referred to the need for the support of national tourism organisations to sustain ecotourism and also for them to promote ecotourism in the northwest region in their promotional material (BI#26).

In terms of their business’s role in the future of ecotourism all interviewees stated that they would continue doing what they were doing and hopefully survive the recession. Should they succeed a small number stated that they may then look at expanding their ecotourism products at a later date.

**Threats to the future of ecotourism**

The provider perceptions of threats to ecotourism in the Greenbox were sought. Seven did not feel there were any direct threats. Thirteen themes emerged among the other responses but two were of greatest common concern. Nine respondents cited ‘fracking’ or hydraulic fractioning in order to extract natural gas from geological structures, for which licenses were sought at the time of interview, as the main threat to the natural environment and to the future of ecotourism. They included both former members and non-members of the Greenbox. An activity centre owner based in rural county Fermanagh, and former Greenbox member with the EU Flower, stated: “Fracking is definitely the main threat at the moment... If the lake is polluted you are not going to get people into it and your insurance wouldn’t cover it!” (BI#6). Another activity centre provider, also a former Greenbox member based in Leitrim concurred:

“Well fracking is a big one. You can forget it if that happens... we have an image of a green beautiful place, so that is the first thing that will go, and
then the while house of cards will tumble after that if fracking starts...forget the food industry, forget the agriculture industry, the tourist industry, it is all going to be lorries, quarries, dust, sickness and gas. That’s what will come with fracking. I have seen it in America; I have seen the sites where it has happened. It just poisons the whole place” (BI#10).

The strongest views on fracking were held by providers, as cited above, who ran activities on the lakes. Five others respondents who mentioned fracking had reflected in a similar fashion on its potential impact on the future of ecotourism with one aptly stating that “the lakes are the lifeblood of the area” and if fracking was to commence in the lakes the future of tourism would be highly questionable. A county Leitrim hotel owner had a different view. He stated that fracking would be mentioned by others as a major threat but he did not perceive it as a significant threat. He felt that ecotourism and fracking “were not incompatible” (BI#1), a view that can be linked to this interviewee’s previous employment history in the oil industry in the UAE. The response to the threat of fracking represents an awareness on the part of the providers of the importance of the natural resource base for ecotourism and, in particular, for its ‘green’ outdoor activity elements.

Economic recession and rising costs were cited as the main threat to the future of ecotourism by five business representatives. The aspects of the economy or types of costs being discussed varied. One former Greenbox member and B&B owner in County Cavan cited the rising cost of recycling as a deterrent for people getting involved in ecotourism. “Well I suppose with the rising costs of recycling and things like that. People might look at not recycling because of costs” (BI#11). Family owners of a B&B and an activity centre, who were former Greenbox members, also discussed the higher costs required to get involved in ecotourism associated with energy efficient measures (BI#13, BI#14). A county Leitrim B&B owner (non-member), mentioned the impact of a high cost labelling system run from Europe (EU Flower) as a disincentive to become involved (BI#17). One former Greenbox member, referred to the impacts of the Irish recession and how people will not develop ecotourism businesses due to this. Lack of grants was mentioned by a Sligo
based country house owner (with the EU Flower) as a possible threat but he felt that it was necessary for people to seek aid or do the jobs themselves (BI#33).

Three respondents cited environmental mismanagement and pollution as central threats to ecotourism development. A thalassotherapy bath owner based in a seaside town discussed the potential threat of environmental pollution with regard to oil spills and their impacts on the beach and on the seaweed crop which would directly impact his own business (BI #26). “I suppose the biggest threat would be environmental pollution, God forbid there was an oil spill or anything like that, that would be huge” (BI #26) He also referred to raising general awareness and avoiding littering of beaches with cans and bottles by groups drinking at night: “education through primary schools and to try and get people to buy in and have a love of the environment” (ibid.). Others also discussed the importance of maintaining the environment within which they operate their businesses and the importance of protecting the local resources on which their products were based.

Three of the surfing school owners interviewed discussed threats which related directly to the future of surfing. As discussed earlier none of the surf schools were Greenbox members or held the EU Flower because the equipment used is petroleum based and some were also conscious of the carbon footprint of surfers who travelled to their destinations. Surfing is however, an ecologically friendly activity. Two discussed the threat to business posed by surfers per se (BI#28, B1#31). One of these respondents expanded on this by mentioning that there are two types of surfer, a competitive and a leisure surfer, and sometimes they do not want to surf the water together so that makes it difficult for businesses to manage lesson times and for surfing groups and associations to plan surfing competitions. Another surf school owner in a Sligo seaside town, mentioned coastal erosion as a major concern locally for the future of surfing (BI#30).

Transport and access were mentioned by two respondents. A fishery owner, and Greenbox former member, referred to poor transport access to the area via airports and roads as affecting the attraction of ecotourists (BI# 8). A B&B owner (non-member) in a rural area of county Cavan elaborated on access in terms of poor signage and access to the actual points of interest in the area itself, such as walks and lakes among other aspects: “... a lot of lakes are not accessible...there are no stands
on them, a lot...have rotted away...you know I don’t see any money being put into it” (BI#12). She went on to discuss flagship ecotourism projects such as accommodation and activity providers in the area and how they needed to be promoted in a more long term way. This respondent felt that promotion of attractions is too short term and is constricted by the availability of funding and once the funding is exhausted the promotion dries up. This is the problem that applied to the Greenbox project more generally:

“Cycling could be a really big thing here in Ireland...the Greenway in Mayo (a new cycleway has been developed), that is just a brilliant idea and a very simple idea...and we actually would have had the Kingfisher Cycle (former Greenbox project) along here...once again it is not being pushed, it was there for a couple of years and then it just seems to slide...That’s what I think is a real problem with tourism in Ireland...it is pushed for a while and it gets big and once the funding or something goes then that’s it...” (BI#12).

Certain themes were cited by individual interviewees and applied to tourism more generally as well as ecotourism. One respondent discussed the threat of unknowns, that the industry cannot really plan for and cited the 2001 Foot and Mouth disease outbreak (one case) as illustrative of this when access to land was not permitted (BI#2). All off-road activities were affected. A former Greenbox member and EU Flower holder (B&B owner) located in a rural village on the Cavan-Leitrim border, cited emigration as being a major concern (BI#3). The area where this business was based was characterised by emigration as far back as the 1950s. The implications for tourism, in terms of emigration, include an aging work force but also limited numbers of businesses being developed as working age adults are leaving rural areas. However, some businesses saw a benefit as tourists were now returning to the area to trace ancestors that had left and as a result were staying in the area while they were conducting genealogy searches.

A number of other former Greenbox members (some of whom also held the EU Flower), who would therefore have been particularly conscious of the demands of ecotourism, referred to a range of issues. One mentioned that not maintaining high
standards in ecotourism would be a threat and that maintaining a high standard would increase tourism numbers. An accommodation provider in rural county Sligo mentioned the threat of cheaper hotels in the neighbouring Sligo city and how that would affect his business directly and consequently ecotourism (BI #35).

Business owners who had not been members of the Greenbox were also aware of threats to ecotourism. A Leitrim B&B owner argued that strict labelling of ecotourism acts as a deterrent (BI #17). The boat charter provider he held an interesting perspective which was fostered by his business experience. He believed that a large seal population off the coast of Sligo was a threat to salmon fish stocks and by implication to ecotourism: “Em, this is going to sound weird but... the amount of seals in the water... are just multiplying so fast I think they are destroying the fish stocks locally...I think the seal population should be controlled a little bit more” (BI #32).

Providers – summary
The preceding section has illustrated how the providers in general define ecotourism in the absence of an accepted definition but their understanding can be related to elements of internationally recognised definitions. Ecotourism was discussed in connection with outdoor activities and the natural environment, with a focus on the local resource base. The role of the Greenbox was discussed in terms of marketing and promotion and funding provision with a small number having a more holistic view of the project. Key threats to the future of ecotourism were fracking and the current economic recession.

CONCLUSION
This chapter presented findings relating to the first research question, that is the relationship between ecotourism and the local resource base. The relationship was investigated through analysis of understandings of ecotourism and of the Greenbox project. The results illustrate that in general ecotourism is viewed as an ethos rather than something than should be strictly defined; however, the providers appear to have a deeper understanding of the many elements that are required in accepted
definitions than do the organisations (Bjork 2000; Fennell 2001; Donahue and Needham 2006). Achieving the EU Flower ecolabel impacted on providers defining ecotourism with reference to technical criteria.

The Greenbox promoted the definition adopted from TIES which refers to green criteria such as responsible travel and environmental conservation. This allies to the understandings of many organisational representatives and providers that ecotourism involves environmentally friendly forms of tourism based on available local resources. The EU Flower, adopted as the accreditation method by the Greenbox focused on technical features of buildings. This was used as a way to define ecotourism by some providers but in general these grey features were perceived as being less embedded in the local environment and resource base. Thus, the adoption of a certification method based on technical criteria relating to water use and insulation (as a method that was available and capable of being evaluated by the NSAI in Ireland and DARD in Northern Ireland) did not align closely with broader understandings of ecotourism and seems to have contributed to some of the uncertainty identified around the concept.

The role of the Greenbox was most clearly understood by organisational representatives who were board members and providers who were part of the provider network, illustrating the importance of being involved with the project in order to gain understanding and the influence of the project in creating awareness of ecotourism. The role of local environmental resources was highlighted by both sets of respondents in permitting the development of ecotourism, pointing to the embeddedness in the local environment. Embeddedness in culture and society were not conveyed as being as important and featured weakly in the types of ecotourism present. The EU Flower as a form of certification was criticised due to onerous paperwork and having one level of attainment but its positive features in terms of environmental education were recognised. The future of ecotourism in the region was viewed as being uncertain. From an organisational perspective this was due to the lack of funding but, for providers, the major threats to the future of ecotourism were fracking and the current economic recession.
CHAPTER 6: NETWORKS AND NETWORKING IN PROMOTING ECOTOURISM - THE ORGANISATIONAL EVIDENCE

INTRODUCTION

The research findings relating to networks and networking are discussed separately for the interviewed organisational representatives and the tourism providers, here and in Chapter 7 respectively. This chapter presents the analysis of organisational networks and networking with reference to the organisational role in promoting ecotourism, and in the Greenbox in particular, in the context of their embeddedness locally and their disembeddedness extra locally. The longevity of the networks and the formality and informality of networking are assessed in relation to their impacts on the promotion of ecotourism. The chapter is divided into three main sections. First the involvement of the organisations in ecotourism is reviewed so as to contextualise the material that follows. The Greenbox board network and its networking are discussed as are the other networks and networking, pertinent to ecotourism, in which the member organisations of the board engaged. This discussion is framed around the geographical scale at which the organisations operate from local to international. A similar analysis follows for organisations that were not members of the Greenbox board but had varying levels of involvement with ecotourism (Chapter 4). The findings discussed relate to the second research question: how do appropriately embedded and disembedded networks and networking among organisations operate to promote ecotourism?

Networks in their simplest form are structures made up of nodes or actors that connect for a variety of purposes (Smith-Ring 1999; Lynch and Morrison 2007). Networks have been found to result in information transfer through the process of networking (O’Donnell 2004). These definitions are used to frame the discussion in terms of networks, as structures which exhibit formal attributes as outlined by Saxena (2005), and networking as relating to both formal and informal approaches to communication.
CHAPTER 6: NETWORKS AND NETWORKING IN PROMOTING ECOTOURISM – THE ORGANISATIONAL EVIDENCE

NETWORKS AND NETWORKING
The Greenbox project was administered by a board consisting of a network of a CEO and representatives of local, regional and national organisations which had a role in tourism, and three provider representatives (as presented in Table 4.1). Networking took place between these members to promote and develop an ecotourism destination and set of ecotourism products. The CEO also networked with external organisations to source funding and information and to organise training. The other members of the board were members of other networks and some of the networking that they undertook was pertinent to the promotion of ecotourism in the Greenbox. In the following discussion the structure and activities of the Greenbox board are discussed first. Then the networking undertaken by the various member organisations with other entities external to the board are assessed with reference to the implications for the promotion of ecotourism as a niche activity in the Greenbox and the Greenbox as a destination. The discussion presents evidence relating to networks and networking that were in existence when the Greenbox was operational (2003-2007) and also presents findings relating to networks and networking at the time of interview in 2011 (Table 6.1).

The organisations conducted five main functions in the context of ecotourism: advice, training, funding, product development, promotion and marketing. Some organisations were concerned primarily with lobbying and representation. Advice related to providing information relating to all aspects of establishing an ecotourism business and qualifying for the EU Flower label. Training involved training in attaining ecotourism standards, web site design, promotion and marketing and other aspects of business development. Funding related to direct provision of grant aid to establish or expand a business or support an ecotourism business for the purpose of applying for the EU Flower certification. Product development related to strategic planning surrounding the development of ecotourism products and activities. Promotion and marketing related to the promotion and marketing of individual providers and the Greenbox as a destination. The three provider members of the network represented the interests of their members relating to all functions and networked horizontally and vertically on an individual basis; for reasons of clarity they are not included in the discussion here but are discussed with the other providers in Chapter 7.
### Table 6.1 Organisational Networking

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A=advice; T=training; F=funding; PD=product development; P&M=promotion and marketing; Info = information exchange; cert= certification; L&R = Lobby and representation; P=producers
The Greenbox board

The Greenbox was administered by a board consisting of a CEO of the project, eight organisations and three provider representatives and is illustrative of a cross sector organisation-provider network as described by Saxena (2005) and Ilbery and Saxena (2007). It was a short term network, as discussed in published tourism literature (Gibson et al. 2005), existing for four years from 2003-2007. It was also a ‘top down’ structure established under government influence in response to external funding being available from the EU (Morrison 1994; Dredge 2006b). As discussed in Chapter 4 the organisations represented local authorities, regional and local development bodies, a public private partnership in the tourism sector in Northern Ireland and the national tourism authorities in Ireland and Northern Ireland. The board made decisions relating to staffing and the administration of funding, while also being responsible for choosing an operational definition of ecotourism and the certification method of the EU Flower label. The purpose of the network was sharing information (learning) about ecotourism development and the implementation of a certification method for accommodation providers. Learning in these contexts has been a feature of network studies in tourism (Wray 2009). Communication occurred formally through board meetings, as presented by Saxena (2005) and Costa et al. (2008). However, some informal networking was also occurring based on personal relationships and the value the participants ascribed to ecotourism (Gibson et al. 2005). This predominately locally embedded network, which included two external members, was established in order to develop ecotourism in the location and promote it externally to tourists.

The Greenbox representative

The CEO was the central node in the Greenbox network (Figure 6.1). She exhibited the most active networking across many functions but primarily for the purposes of ecotourism certification, training and funding. This networking was occurring formally in a structured and organised way and informally, in a more ‘open ended’ fashion (Saxena 2005). It was occurring both horizontally, in an embedded way in the Greenbox area, and disembedded vertically outside the area and included contact with organisations and providers. The CEO also engaged formally, with external
representatives of Interreg and the Peace Programme in order to access the €3.2 million funding which was granted to the Greenbox project in the early 2000s. She, with the board, made decisions about the distribution of the funding to providers who had applied for support to qualify for the EU Flower. Communication took place with representatives of the NSAI in Ireland and the DARD in NI in order to certify providers and monitor the EU Flower label. Networking took place formally also with the European Commission for the Environment in Brussels who administer the EU Flower Award in order to obtain information.

Figure 6.1: The Greenbox CEO links

The CEO liaised with Sligo IT locally to develop an ecotourism educational programme that was delivered to both the providers and the organisational representatives. The National Parks and Wildlife Service was liaised with to assist with the development of ecotourism training, by providing advice on elements of parks and wildlife to focus on, for the Greenbox staff and for member providers. This link involved formal discussion but informal social relationships existed also. The representative also reported networking most actively with ecotourism providers to deliver services to them. Some 80 providers were involved at the maximum with
whom group and individual meetings were held by a member of Greenbox staff. The project also provided marketing advice and represented businesses through websites and attendance at events. Community linkages were also cited as being very important, with festival committees and other service providers in the region, as a method of advertising the Greenbox to tourists and tourism providers.

Some of the CEO’s networking related to providing advice to producer groups or tourism providers in pursuit of the Greenbox role in developing and administering a provider ecotourism network which did not emerge to the extent anticipated, as will be discussed in Chapter 7. The CEO liaised with all organisations on the board on an on-going basis at formal meetings for specific ecotourism and Greenbox activities relating to the administration of the project in terms of staffing, defining ecotourism and making decisions relating to the allocation of funding. Even though she had a role in selecting some of the board members she highlighted some problems with a board that only represents one (public sector) interest:

“... So we are recruiting two or three new directors at the moment, private sector directors, with KEY experiences in running businesses, and the biggest deficiency we would have ever had on our board was that... business experience, HR experience, the real hustle bustle of you know, sometimes you have to fire people, sometimes you actually have to make decisions, that will or will not be popular with their own communities, and stuff like that, it’s not unique in that ... but agencies usually take an awful lot of time to make decisions, whereas business people will make a business decision very fast.” (OI # 1).

This view echoes Dredge (2004) who highlights the importance of the relevant partners being involved in the network. The respondent stated that her previous experience helped gain trust with other organisations. “I had 10-15 years’ experience behind me, where they actually found it hard to ignore me… and [they] knew I would only do something good for tourism and I wasn’t coming with some green, whacky, Ned of the hills kind of project” (OI # 1). The Greenbox representative
stated that they were keen to link with other organisations but did not have the time. The Northern Ireland Environmental Agency is an organisation which they mentioned in this context.

The representative also sat on the board of local organisations that had links to ecotourism, Leitrim Energy, Leitrim Enterprise board, Sligo IT, Harvest Feast Festival and the Model Arts Centre (an art gallery in Sligo), and was involved formally in these instances (Saxena 2005). She delivered services on these boards by advising on ecotourism as defined and discussing ecotourism certification. The CEO therefore, exhibited extensive networking for the purpose of promoting ecotourism. Her embedded local networking was important for developing the board network and liaising with the board member organisations, and for developing tourism businesses, and offering training and support in this regard so as to increase the number of products in order to have a larger critical mass to promote. Extra local networking with funding agencies was vital as the project was funding dependent and the funding also allowed the EU Flower to be attained by providers which led to media coverage allowing ecotourism to be promoted further. The CEO’s extensive network membership and networking both horizontally and vertically undoubtedly contributed to the success of the Greenbox and the promotion of ecotourism during a short time period (Saxena 2005).

The Greenbox board member networks and networking
The Greenbox project included a network with members from organisations considered pertinent to the promotion of ecotourism in the designated area. The network and the implications of its networking for ecotourism are discussed from national to local levels.

National Organisations: The national tourism authorities in Ireland (FI) and Northern Ireland (NITB) were members of the Greenbox board when it was established. Neither of the interviewees sat on the board, and their predecessors were not available for interview; hence the former were interviewed. Both National Tourism Authorities had a statutory remit to develop tourism in their respective
jurisdictions but they did not have the same responsibility for ecotourism; therefore, their networks and networking for ecotourism were more limited than those for tourism. Both had sustainable tourism as part of their responsibility and ecotourism forms part of this. The Greenbox may have had a role to play in this development and in fostering learning about ecotourism and its applicability in an Irish context. Apart from being a member of the Greenbox board the FI representative also liaised with ecotourism providers through organising specialist ecotourism training programmes regarding business development, offering advice on business establishment or expansion, and promotion, marketing and representation at a national level. The NITB in Northern Ireland reported links with eight other entities; however, only one other than the Greenbox was relevant to ecotourism. Extra local networking took place with the Sustainable Tourism Officers of Great Britain and Ireland to develop a sustainable tourism label. This is a formal group that meets twice yearly in order to develop a bundle of ecotourism, green tourism and sustainable tourism packages across each jurisdiction (Michael 2007; Ilbery and Saxena 2009). The NITB representative also referred to discussion of certification through the Greenbox network as having strengthened their links with their counterpart in Ireland:

“Well it may have sort have strengthened links with the likes of Fáilte Ireland for example, there might have been greater joint working. And something like validation, like labels coming out of the Greenbox were relevant then to us, and to Fáilte Ireland.” (OI#3)

Therefore, network membership had an impact on relationships between organisations in this context and, consequently, on ecotourism promotion. This may be related to the work of Lovelock (2001) who posits that inter organisational networks can further develop organisation-organisation relationships and in this regard facilitated a conversation about ecotourism and networking for the purpose of developing it further. The NITB also liaised with ecotourism businesses in providing funding, training and advice for establishment or expansion and promoted, marketed and represented their members at marketing events or trade shows.
Regional Organisations: As discussed already one regional organisation, the WDC, was a member of the Greenbox board, and was involved in developing the initial proposal for the project. The WDC published the *Blueprint for Tourism* in 2000 and networked extensively with a range of stakeholders relating to tourism and ecotourism during the years 2003-2007 and promoted tourism and ecotourism in the region through a formal vertical connection with the national tourism authority: “definitely FI, we would look for them, if we had an idea, and input, we would look to them to do that and then act accordingly” (OI #7). The WDC was less active in networking pertinent to tourism than some of its counterparts at the time of interview. Due to the lack of availability of funding tourism and ecotourism had become a “watching brief” (OI #7).

Local Organisations: There were four local organisations represented on the board of the Greenbox from two local authorities, the Rural Development Programme, 2007-2013 (Leader), and a local PPP in county Fermanagh. The local authorities, one in Ireland and one in Northern Ireland, will be discussed first. In his role as tourism officer in a local authority in Northern Ireland (FDC), a representative had a wide range of organisational links, 16 in total, some of which were more relevant than others to tourism and ecotourism. He engaged in networking both formally and informally at local horizontal and extra-local vertical geographical scales. FDC held regular and structured meetings and appeared to have a role in increasing interest in ecotourism in the Greenbox (Costa *et al.* 2008):

“The idea is to get as wide a representation as possible from tourism interests, so it is council and also private sector people, and it would be private sector operators but you would also have…em… people from National Trust who are private sector ok, but they are, not quite out of the same commercial sort of view as say the owner of a hotel. Then we would have tourist board representatives as well” (OI #5).

The representative sat on the board of the PPP, FL, with which regular meetings took place and strong interpersonal ties existed, phenomena which Hess (2009) suggests are interrelated. FL plays a central role in the overall promotion and marketing of
County Fermanagh. As part of this collaboration *Discover Fermanagh*, a document that focuses on the development and promotion of outdoor tourism packages and attractions was devised. FDC conducted a significant proportion of networking through partnerships with FL and Waterways Ireland (WI) in order to promote the area and develop tourism products including ecotourism type activities such as canoeing and angling.

This collective action is comparable to diagonal networking in the literature (Michael 2007). Even though this networking appears to have had a positive impact on activity on the part of the organisation, the respondent did state that there were issues with such an approach relating to the attendance at meetings being impacted negatively because they were so frequent:

“It’s possibly too frequent, because they tend to sort of catch up on each other. Generally there is a monthly steering group, and then the sub groups report, so monthly sub group meetings reporting to monthly steering group meetings and then also a couple of times a year we also have a much wider group, that has loads of people on it, and it’s called an implementation group, and the idea is to try and bring as many people on board as possible, but we’re working on... some kind of... cross-departmental, or a group that involved representatives from all the public bodies, not just the tourist board, but other government departments here, and for instance, the Northern Ireland Environmental Agency. There is a kind of a departmental group as well, that meet a couple of times a year, we bring them in and talk to them about their activities, for example road service, they are not interested in tourism but they are responsible for tourism signage, em.. Water service or any other but it would generally be, or the planners for instance, planning is a whole other issue. ....” (OI #5).

The FDC representative also engaged in vertical disembodied networking with Interreg, as a member of the steering group, which was described as being “vital for the county” because it allowed for access to funding, as reported by Saxena (2005),
which permitted the coordination of maintenance of the waterways and the development of joint products (OI #5).

Other formal national extra-local links existed with ICBAN and TI for promotion and marketing and the overall representation of the county. Many of these international and national links were based on monthly sub group formal meetings. However the respondent reported that the success of these relationships was primarily based on the informal and friendship ties with the corresponding tourism officers in these organisations (Granovetter 1973, 1985; Hess 2004). Regional and local level links more generally were stated as being informal and took the form of services delivered by the local authority to other organisations or tourism providers (Griffin 1999; Saxena 2005; Timor and Getz 2008).

Tourism providers were networked with on a more casual and informal basis, following Saxena’s (2005) definition. FDC grant aided tourism and ecotourism businesses, for expansion and establishment purposes, provided training to providers and offered advice when approached on various matters including establishment and funding, and provided promotion and representational supports at events and on a website. The organisation also part funded some ecotourism training courses offered through the Greenbox to ecotourism providers. The representative felt that the organisation’s involvement with the Greenbox led them to have closer relationships with FINW. “Being involved with the Greenbox I suppose helped us to develop our relationships with our neighbouring councils and the tourism authorities” (OI #5).

Lovelock (2001) has highlighted how networks can foster greater organisation-organisation collaboration which this example is illustrative of. This respondent also stated “we certainly have relationships with other organisations at a more informal level” (OI #5). This informal networking occurs because the representative had been in contact with his counterparts in other organisations for some time and personal relationships had developed. In these instances there appears to be a correlation between active networking and interest in ecotourism development and promotion.

The other local authority on the Greenbox board was located in Ireland. The interviewee in this case did not sit on the board and a council director, who has since retired, had fulfilled this role in the past. This local authority exhibited limited links and those evident were related to the organisation’s role in promoting ecotourism.
businesses in the council’s jurisdiction. They assisted providers by providing advice on establishing or expanding businesses and also provided promotion and marketing support on their websites. The interviewee was in post ten years but did not seem to have developed personal ties with other tourism officers on the Greenbox board. The director’s networking in the case of this local authority appeared to have been stronger in the past than the tourism officer’s links which appeared to be fulfilling more of an administrative role. She had connections with the Greenbox and member providers and also had links with WI in relation to water based activities which could be considered ecotourism. She was starting to build connections with national tour operators in order to increase the tourism numbers visiting the county and considered that ecotourism may form part of the focus.

The literature has alluded to the importance of personal attributes and how they can impact positively or negatively on networking (Pavlovich 2001; Saxena 2005). The preceding two local authority examples illustrate both ends of a spectrum. One representative was long established in post and had strong personal contacts and an interest in ecotourism and tourism more generally that appear to have fostered active networking and the other representative did not report any personal ties and engaged in limited networking corresponding with research from previous studies (Pavlovich 2001). Limited networking appears to have contributed to limited ecotourism involvement.

There was one PPP on the Greenbox board which was located in county Fermanagh and had few links with organisations but networked extensively with providers for the purpose of ecotourism development across all sectors. The links with organisations were formal board level engagements, as in the case of FDC and WI, and were for joint product development in a diagonal way (Michael 2007). As mentioned above a strategy document, Destination Fermanagh, was discussed which promoted low carbon water based attractions and some Greenbox members. In principle these links were formal but the interviewee had been in her post over ten years and had developed significant social relationships with individuals in the other organisations with which she networked.

Like the local authority in Northern Ireland, the PPP appeared to hold regular meetings: “you know, you could be having a meeting once a month, once every two
months, our own board meetings are monthly, em... Lakelands and Inland Waterways, could be every two to three months, it just depends...” (OI#6). This frequency of meetings was absent in the Irish local authority and appears to be a feature of Northern Ireland structures only. Face to face meetings of this kind have been cited as being very important for the diffusion of information through networks and in this instance appear to have had a role in ecotourism development (Costa et al. 2008). The respondent communicated extensively with members of the local tourism trade, who paid a fee for promotion and marketing. Structurally, this was formal networking but through working in tourism in the area for a number of years the respondent also knew many of the providers informally. She said also that FL was working on improving their connections with tour operators, journalists and tourism providers in order to promote and market the area more fully. The Greenbox had not created any new organisational links for them but was said to have put them in touch with members of organisations they may not have known previously.

A Leader company in Northern Ireland was a member of the original Greenbox board. The Leader structure was reorganised in NI as part of administrative reform of the organisation of local structures such as local authorities and town councils and areas of administration, and the SWARD organisation administered the programme at the time of interview. The representative sat on a Joint Council Committee with the four local authorities in the Greenbox which assisted with the delivery of the Leader programme through regular meetings with community representatives. This structure was formal but there was a considerable amount of informal contact based on established working relationships. As SWARD is responsible for administering the Rural Development (Leader) Programme its networking related primarily to the provision of funding to tourism providers, including ecotourism providers. The representative was mainly networking for the purpose of supporting providers through grant aid and advice for establishment and expansion of businesses and offered some training support also for those venturing into tourism, who included Greenbox members.
Summary

The preceding discussion illustrates that both formal networking between the Greenbox board members through meetings and informal links with external entities were in existence. Much of this networking was at a locally embedded horizontal level within the Greenbox but appropriately disembedded links to the national tourism authorities and external funding bodies took place vertically. The Greenbox CEO had the most extensive web of links because of liaising reciprocally with all other partners in the network relating to staffing and procedures, supporting providers and networking vertically externally in the context of sourcing funding, organising certification and promotion. Her activity is illustrative of the importance of networks and networking in ecotourism development and promotion. Two organisations in NI, a local authority and a PPP, provide examples of extensive locally embedded relationships with other organisations and providers in the context of promoting tourism, supported by regular meetings (Costa et al. 2008). Networking was formally structured but frequent informal contacts were reported also based on personal knowledge of other actors arising from longevity in post, a factor that has been identified by Saxena (2005) as influencing the potential for networking. Most organisations had contacts with ecotourism providers, often as part of a wider remit for tourism. When the Greenbox was operational, all organisations networked with other organisations external to the Greenbox, both horizontally and vertically, at national and international levels, for the purpose of promoting ecotourism to external markets. This activity decreased after 2007.

Organisations that were networking less actively at the time of interview included a regional statutory body in Ireland which, because of the lack of availability of funding, was no longer actively involved in tourism or ecotourism. A county council in Ireland also had few links although it did promote ecotourism businesses in the Greenbox area. The interviewee had not sat on the board of the Greenbox and, although in post for ten years, had not developed personal ties with other tourism officers on the board and was not active in promoting ecotourism. The Leader interviewee was networking for the purpose of funding ecotourism providers. Both National Tourism Authorities have a statutory remit to develop tourism in their respective jurisdictions but they did not have specific remits for ecotourism. Most of their links were formal board memberships and some related to sustainable tourism.
rather than ecotourism per se. The remit of the organisation was pertinent to the networking to promote ecotourism but so also was the interest and experience of the tourism officer or other executive.

NON BOARD ORGANISATIONS
This section presents the networks and networking discussed by the 13 organisations that were not members of the Greenbox board. The type (formal or informal) and trajectory (horizontal or vertical) of the networks and networking were analysed. The international organisations will be presented first, followed by discussion of the national, regional and local organisations. Similar to their board member counterparts, non board organisations exhibited both active and less active networking relating to ecotourism. They were generally more active in terms of informal networking both vertically and horizontally and some had direct links with providers of ecotourism products.

Two international organisations were involved. One was a cross-border network (ICBAN) which covered six counties, three in Ireland and three in Northern Ireland. The cross border network consists of two representatives from ten different local authorities which met regularly to promote the successful development of the area. Six of the local authorities fall in the Greenbox: Fermanagh, Cavan, Donegal, Leitrim, Monaghan and Sligo. A formal vertical link with Interreg was cited as being “vital”, as obtaining funding on behalf of its membership organisations is the cross border network’s “sole purpose”. The funding was distributed to member councils for projects to develop the area including tourism and ecotourism projects. Formal links with the national tourism development authorities, in Ireland (FI) and Northern Ireland (NITB), related to the promotion of tourism in general in the six border counties. There was no specific ecotourism focus. The interviewee stated that actual contact with these organisations was relatively informal, taking place over the phone with staff members whom he knew. He was also actively networking with the member local authorities in a reciprocal way based on personal knowledge.

TI does not have a specific remit for ecotourism. Ecotourism businesses may, however, benefit from its wider role in overseas selling of the island of Ireland as a destination.
Three national level tourism organisational representatives were interviewed in order to ascertain the level of promotion and marketing of ecotourism nationally by non-Greenbox board members. The representative of the national agriculture and food development authority had four tourism related connections (and many more relating to farm diversification). As a national level she liaised with FI on behalf of farm families who wished to diversify into tourism. Informal contact with FI occurred at least once a month, made possible by her 20 years’ experience and social connections with representatives of FI. Her interest was in farm tourism rather than ecotourism as a specific segment. The representative of a national private tourism trade membership group explained that ecotourism was not a concern of their members, who are large scale tourism businesses. However its inclusion was not ruled out in the future. The representative of the organisation responsible for the conservation, management and development of fish stocks and habitats on the River Shannon, its tributaries and lakes, networked with seven organisations and five providers relating to what could be broadly considered forms of ecotourism. Links with LCC were important for developing and maintaining fishery stocks on the Shannon system through liaising with them to discuss plans that may impact on fish stocks or access to waterways. Angling is actively promoted in the Greenbox area as an ecotourism activity; therefore this link was central to ecotourism as promoted. The link was reciprocal for product development as both worked towards developing water based attractions. FI and WI were cited as being most important for the promotion and marketing of the tourism element of the fisheries product. Also important in this regard were the Heritage Council and local authorities in the Greenbox area in order to coordinate the management and protection of riparian zones. At a local level, fishing festival committees were networked with extensively. The representative of IFI also mentioned five accommodation providers as being instrumental in attracting anglers and maintaining return visits through a quality service. All of this networking was cited as being informal, due to the fact that the respondent was from the locality, had been with the organisations for over 20 years and had a deep-set interest in maintaining the angling product.

One regional tourism authority was included in the sample (NWTA). A second was contacted but declined to participate. The interviewee represented tourism on various
boards and networked less formally with seven provider groups. Ecotourism formed a component when relevant to particular providers:

“Where we would have had representation locally, would be on things like the Leader Programmes, so there would be four Leader programmes in Donegal and either myself or my colleague would represent Fáilte Ireland on those. We also convene and chair a number of regional groups such as the Tourism Sector Forum” (OI #15).

Many of these interactions were described as casual (informal) due to friendship ties which had developed. The interviewee was employed by the organisation for over 20 years and her personal interest in tourism meant she wished to actively network with others (Pavlovich 2001). The major focus in the networks was identifying the challenges that exist in the local tourism product through face-to-face meetings with tourism providers taking place twice annually (Costa et al. 2008). This structure was then further supported by regular formal meetings with FI, the parent organisation. The issues identified by the providers are fed back for consideration to the national organisation in the hope that they will be incorporated into future measures and policy. TINW was involved in advising providers (including ecotourism providers) on establishment or expansion of tourism businesses along with promoting, marketing and representing tourism businesses.

Local authority tourism officers and representatives of the Rural Development (Leader) Programme 2007-2013 were also interviewed. The local authority tourism officer connections will be presented first. CCC networked at international, national, regional and local levels with eight other organisations in total and held formal quarterly meetings with the local tourism trade, including hotels, B&Bs and other providers in the context of non-invasive tourism activities. Cavan tourism did not have contact with the Greenbox. When queried about this the representative stated: “there was always a feeling, now, right or wrong, that we were sort of on the edge of it a little, I don’t ever think there was a sense of ownership in Cavan with regard to the Greenbox, ever” (OI # 11). However, the CCC officer had responsibility for products that she understood to be ecotourism such as angling and other water based non-invasive activities. It was considered important to include CCC in the
organisational interviews because the presence of these products was known. The ‘Kingfisher (cycle) Trail’ had also been developed in counties Cavan, Fermanagh and Leitrim in the 1990s. In the circumstances of the natural resource base and existing products the limited involvement with the Greenbox was surprising. However, it appears to be due in part to the established status of these products whilst the Greenbox project was designed more to promote less developed tourism areas.

The different types of providers, who included ecotourism providers, were met separately in recognition of their differing needs:

“...I meet the hotel trade once every three to four months. In the old days when FI had the old regional authorities, there used to be a tourism group here, it used to be a disaster, and it was a disaster in every county I think because you had the local B&B lady sitting alongside the general manager of the large hotel so everyone was trying to give their penny worth, with completely different objectives, completely different ways of viewing the world, operating at a completely different scale, it was relatively pointless really, so we broke it up here, where we had, the senior trade, you are talking about multi million euro investments, people who make that kind of investment and then, also meet the B&B ladies separately, let them air any grievances they have as well” (OI #11).

International links with Interreg and with the EU for the Rural Development Programme (Leader) 2007-2013 were very important for CCC, especially for funding calls but were project dependent. Networking with FI and ICBAN took place quarterly and were significant in terms of promotion and marketing (FI) and sourcing funding to achieve balanced development in the region (ICBAN). Promotion and marketing was related to the role of the tourism officer in a local authority. She advised tourism providers on establishment and expansion of tourism businesses and arranged for training, promotion, marketing and representation of member businesses. Ecotourism businesses were included.
SCC had developed a focus on promoting the county as the Yeats County (the home of the poet WB Yeats) with a focus on natural resource based activities such as hill walking. There was also significant investment taking place in the development of a 24 hour city at the time of interview and therefore, ecotourism was not a central focus. SCC provided training and advice for those wishing to develop or expand tourism businesses and promoted local tourism businesses. As in the case of CCC, Interreg was liaised with for funding purposes and FI for funding and overall collaboration in order to develop the tourism product. Ecotourism was not ruled out in these instances, but the representative had limited information on whether any of the applicants were ecotourism providers. SCC provided mainly non-financial assistance to tourism festivals such as Gael Force (an outdoor low carbon endurance run) including lands for car parks and stewarding for activities. Like many local authorities the direct provision of financial assistance is not part of the role or remit.

The Rural Development (RDP) (Leader) 2007-2013 Companies were one of the main sources of local funding for ecotourism businesses. The overall aims of the RDP included improving the environment and countryside while also improving the quality of life in the areas served. Tourism was one of the measures administered and funded through this. Ecotourism applications were evaluated against the required criteria. In order to fulfill these aims the Leader boards all consist of at least 15 members from multiple sectors including: “local government, statutory sector, community and voluntary sector and national social partners” (OI #20) which involves embedded horizontal networking in the geographical areas of responsibility. DL reported networking with FI, the Greenbox, Interreg and ICBAN and supported providers through the provision of grant aid for either the establishment or expansion of businesses and also assisted with some business development training. Two of the Greenbox flagship projects are located in the area and obtained a proportion of funding from DL. Also the positive attitude of the interviewee towards ecotourism appeared to have an impact. Like DL, CML and LL grant aided tourism and ecotourism businesses for either establishment or expansion and also assisted with some business development training.
Limits to network and networking activity

Two organisations discussed links that had a peripheral pertinence to ecotourism but in general believed that the future of ecotourism was questionable, could not see a market for the product and as a result were not actively involved in its promotion. Other reasons cited for non-involvement related to the role or remit of the organisation and the decreasing access to funding due to the Irish and worldwide recessions. Reservations, about demand for ecotourism, were expressed as follows:

“When we are going to talk about the Greenbox I will always start, my end of the discussion will always be 'show me the money'. I have nothing wrong with the concept, I think it is good, it is something we should be getting into… I will not call it scepticism, my reservedness 'show me the money'… we know that traditional tourism makes money… now we are moving into something else and the economics of that I don't think have been proven so I will always start by asking 'show me where the money is, we can have any kind of a model or concept, concepts can be built in seconds, it takes a bit more time to put them on the ground, but it takes a longer time to prove they make …as far as I can see it is not making money” (OI # 14).

The lack of evidence of economic benefit in this instance was a reason for limited involvement in ecotourism and a consequent lack of networking to develop the ecotourism products. However, the organisation still funded ecotourism providers when eligible.

Greenbox impact on links

Many of those interviewed who were not members of the Greenbox board reported that the Greenbox did not create any new linkages or networking opportunities for them. Only two mentioned that it brought them closer to other organisations but that all their links existed prior to the establishment of the Greenbox. The representative of the regional statutory body on the board of the Greenbox said:
“Ah not really, it would be… I don’t think it would be a correct indication to say that they pulled us in to loads of people, I think quite the reverse, we were expected to network them! That was a unique dynamic of this, like I have worked with quite a few boards and organisations that are allied to us and there is a good pro quo, now this was one where I think it was mostly one way….” (OI #7).

However many also stated that the Greenbox did have a positive impact on their existing networking and also made them more aware of the concept of ecotourism. They would not have become involved in promoting ecotourism had it not been for the establishment of the Greenbox which therefore highlights its importance as a network for ecotourism development and promotion in the region (Anderson 2009).

**Difficulties in collaborating**

Two respondents mentioned issues that created difficulties with collaboration. The Greenbox representative was critical of some organisations in terms of wishing to protect roles that they felt were being usurped from them, something she felt was hindering the development of projects in the area:

“... they often will be very precious that you are interfering with their areas... So say you were running x training course the Enterprise board would say ‘well I run that’, ‘and I run this’… whatever. But they usually weren’t bespoke enough to suit our clients. Just cross conflict, there were so many other things going on, I had people at my table that were involved in two to three other different programmes and you just saw no smartness about running things together or cooperating at local level, it was just about the logos and logos. And the most difficult and least cooperative agencies were usually run by men, like we had three Leader women in our area – no issue, it happened (collaboration) it was not a big deal. It was definitely a gender thing. (With women) never as much territorial or power stuff …”(OI# 1).
CHAPTER 6: NETWORKS AND NETWORKING IN PROMOTING ECOTOURISM – THE ORGANISATIONAL EVIDENCE

Another non board, national level organisation concurred:

“Well there are in that there is this kind of feeling of… em… that’s our remit don’t touch it. And that’s just not me, that is everybody that is the other agencies. What I would find is that when you sit around the table with other agencies, some agencies will look at it as I am here to contribute but others will look at it as I am here to control. And where you have an agency sitting down and saying this is my territory, I am in control of this it is very hard to move forward. Not so much as conflict, more as control. It would not come in the shape of conflict…. they are frustrated” (OI #12).

Limited attendance at meetings and under representation of sectoral interests was cited as being a barrier to networking. A national membership organisation representative stated: I “yea … You can bring people together but if they haven’t got this multi sectoral approach they are sitting there (without communicating). It is that there is not this multi sectoral thinking…it is seriously lacking…” (OI # 17). One former board member and local authority tourism officer who was very actively networking discussed how people get fatigue when attending so many meetings. This evidence provides a differing perspective from previous findings that corroborate Costa et al. (2008) in terms of the benefits of face to face meetings:

“It can be yea, and that’s because people are busy the same people… You know as well people can get meeting fatigue, and we are looking at the structure of our Destination Fermanagh meetings to make sure we are not kind of over loading people, and the private sector people in particular, if they are not at their work, like the other day, an activity provider, he was all set to come to a meeting but he phoned me up and said no sorry he could not come because there is a photographer from a local paper coming to take a picture of my new cycle track and I have to be there, he did not have someone else to either send to the meeting or be there for the photographer, but people are generally quite good” (OI # 5).
Summary
Non board organisations were found to have supported ecotourism providers with funding in the case of Leader companies and non-financial resources in the case of local authorities. Some organisations would offer support when approached by the providers. There was variation between organisations in terms of their membership of networks and networking activity; with some exhibiting many more links than others. Embedded local horizontal and disembedded vertical networking was being conducted by most organisations in the context of tourism of which ecotourism was a part (Cawley et al. 2007; Saxena et al. 2007). Variation was evident in the levels and purposes of networking which could be attributed, in many cases, to the role and remit of the organisations, the personal ties of the executives for tourism and the frequency of organisational meetings. Organisations that held regular (monthly) meetings had the greatest levels of both formal and informal networking with others and when involved in ecotourism their involvement was more active. Personal ties were found to be important to the process of networking among many of the interviewees. Leader companies provided financial support to ecotourism businesses as part of their more general remit. Tourism promotional and marketing organisations also assisted ecotourism businesses as part of a broader mission. Local authorities in Ireland supported ecotourism in nonfinancial ways through promotion, training and advice similar to their NI counterparts however; NI local authorities also supported tourism and ecotourism financially.

Conclusions
The Greenbox was established as a top down funded project to promote ecotourism products and a destination. The board of the project consisted of a CEO and eight other organisational members from local to national scales. The Greenbox did not play a central role in creating links for other organisations in terms of networking to promote ecotourism; however, it does appear that the creation of the Greenbox as a network, an area and a set of products created awareness of ecotourism among many organisations.

Only three organisational representatives stated that the Greenbox had helped create new links or develop existing networking further, all of which were members of the
original Greenbox board. However, many others reported that the Greenbox had a positive impact in terms of increasing awareness of ecotourism in the area and more generally and also providing the necessary information for dealing with ecotourism projects and developments. As a result, ecotourism was discussed with other organisations they may already have been networking with. Only two interviewees at the time of interview stated that their organisation did not have a role in promoting ecotourism. They felt that the Greenbox project was successful in promoting general awareness of ecotourism but that the lack of funding after the end of 2007 meant that formal networking ceased among the members of the board and funding of provider support was no longer possible.

Some variation was apparent in terms of the levels and purpose of networking occurring. This variation was found to relate primarily to the role and remit of the organisations and also to the level of personal ties exhibited by the executives for tourism (Granovetter 1973, 1985). Personal ties emerged as being very important in both creating and sustaining embedded horizontal networking activity; some board members stated that the relationships that they had developed with other tourism officers over the years were instrumental in the success of their organisation’s ecotourism networking. The personal interest of the officers in ecotourism emerged as contributing to the promotion of ecotourism in two organisations.

Also having an impact on networking was the frequency of meetings. Organisations that held regular (monthly) formal meetings reported greater levels of informal networking, following Costa et al. (2008). Those that met less frequently also reported less active informal networking. Vertical and horizontal networking from the local to international levels was engaged in by all organisations and they were therefore active in terms of the ‘third way’ (Murdoch 2000). Many of the organisations illustrated a mix of strong (within the network) and weak (beyond the network) ties (Pavlovich 2001). There was extensive evidence of networking with providers locally but also networking was occurring externally for funding, promotion and marketing. Cross sector networks between organisations and providers and with other organisations were identified and inter organisational relationships in the form of friendships were found to foster more active networking (Lovelock 2001). The frequency of contact varied but these personal relationships
tended to increase the frequency of informal contacts (Griffin 1999). Costa et al. (2008) posit that more active networking occurs when face-to-face contact occurs and this was found in the organisations that exhibited regular meeting structures.
CHAPTER 7: NETWORKS AND NETWORKING IN PROMOTING ECOTOURISM - THE PROVIDER EVIDENCE

INTRODUCTION
This chapter discusses the networks and networking identified among providers, their local embeddedness (how enmeshed the networks and networking are in the locality) and extra local disembeddedness (how networks are formed and networking occurs between different spatial scales). As with the organisations, the formality (organisation) or informality (more fluidity) associated with the structures and actions are explored, as is their longevity. In doing this the chapter engages with the third research question: How do appropriately embedded and disembedded networks and networking among providers operate to promote ecotourism?

The Greenbox provider network is discussed first and includes the reported networking with the staff of the Greenbox and with other ecotourism providers. Second, membership of other tourism networks and associated networking are discussed. Finally, networking with the wider community and links with local festivals and events are examined. As in Chapter 6 networks are understood as structures composed of nodes or actors that connect for a variety of purposes (Smith-Ring 1999; Lynch and Morrison 2007) and the term networking is used to describe the information transfer that takes place through the network or indeed independently of any actual constituted network (O’Donnell 2004).

A total of 37 providers were interviewed, 23 of whom were members of the Greenbox and 14 of whom were not. Of the 23, 14 were EU flower holders. The 14 providers who were not members of the project were selected because the type of tourism being promoted on their websites bore similarities with ecotourism.
PROVIDER ROLE IN DEVELOPING AND PROMOTING ECOTOURISM

The owners and managers were asked whether they had a role in promoting ecotourism. Five common types of actions relating to ecotourism emerged: preserving and protecting the environment, providing ecotourism activities, using local resources, complying with technical criteria and, finally, more holistic remits in promoting ecotourism.

‘Preserving and protecting’ the environment

Many respondents equated the role of their business in ecotourism to preserving and protecting the environment, highlighting the role of the local resource base (Chapter 5). Ten providers stated this phrase exactly whereas others made statements that were broadly similar. An owner of a fishing and accommodation business in Leitrim and former Greenbox member expressed a more broadly held view:

“We are in the Greenbox area, and it is certainly something I would be aware of. Even before the Greenbox started I would have been... eco aware... and it would be a side of the business I would like to develop. I suppose because of the nature of the business that we are in, we are dependent on... eco awareness, and clean water would be essential to us...promotion locally... of environmental awareness would have benefits to our business” (BI #8).

It is clear from this quote that this provider felt that he was aware of the need to protect the environment and conscious of the environmental impact of his tourism business before the establishment of the Greenbox. Similar views were voiced by activity centre interviewees and some B&B providers, illustrating that the Greenbox may not have been wholly responsible for fostering their personal interest in ecotourism and the ecologically compliant features of the business.

Some respondents like the man above, I felt, had not been asked questions like this before and as a result could be seen to consciously move through a thought process considering out-loud what the role of the business actually was in terms of ecotourism and discussed the business’s dependence on the environment more than
a role in promoting ecotourism. The importance of well managed environments for the success of ecotourism businesses and products was echoed by other owners and managers. For example, an activity centre owner and former Greenbox member said: “We are an eco-business, we slot very easily into it, eco slots into what we do… we need the environment for what we do so we have to respect it and look after it…” (BI # 10). This response reflects the importance of being ecologically aware when your business depends on the sustainability of the natural environment in which you are located which itself is part of the appeal and attraction for visitors.

A non Greenbox member took a more general view of their role in ecotourism, stating that everyone, especially when based in the countryside, has a role in ecotourism locally which he linked subconsciously to inter-generational sustainable development: “I think everyone has a role in ecotourism… you are living out in the country so it is very important to preserve it for ourselves and those … in the future. When you are living beside lakes, it is even more important…” (BI#12). A B&B provider, who was a former Greenbox member, echoed these sentiments: “Well from a personal perspective…I have always had great regard for preserving what is here” (BI# 13). Another non Greenbox B&B owner referred to the importance of the environment but linked it to their biggest client base, which were groups of French anglers: “Yes I would think so yes, especially in terms of angling, we have a lot of French anglers here and they are very much dependent on the natural environment” (BI#16).

Whereas the above respondents referred to the importance of protecting the natural environment, a former Greenbox member whose business included a yoga centre and separate self-catering accommodation highlighted some of the difficulties she faces in trying to comply with ecotourism criteria while refurbishing traditional Irish cottages in a lakeside setting:

“I see it as preserving and protecting, like with the houses here to reinvent them and preserve them as sympathetically as you can, but then you have the other side of it in terms of the environment and heating them and putting in double glazed windows that, they kind of go against each other” (Business Interview #25).
The relationship between sympathetic building strategies and ecotourism was echoed by the manager of a caravan park in a seaside resort in county Sligo (non Greenbox member) although this development per se could be viewed as inappropriate in a dune setting, irrespective of how sensitively it was designed:

“We are involved in ecotourism to a degree because of our location. We are located in the middle of the sand dunes (a long established caravan park in the dunes)...we blend the park with the dunes, we could have levelled this whole park, and turned it into it a housing estate where everything is uniform...but we have left the dune and the marram grass in it…” (BI # 27).

These respondents included three former Greenbox members and four who were never involved illustrating understanding, among both groups, of the importance of the environment for tourism in general and its relationship with ecotourism. Awareness of landscape value underpins these respondents' views it would seem because of their location in geographical areas that had significant landscape value including sand dune coastal locations and lakeside settings which are the basis for tourism activities.

To provide ecotourist services/activities
The role of a business in promoting ecotourism was frequently linked to the type of services provided. In the following example, the B&B owner, who was a former Greenbox member, had a client base through a German tour operator who sent German eco tourists to avail of the holidays that the B&B provided:

“They do three different types of holidays, one of them is cycling holidays ...they start and end here so the first and last night of the week is here. The second group then are canoers ... they canoe for the week up to Enniskillen and get picked up in Enniskillen and brought back here and sleep out on the lawn. The last week then is the ‘farmhouse week’ ...These are eco tourists, that’s what they are buying they know that when they come” (BI # 18).
The business tailored the ecotourism holidays, to meet the requirements of the tour operator, each lasting either one week or a fortnight. The tourists arrived in Dublin by air and travelled to the B&B with a local tour operator. The experiences offered included a cycling holiday, where the guests completed a circuit through adjoining counties and return, to the B&B, and the respondent liaised with accommodation providers in the other locations who follow broad principles of ecotourism and provide bicycle storage, although some were not eco certified. The second type of experience was a canoeing holiday, usually of a week’s duration, and the tourists camped in tents in the gardens for the first and last nights. For the other nights they travelled along the River Erne across the border to Northern Ireland and camped outdoors. They were then collected from Enniskillen (the main town on Lough Erne) and brought back to the B&B and returned to Germany the next day. The final experience was a farmhouse week: “The ‘farmhouse week’ stays here for the entire week. They spend a day walking, a day cycling, and a day canoeing. They go up to Sligo ... and spend a day or two here” (BI #18). These experiences were developed deliberately to meet a niche demand for outdoor holidays in natural settings and not only illustrate local network embeddedness through the B&B owner’s contact with B&B owners and local coach hire companies but also embeddedness in the local environment through the use of local resources such as waterways in order to develop a niche product.

A boat charter owner who was not a member of the Greenbox had a more limited view of ecotourism. He equated the product he provided to ecotourism in terms of care of the environment he brought tourists to visit: “I don’t know about my role but I take people to see the seals and that and I never leave rubbish” (BI#32).

Use of local resources

Some respondents related their role in promoting ecotourism to the use of particular resources available locally. The owner of the thalassotherapy bath house (former Greenbox member) viewed his involvement in ecotourism as being associated with the way his business harvested seaweed:
“We are harvesting... all by hand, traditional harvesting...everything is walking as well... there is no machinery on the reef, and that seaweed generally regenerates in between three to six months ... it depends on the time of the year and how cold the water is” (BI#26).

Using local food is discussed by Honey (2002) and Healy (1994) as sometimes being associated with ecotourism. It was equated with ecotourism by one respondent, a hotel owner and non Greenbox respondent: “Well like, in terms of using what’s in the area... we are producing a lot of our own herbs...we are making our own breads, jams, so we are doing as much as possible. Like our duck comes from just over the road there... our beef is local... so as much as possible is local” (BI#5). This and the preceding response highlight the concept of endogenous resource use with the latter respondent engaging in networking to source local products (Murdoch 2000).

An education centre manager and former Greenbox member saw their role in promoting ecotourism in terms of making local B&Bs aware of what would be expected of them by ecotourists. This was important in order to provide a high standard of service to meet the requirements of tourists:

“people used to come from Dublin, from Cork, from Belfast, from wherever, when you are coming to an organic course, if you are staying in a B&B locally... (you want) local eggs...a bit of composting going on ... so we had ... meetings with the local B&Bs to tell them about our audience in order to basically market their B&Bs” (BI#7).

Two water based activity centre owners, both former Greenbox members, one who held the EU Flower and the other who was awarded a Greenbox ecotourism award, reported that eco principles were implicit in the instructor training they had completed:
“Em, well, the way I look at it (laughs) we originally ... initially we were very eco and the, principles of our outdoor activities... and this is sometimes difficult to convey back over to people who administer the sort of green tourism and that...that you know if you go through things like canoeing and caving (training... there are whole sections of those syllabuses... where you have to be ... you have to understand conservation and all)... Protecting the wildlife and the environment, etc, etc, you know? So you automatically do that, it is part and parcel of all those activities you know... so it just comes with the trade really” (BI#6).

This example illustrates the importance of exogenous experience in terms of gaining international knowledge through study abroad and bringing back educational capital which was used to establish the business and knowledge of ecological principles. In the case of the two water activity owners the training predated the Greenbox.

Role linked to technical criteria

Other respondents discussed their role as an ecotourism business as adhering to technical criteria. This related to sustaining the future of the environment by using sustainable measures but also to how changing to energy efficient appliances can save the business money. A B&B owner and former Greenbox member, who defined ecotourism in terms of preserving and protecting the environment, elaborated on the ecologically sustainable measures which she and her husband put in place when first developing their premises:

“We tried to build the house in a very sustainable way, long before it was fashionable... we deliberately chose timber frame, partly because of the insulation values and partly because my husband was a carpenter... we took advantage of a natural spring down in the front garden, to make a pond so all the rain water could be caught. We have two separate heating systems... All our lights are on timers… LED lights” (BI #13).
The measures undertaken by this business relate to the technical criteria of the EU Flower which this provider had obtained, but was not going to renew due to her belief that the Greenbox had now taken the ecological principles too far and had become “eco fascists”. She felt what she was doing was not ‘ecological enough’ for the type of ecotourists the Greenbox was trying to attract (BI #13). She had a negative view of the Greenbox because of these high standards and as a result vented her frustration by using the term ‘fascism’ which is usually used to define forms of radical authority and has negative connotations. Also pertinent is that she argued that the EU Flower had not attracted any extra tourists and, as a result, she did not see a benefit in maintaining her environmental credentials. The difficulty of having a certification method with only one high level of attainment was highlighted and echoes Buckley (2002) who mentions the need for at least two levels of attainment, which may assist in encouraging providers to retain their ecolabels. The caravan park manager, referred to earlier, who considered the siting of the park as being ecologically sensitive also referred to the energy saving features of the onsite information office:

“This building (the information and services office in the park) is being refurbished shortly as well, it is going to be insulated and all the lights are going on sensors, because usually they would be on all night long, now there will be one light inside the door and when you walk in the others will come on. We are looking at solar panels to heat our water....” (BI#27).

This pattern of progressing towards ecotourism in a phased way can also be linked to discussions on certification in the literature (Buckley 2002).

Multiple roles

There were examples of providers who began to formulate a holistic view of their pursuit of ecotourism principles and echoed contemporary definitions of ecotourism:
“Well, we have you see the EU Flower so we have the low energy usage with the low energy appliances and so on, with the solar panels ... we have the biodiversity plaques on the wall as you have seen and we monitor our usage but apart from that it is the very fact that people are coming to holiday on the lake, in a rural location its getting the kids out, away from the ibox or x box or whatever you call it, get the boots on and they will cycle to town for sweets, we have bikes on site... they are making their own fun, I would see that as ecotourism” (BI#20).

This provider who was a Greenbox member and EU Flower holder and was a member of the new provider network, the Greenbook (A new ecotourism network established 2011, discussed further on page 162), discussed elements of ecotourism, as defined by the Greenbox, such as the importance of preserving the natural environment through ecological forms of tourism and low impact activities. Ironically this provider did not define ecotourism when asked to do so but his business is eco-compliant in many ways.

A Leitrim hotel owner (and former Greenbox member), discussed his business role in holistic terms incorporating environmental sustainability, corporate responsibility, and links to the local community, which are central elements in ecotourism as defined internationally. He also discussed the measures he felt added to ecotourism such as his recycling policy, eco policy document relating to waste minimisation, energy use and recycling. However, he thought that ecotourism should no longer be the central focus and social and corporate responsibility for the environment should become more central. This provider discussed ecotourism as ‘tired’ but that he still used it as a marketing strategy.

Summary
Business owners and managers discussed the role of their business in promoting ecotourism in a range of different ways that are in large part related to the type of business involved. Technical criteria are important for those who have obtained the EU Flower. As with the defining of ecotourism, the preserving and protecting of the
natural environment are central concerns. Some providers define their role in a more holistic way that encompasses the ‘green’ and ‘grey’ attributes of ecotourism.

**THE GREENBOX PROVIDER NETWORK**
Chapter 6 illustrated how the Greenbox consisted of a formal board (network) of organisational members from a range of local, regional and national organisations which hold a tourism remit. A provider network was also developed as part of the project which consisted of a range of ecotourism provider types (Chapter 4) and is the focus here. The Greenbox CEO and staff provided training, advice and funding for those wishing to obtain EU Flower certification and providers communicated with the Greenbox for this purpose locally. The providers who were members of the provider network were also listed on the Greenbox website which ceased to function in 2011. The providers reported that they did not frequently liaise with the staff of the Greenbox and contact was directly with the CEO or with external professionals whom the Greenbox engaged to provide ecotourism training or advice on certification. Professional staff were only engaged by the Greenbox for a short time (2003-2005 approximately) when funding was available to pay them.

Providers became aware of the Greenbox in a variety of ways. These included newspaper articles, from other providers, through external membership networks (such as Ireland’s Blue Book) and through the Greenbox directly by meeting them at conferences or other tourism events (Chapter 5). Three providers, one B&B owner, one hotel owner and a self-catering owner sat on the Greenbox board to represent the provider network members. When interviewed in 2010 the CEO of the Greenbox had a positive view of the provider network stating that it was active. This organisational view did not agree with provider expectations. Most of the providers who joined the network said that it was not fully operational.

All of the providers were asked if the establishment of the Greenbox had created any new links for them with other providers to establish the extent of the network and networking. Eleven former Greenbox members answered positively. These links related to networking with other ecotourism providers who were members of the network, whom they became familiar with through the Greenbox website or from obtaining EU Flower certification. In some cases these providers may have known
one another already but networking relating to ecotourism or eco certification was new. Twenty-six respondents including both Greenbox and non Greenbox members felt that the Greenbox had no impact (either positive or negative) on their links with others. All providers mentioned that they continued to network as they had done before the Greenbox was established with other providers; therefore, the network did not appear to have a central role in ecotourism development and promotion among the selected providers.

Greenbox provider network and its implications for ecotourism
The eleven Greenbox members who reported that contact with the Greenbox staff, through the provider network, had improved connections with other providers, discussed raising of their awareness of ecotourism through becoming conscious of what other providers were doing: “it.. sort-of raised your awareness...but among a very small group” (BI #4). This respondent mentioned that, while the establishment of the Greenbox network created informal contacts, the members were not actively networking with one another, because regular meetings or networking events did not take place.

A yoga centre owner mentioned that she networked with other Greenbox members: “mainly the other ecotourism producers in the area, some I know before but some I met through the Greenbox” (BI# 23). A self-catering property owner who was an EU Flower holder and Greenbox member said that it was not his initial intention to join the Greenbox:

“Em… it was not part of the original plan, I saw it advertised, I cannot remember where I had first seen it, and I thought that could be good for us, from a marketing point of view and when I got involved then I found out that there was a chance to get a bit of funding and that was attractive then as well, but also it was meeting other people who were doing the same thing, to be part of a network. ..and just those different things the pictures of the birds and all that has been great for people and I might not have done that had I not been involved in the Greenbox (BI # 20).
These providers are located in County Fermanagh in close proximity to one another, which possibly impacts on fostering active networking. This issue of geographical proximity has been highlighted in many fields including technology and tourism as a way to foster networking (Scott and Baggio 2008).

The B&B owner who had strong formal links with a German tour operator on the basis of being eco certified and providing ecotourism experiences felt that the Greenbox had created some opportunity to liaise with other providers in a diagonal way: “...they started to bring not just accommodation, but food and all that sort of thing together to create a larger network” (BI #18). However, due to her business’s peripheral location, opportunities for collaboration were limited as it appeared networking was only occurring in areas where there was a critical mass in terms of Greenbox members and EU Flower holders: “but if you see where all the EU Flowers are... we are on our own... so it wasn’t a lot of connection for us” (ibid.).

Three of the respondents, who mentioned that the Greenbox had created new connections with other tourism providers for them referred to one provider in particular (also a EU Flower holder). This provider was located nearby, had been in operation before the Greenbox was established, received significant funding from the Greenbox to develop new buildings, in order to expand her current business, and had what other providers felt was a very well developed marketing strategy and was heralded as a local leader for the advancement of ecotourism. Her role aligns with Sage’s (2003) identification of the importance of a local leader in contributing to the development of local food networks. Her success in creating publicity for ecotourism and for the Greenbox while it was in existence was achieved through her own strategies and through liaising with journalists.

Some argued that becoming a member of the Greenbox network did not actually improve connections between providers because they were in contact with one another already: “Probably not what you want to hear now but no it didn’t, again... it is a small place... everybody knows everyone else in business...the links were already there” (BI # 2). This quote is reflective of a number of the twenty-six. “There wasn’t a lot of connection for us, it was more a connection between the mass of people, which I mean is understandable, so that didn’t really help us in any way” (BI # 18). This aspect of the Greenbox provider network not being necessary because people in
the small towns and villages knew each other was highlighted by three other providers, one of whom owned a hotel which was extensively promoted by the Greenbox when it received an EU Flower. The other two providers felt that the nature of rural communities meant that conscious attempts at structured networking were not necessary because they were long established. The providers were long established and aged 55-64 and had lifelong connections with people in the locality as they had grown up there. Areas where there was a critical mass of providers or those who were located close to large towns (with a captive tourism market) seemed to be more active in developing tourism development groups or in general networking informally with one another. Those without this critical mass discussed the disadvantage associated with having nobody to network locally with as relayed earlier. A Fermanagh hotelier, located in a county town who was a Greenbox member stated:

“Aye, yea it did like. It sort of, I got to know other ones then through it…like it’s all about networking and meeting people and we would be able to recommend us and us them you know. There is also a good local network, not necessarily through the Greenbox now, but, you know it’s all about keeping people around the town getting them to spend…”(BI # 22).

This provider did not become aware of the Greenbox until he was introduced to it by a friend who was running an ecotourism business close by: “Well I don’t know, well there is a friend of mine out the road here… and the Greenbox thing kind of came up and we were talking about it and then I got involved” (BI # 22). This contact was promoting learning about ecotourism in an informal, locally embedded way which had implications for practices in the hotel:

“I wouldn't say there were any benefits you know but it is good for the hotel, you know, in terms of keeping in mind and doing things that you didn’t do before, so like, it’s going to the stage now where we are really into recycling and things like that and energy saving and things like that... like... one of the best examples I suppose is that I used to use maybe 5 skips a month and now we do maybe 1 skip a month” (BI # 22).
Other members, more generally, stated that the “potential to network was limited” (BI # 8). Reasons provided for lack of networking included a belief that there was nobody leading a local network in the area or that the Greenbox network was no longer functional and there was limited opportunity locally to develop another structure. One provider mentioned that because he had been in business for so many years and had a returning trade that ‘finds him’ he did not believe that he needed to become involved in a formal network. However, he was also networking with other businesses to refer clients locally on the basis of friendships and familiarity. Another provider who had a role in two family businesses, referred to having tried to develop a local network by contacting local hotels in order to develop combined experiences for tourists visiting the area but no hotels were willing to collaborate.

The EU Flower: its impact on networking

The process of obtaining EU Flower certification appears to have created opportunities for providers to meet and develop collaborations with other EU Flower holders and learn about ecotourism, independently of the Greenbox provider network per se. The process was, in ways, facilitated by the Greenbox as it was through the project that certification was achieved. Providers applying for or having attained the EU Flower learned about one another’s products through the Greenbox and developed their links on the basis of being certified. Therefore, as the Greenbox brought the EU Flower label to the area, it had a direct role in the creation of this networking. References were made to formal meetings organised by the Greenbox in order to provide information about applying for and obtaining EU Flower certification. There was no reference made to meetings occurring after the certification process had ceased. The 14 certified providers stated that were it not for their membership of the Greenbox network they would have not become aware of or applied for the EU Flower. Therefore, it can be seen that the Greenbox had a role in creating awareness of certification among providers. This networking, although not occurring within the Greenbox, impacted on the awareness of ecotourism in an indirect way. Hjalager (2010) has discussed the importance of clusters or organisational structures to create awareness or a basis for education that would result in innovations in tourism. The Greenbox illustrates this process in operation.
The majority of EU Flower holders and Greenbox members were slightly younger (aged 45-54) and felt a network was beneficial possibly because their business links were not as strongly developed. Another former member stated: “yes... possibly... it tied us in with people...most of them would be part of the new network” (BI # 7).

The new network (the Greenbook) illustrates an awareness of the importance of a network or active networking in promoting ecotourism. One mentioned that the Greenbox created links for them through “conferences and get-togethers” (BI # 10).

The actual establishment of the Greenbox made non-members aware of EU Flower certification and of local providers who held the Flower; therefore the establishment of the project impacted on the education of non-members also about ecotourism. The Greenbox informed members on EU Flower certification and general environmental protection through waste and water management.

*Limits to networking*

Ten respondents stated that they were not networking through the Greenbox. Five were former Greenbox members who identified some of the weaknesses associated with the network. One EU Flower holder who had been a member of the Greenbox said that there was: “no real opportunity or benefits associated with it... we are kind of self-sustaining with the accommodation and that” (BI #6). Because he had accommodation and activities on site, he was of the opinion that networking with other providers would not accrue any benefit for him because he did not have to liaise with them to offer tourists a place to stay. A self-catering owner felt that the Greenbox created contacts with some ecotourism providers but he felt “the whole thing was too small scale” and that it would have had to cover a larger geographical area to have any major impact. He said that the Greenbox did not create any business advantage for him.

Some chose to highlight weaknesses in terms of networking more generally and how it manifested in the Greenbox, in terms of some providers not actively participating:

“I think there are weaknesses, I always think that if you can get a group you know in anything, that’s all working together towards the same purpose and,
and some of those people maybe with a little bit more knowledge than others, or you know, with different ways of thinking that can bring an idea forward, em, I just kind of think if you could get people to work together in a group that you could attain so much more you know” (BI # 18).

This provider was aware of the positive impacts networking may have on ecotourism development but said that it was difficult to get people to collaborate. Another highlighted the difficulty in attending meetings as a reason for limited involvement in events organised by the Greenbox:

“ … em…. I suppose the only weaknesses is that they don’t interact enough with one another really, I know the time the Greenbox was going there was meetings, the one thing I could get about the meetings was that they were very … You had to travel a distance to them, you know you just didn’t have the time like. I know with myself it is very hard to get away… You know the meetings always involved a journey. Like I did try to go to them but it was just the distance you had to go to them you know, it was a whole-day-job to go to one meeting” (BI # 22).

The Greenbox did therefore arrange meetings but due to the geographical area of the Greenbox and the locations selected the meetings were not always accessible.

Difficulties were also highlighted by another member who discussed problems with having the time to travel to meetings, reflecting evidence from the literature more generally (Dredge 2006a). Another provider concurred: “The weakness really is communication, in terms of people responding to emails, getting new members on board and of course in all of this is the issue of TIME, and that people have no time in a lot of instances to get involved in initiatives like the Greenbox or the Greenbook” (BI # 23).

One former member mentioned that the only networking he felt was worthwhile was the Greenbox Christmas party. He felt that the only benefit of being a member was a social one and no business benefit arose in terms of tourist numbers. Three other of these providers were involved in networking but felt that its usefulness was
questionable because it did not continue after the Greenbox ceased to exist, illustrating the importance of a lead organisation or group as highlighted in the findings in Chapter 5, where some providers called for a new network or organisation to lead ecotourism in the area.

As might be expected, providers who were never members of the Greenbox stated that it had no impact on their networking activity. This networking more generally is discussed later. These providers were selected as they promoted their products as ecotourism. However, at interview it was found that some were not as ecotourism-focused as the websites would lead potential visitors to believe; highlighting the problem of ‘green-washing’ (Honey 2006). These providers did not join the Greenbox as they did not consider themselves to be located in the Greenbox area or did not consider their products “ecotourism enough”. However, all but two were aware of the Greenbox which may have led in part to the green-washing in an attempt to access tourists by ‘piggybacking’ on the initiative. The non Greenbox providers tended to focus mainly on small scale accommodation and easily developed activities such as walking and cycling. Four surf schools were included in this group and were selected because adventure tourism such as surfing has been closely allied to ecotourism in the literature (Buckley 2003). Due to many surfboards being based on petrochemicals these surf school owners felt they were not eligible to join the Greenbox.

The Greenbook

One provider reflected on why the Greenbox project did not continue to function: “you wonder how these things do not work... you really wish you could understand...I don’t know how it doesn’t work in the end”. However, this provider stated that she was “aware that the funding ran out and that this impacts on a lot of it” (BI # 18). Even though the network was short term, the associated learning (awareness of ecotourism as a particular type of tourism that is certified and promoted as a niche service) appeared to contribute to a new network being developed by a small number of former Greenbox members in 2011. The Greenbook operates as a promotional website for the member businesses and also promotes eco certification. Its development highlights an awareness of the positive role a network
may have in ecotourism development and promotion. Unlike the Greenbox the
Greenbook accepts a number of certification methods as discussed in Chapter 5. The
educational centre owner discussed earlier mentioned:

“so basically ... the Greenbox has ceased as a body, but what has (been
developed) after the Greenbox is the Greenbook network as a tourism
providers network and so we all link together in terms of what we provide
with the website, people can maybe book an accommodation, book
whatever, a course here, or book some activity, surfing or something, it is
good to have it all constituted as a local network for an international
audience” (BI # 7).

The Greenbook was established by a group of five business owners and had ten
members in early 2011 who were former Greenbox members. One of the group, the
educational centre owner above, had been instrumental in the initial development of
the Greenbox in the late 1990s. Two providers (one yoga centre owner and another
educational centre owner) mentioned that the Greenbox was established as a pilot
project and it was always their intention to carry on with what the Greenbox had
begun to develop and they consequently drove the establishment of the Greenbook.
The latter, unlike the Greenbox is a bottom up, provider led network (supported by
the national tourism authorities but they do not form part of the network), which
promotes multiple accreditation methods and operates mainly as a promotion and
marketing portal for ecotourism providers who become members for a fee. The fee
was not disclosed at interview. The approach of using multiple labels instead of one
reflects a learning experience from the Greenbox, with one provider mentioning that
they wanted to prevent providers incurring extra costs (by having to obtain a new
label) and, therefore, if a provider held an ecotourism label that was accepted
worldwide they could join the network. Research has documented that multiple
levels of certification is a more successful approach to eco certification than one
method only (Buckley 2002). The development of this network demonstrates a
consciousness of the value of networking in developing ecotourism further among a
small number of providers.
Dredge and Pforr (2008) have discussed how networks in tourism can be seen to move through episodes where members and participants opt in and out essentially outlining how networks can operate as a transformational exercise with different episodes and phases of participation. This can be offered as an explanation for what has occurred in the Greenbox, even though it is essentially entering a new phase that is independent of the old one. Similarly Wray (2009) outlines how policy led networks follow a lifecycle where again participants engage at different phases and the network evolves based on the issues that emerge at various times, for example the availability of funding in the case of the Greenbox.

**Summary**

The provider network is embedded locally by virtue of the fact that it is promoted by local organisations (Chapter 6), consists of locally based businesses, whose owners and managers liaise with one another and, by being ecotourism businesses, using local, endogenous resources. The network was established as a way to promote member businesses extra locally and caused a growing awareness of existing local ecotourism products, but also of the potential to develop ecotourism further through a network. Providers were liaising locally, with other providers, in order to refer business between one another which further embedded the process of networking and the local ecotourism product.

**OTHER LOCAL NETWORKS AND PROVIDER NETWORKING**

Local networks for promotional and marketing purposes commonly exist in rural areas, sometimes funded by local development organisations such as Leader (Cawley et al. 2007). Their activities include inter alia preparation of brochures, maintenance of web sites and lobbying on behalf of the members. Informal referral of clients is also known to occur between local businesses, for example between hotels and B&B premises and between accommodation providers and recreational providers (Mottiar and Ryan 2007; Cawley 2010). The following discusses the evidence relating to the local development networks of various kinds with which the interviewed businesses liaised and the inter-business networking.
The purpose of developing networks and networking by the interviewees with other providers was analysed and was found to include: sharing of information, development of tourism products and general social and friendship based interaction. Thirty-six respondents were involved in collaboration locally with the remaining one stating he had no one to connect with because of his peripheral location and also a lack of time to develop connections with others. One provider mentioned that there was a realisation, particularly after the recession took hold, that tourism providers themselves would have to take a more proactive role in the promotion of their areas as organisations who usually held this role had limited budgets.

Local tourism networks existed in formal ways, including local tourism development groups, angling clubs and a range of community and festival committees. The local tourism groups have a more formal committee style structure (but not boards) and the local community groups and festivals are informal in structure, as illustrated by Saxena (2005) in the Peak District National Park. Jack and Anderson (2002) have illustrated that such involvement in local groups, partnerships or networks is important for entrepreneurs in order to become part of the local structures.

Membership of a local tourism development group which had been formed to promote the local area and develop tourism products was mentioned as important by four providers, two in Cavan and two in Leitrim. One of the two respondents in Cavan was a former Greenbox member and held the EU Flower. In Cavan the network arranged the general up-keep of the area and also helped to develop new projects such as the restoration of a nineteenth century Workhouse in Ballyconnell where poor people were accommodated at the time of the Great Famine and afterwards, “we are trying to get some work done on the Workhouse... trying to secure it so people can walk around it” (BI # 18). The council owned the Workhouse, but the tourism group proposed the redevelopment and liaised with the council in that regard. This provider also mentioned a local walk which the local tourism development group had previously developed. A local Coillte (commercial state company operating in forestry, land based businesses, renewable energy and panel products) representative assisted with the development of a local walk through public grounds which is part forest land owned by Coillte. These activities highlight
the importance of locally embedded formal networking in order to develop local ecotourism products.

One of the Leitrim providers reported that the local tourism development group she was involved with formally, by having an officer role, was trying to develop the tourism product further which shared features with ecotourism:

“Well I am secretary of the local tourism group. That’s in terms of developing the village as a tourism destination, we are in the process of doing a booklet now and revamping the website, which has taken lots of work. Yea we are trying to sell it as a hub and we are giving them places within a 50 mile radius, as day trips (walks, cycles, attractions)... because I know when I go away I love to get somewhere, a round trip and come back, that’s what we are doing, five or 6 loops” (BI # 17).

A non-Greenbox guesthouse owner, located in a county town felt that connections to the angling club were important as a high proportion of her summer clientele were anglers: “the angling club is very important... I am secretary there...there would just be a few of us... we would all kind of liaise together” (BI#1), illustrating a formal committee level connection. She also mentioned that in a county town people networked informally all the time and formalised networks, like the Greenbox, were not necessary. But she also said that membership of the angling club was essential in order to be aware of what was happening locally and advise her clients.

A Greenbox EU Flower holder cited the importance of two local women’s networks: “Oh yea, I have been a member of two women’s networks which have supported me through... market research, business development, from doing a marketing plan, a PR plan a business plan and so on...” (BI # 24). The first of these networks was the local Fermanagh Women in Agriculture Network and the other was a ‘network for enterprising women’. Both highlight the support available for entrepreneurial rural women in Fermanagh which was not mentioned specifically elsewhere.

Networking was occurring informally locally between accommodation, activity and ecotourism providers for the purpose of business referrals and also the general
sharing of information and confirms Mottiar's (2007) findings when examining lifestyle entrepreneurs in Westport, County Mayo.

Absence of networking and factors that inhibit networking

The boat charter owner, (referred to earlier) who provided trips to watch seals which he described as ecotourism on his website mentioned some of the difficulties with networking and how a new Sligo adventure hub was attempting to create more opportunities in this regard:

“when you look at those guys in Donegal and that and how closely they work together, they are so knit… they are all so well developed compared to Sligo, Sligo is so underdeveloped ... Those guys just all seem to cement together. And that is what Adventure Sligo is all about, getting people in the area to work together, but it is just the fact that Sligo has been denied so much for so long, but we are starting to see the importance of it now and we are just getting going, it is just all about getting people to realise the importance of it. But there is a kind of an attitude here with people that we are all in competition and we shouldn’t be working together, but I think we should you know” (BI # 32).

An awareness of the usefulness of a network and networking in developing tourism more generally may be related to earlier findings in the chapter in terms of ecotourism and the development of the provider network, the Greenbook.

A B&B owner highlighted how cooperation may occur even when competition is present:

“Locally (more generally in tourism) we link up very very much, so this is through …but also if someone rings up and says, em, can we have a week in August and you can’t take them, you find out exactly what they are after so that you can offer it out to other people. A lot of that goes on, there is a lot of cooperation that goes on…em… and one is never frightened of competition and one shouldn’t be frightened of competition, competition…em… keeps
you on your mettle, it keeps your standards high and it does no one any harm at all, and the other thing that you got to remember is that tourists are a bit like sheep, they like to follow each other …” (BI #19).

One surf school owner worked with a local hotel and other accommodation providers in order to offer competitive rates for visiting surfers but they did not network with the other surf schools in the town as they considered them their competition. This aspect of competition was also highlighted by hotel owners and other providers located in areas where another provider may have been providing the same service. One provider did not believe the capacity existed to network as he considered other local accommodation providers to be significant competition. “we are in opposition with each other if you know what I mean... everybody is trying to pull a fast one on somebody else...” (BI # 9). Merchant and Mottiar (2011), in their study which examines lifestyle entrepreneurs in surfing in Co. Clare and Co. Donegal, found that surf school owners, though in competition, spoke highly of each other’s business. This was also the case here but there appears to have been fear of competition in the Greenbox which may be explained by the fact that the tourism numbers are much higher in the areas studied by Merchant and Mottiar (2011) than in those involved here. This element of competition emerges again later when referring to community engagement.

A small number of providers mentioned that they believed there was no networking happening through the Greenbox. This related to the planned ecotourism provider network which they felt was not operational and as a result a proper opportunity to network though the Greenbox did not really exist. However, as the results illustrate, networking was occurring between providers on the basis of familiarity, EU Flower certification and ecotourism more generally.

Networking with local communities
The preceding section highlighted how networking was taking place between tourism providers. Providers were also queried about links with local community members or groups and their purpose. This provided further insight into the tourism businesses’ local embeddedness into wider community networks. Some of this
networking related to ecotourism, some to tourism more generally and some to non-touristic community support. Referral of clients was of particular importance.

Referral of tourists to other local businesses was mentioned by several respondents. A former Greenbox and EU Flower holder referred to demand created by ecotourists for food and drink locally:

“Well when I would have people coming I would always tell people that there are two good supermarkets in the town, and a Chinese restaurant, pubs … to try and get them to spend in the town … especially those that come for water sports they would have the car loaded up with gear already so they would want to do the shopping the minute they land here. With the pubs now when we started I would have to had gone with them, eased them in” (BI #20).

This illustrates an understanding of embedded, local, cooperation by this provider. This has been found in other studies in an Irish context where businesses cooperate locally in order to develop the tourism product and allow for all businesses to benefit where possible (Merchant and Mottiar 2011).

Liaising with local restaurants was deemed important by three providers. Two of these in particular referred to the relationship they had with a local restaurant which was owned and managed by a celebrity chef who specialised in the use of local food. Although not classified as an ecotourism business, the respondent provides an excellent example of the relationship between environment, food and tourism (Heinrichs 2000; Sims 2009). The chef had limited accommodation capacity on his own premises for overnight guests and as a result referred visitors to other local establishments. He developed the relationships with the local providers directly whose details he passed on to guests. Also, his wife arranged the collection and return of tourists to and from the restaurant so that they could enjoy a drink with their meal: “He is very good, brings loads of people to the area, they stay here, we drop them over and his wife drops them back so they can have a drink” (BI #3). However, one provider was also aware that an over reliance on this local connection
could have negative implications if, for example, the chef was to close his business the popularity of visiting the local area could diminish: “in the area here he really brings people to the area. But we have kind of realised that we cannot rely on that so we have to look at other things” (BI # 5).

Contact with local businesses such as butchers and golf clubs (i.e. not exclusively examples of ecotourism) were deemed important by ecotourism providers in terms of offering tourists value through discounts: “we have a deal with the golf club... anyone staying here gets the same deal as if they were playing with a member...the butcher gives a 10% discount to people staying here” (BI #4). Others mentioned their engagement with pubs and restaurants but also the importance of those who have a more indirect role in tourism such as local taxi drivers: “you do link up with the village...we send people down for food... and there is a link up with the pubs... and the taxi guy” (BI #6). This contact with transport providers is not only important to provide a service but also to ensure the local taxi drivers are aware of events that are taking place locally and the attractions that may be of interest to local visitors. This finding was also echoed in the organisational data. This networking was informal and primarily based on social networks and an awareness of local businesses.

Activity centre owners whose premises did not have accommodation cited the importance of local accommodation for those wishing to stay locally and take part in activities daily. The referral was informal but the providers were listed on the websites in a more formal way. One activity provider mentioned that these informal contacts were important in terms of referrals to them also. In a more formal context, a local educational centre included local accommodation and activity providers in a catalogue of their courses:

“B&Bs, hostels, activity centres.. we told them what the needs of visitors to the centre were... so people used to come from Dublin, from Cork, from Belfast, from wherever...if you are staying in a B&B locally there would be available local eggs, there would be a bit of composting going on in the B&Bs so we had kind of meetings with the local B&Bs to tell them about our audience in order to basically market their B&Bs as part of that they would have to step up a mark, maybe bake their own scones in the mornings, so
there was always training sessions going on ... to keep the providers, B&Bs up to date with our customers” (BI # 7).

This informal local network of accommodation providers adhered to the principles of ecotourism and catering for clients of the local activity centre was important for them. The manager of the centre stated that a benefit created for them by the Greenbox was the certification of some of the accommodation providers: “letting our customers see that the B&Bs were certified made a huge difference in terms of quality assurance for the people that come in” (BI # 7).

Some facilities that were funded by the Greenbox, in order to meet EU Flower criteria were made available for community purposes more generally. The following examples illustrate this: “the centre is used here by the local community too not just tourists so yes, locals would come for classes and wellness events and it is now a venue for weddings and other events so yea” (BI #23). “Yes we arrange a lot of events …family fun days, socials, summer camps, am, fundraising events, Alzheimer’s tea day, we would arrange as the community centre” (BI # 36).

One of these halls is owned by the local community, where these uses would be expected. The other is privately owned and the uses relate to fostering relationships between the community and the business. In the case of the community hall many courses are free but the private hall generally charges. An exception to this is local charity events where the facility is provided free of charge.

Other providers, who were not Greenbox members but provided natural and cultural resource based experiences, were similarly embedded in a local system of communication and exchange. These providers, although not members or eco certified provided walking and cycling experiences that comply with ecotourism principles. They also engaged in referrals with other local tourism businesses and supported other businesses. Two B&B owners cited the importance of local genealogy experts for them because a significant proportion of their clientele was generated by people travelling to the region to trace their ancestors. They telephoned the experts when the visitors arrived and set up meetings for the tourists.

One educational centre, which was involved in the development of the Greenbox project, maintained strong relationships with primary schools in the area related to
the development of school gardens, for which funding support was obtained by the schools from The Peace Programme. This centre also worked with the local Health Service Executive (HSE) representative in order to develop community gardens: “we have a fantastic programme with the HSE, from 2004 until 2011, to create community gardens so we delivered expertise to people establishing community gardens all over the mid-west, into Fermanagh.... the end result was sustainable gardens and they have gone from strength to strength” (BI #7). This is a more formalised structure as this provider is engaged in providing a service for which he gets paid.

One non-Greenbox provider referred to helping to provide cultural tourism experiences associated with a visitor centre funded by Leader:

“We do we do… part of the funding for the (local) visitor centre (from Leader) was to do with that in terms of organising walks and that, because there is a lot of historical, there are Giants’ graves (dolmens) across the road, there are standing stones ... so that people ... there is a beautiful dolmen, and they have spent 10 years now negotiating with farmers, but I don’t know are they any further ahead, which is a great pity, because that would have been our part, …And then they did walks up … the mountains… that has been beneficial, but again I don’t think it has been marketed enough, you know to get it out there” (BI #18).

Two hotel owners mentioned their sponsorship of the local and county GAA teams, respectively, as being their main form of community networking outside of tourism neither of which related directly to ecotourism. One was more vocal about his sponsorship role than the other and cited his support of the local church and marina as well as the county GAA team. These links appeared to be used in his marketing and promotion strategy and he felt networking with and assisting these groups would result in increased visitor numbers (BI #2). In the other example the hotel was located in a small village and sponsorship related to a club level team and financial benefit in terms of players visiting the hotel to eat and drink was much more limited.
Table 7.1 Provider Networking

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*Involvement with festivals and other local events*

Providers were also involved in organising and supporting locally run festivals and events which served to bring tourists to the area, some of which may be described as
having links to ecotourism. Twenty-one listed these events on their websites and eight cited direct involvement in running such events:

“Oh I do yea, as many as I possibly can, em, any and all tourism providers, especially if there is any networking events, I’d pop down and say hello to everybody, so I think there is a good networking facility in Sligo, it is not structured but, there is a positive kind of networking vibe and feel. We get a lot of referrals from whether it is the horse riding centre…and vice versa we set up a tourist information part within the baths themselves and all the staff are trained into what activities are happening when around the county and we get people to put in posters and all that…” (BI # 26).

This provider (former Greenbox member) ran a thalassotherapy bath house and the five other business owners interviewed in the same seaside town mentioned his high level of involvement in promoting tourism in the area. Another Greenbox provider who ran a lakeside self-catering property in County Fermanagh highlighted political tensions that persisted locally which impinged on organising a local festival. The community festival was revived after a 30 year break and a folk group from south of the border was booked to perform. The group was threatened by the Loyalist Volunteer Force (LVF) and armoured vehicles were used to transport them to and from county Cavan. This provider highlights how the political legacy following the ‘troubles’, notwithstanding the Good Friday Agreement (see Chapter 4), still impact negatively on the development of tourism in his local area. There appeared to be an absence of business referrals in these areas because of political tension more generally.

Networking with local community events such as angling festivals and charity events was discussed by 24 respondents. Providers in towns and villages where annual festivals were held all cited the importance of networking with the festival organisers through offering support in terms of assisting with distributing flyers or attending meetings. This was considered important in order to create an awareness of what is happening in the area but also in order for the businesses to capitalise on the increased tourist numbers at this time. Charity events were supported financially by two providers and two opened up their large premises free of charge for the hosting of these events: “we run a lot of charity events here too, for the likes of the
Children’s Hospice and raised €28,000 for that, so we do it when we can definitely yes” (BI # 19).

Festivals were promoted on the websites of eight providers. B&B owners who historically had hosted anglers were also involved in hosting angling festivals. One hotel owner mentioned his role in a county music festival and a number of B&Bs in a County Leitrim town mentioned the importance of being involved in a locally based international literary festival. However, the county council had relocated this event to the county town and tourism businesses that previously benefitted, in terms of an increase in tourist numbers during the festival, were no longer benefitting from the festival because of distance from the town.

A country house owner alluded to the fact that: “we don’t run a village fair or anything like that but I would like to” (BI # 33). He was located in a town in Sligo that already held an annual festival in connection with a local folk park but he hoped to establish a fete or farmers market event on his own premises. On-farm and local produce was a special feature of his in-house restaurant.

A caravan park manager stated that, as it was a not for profit company, 50% of the turnover was pumped back into local events (Business Interview # 27). A hostel manager stated: “yes we arrange a lot of events… we arrange them, a good few of them … we would arrange family fun days, socials, summer camps … em… fundraising events, Alzheimer’s tea day” (BI # 36). Two of the surf school owners mentioned that they were involved in running the annual surf carnival.

Summary
Providers made connections between their role in ecotourism and the importance of protecting the environment, providing activities and the use of available resources. Some of the eco certified providers linked their role to compliance with the technical criteria of the EU Flower. A small number gained benefit from being Greenbox members whereas others did not feel there was a benefit associated with the provider network. For EU Flower providers obtaining the certification improved their networking with other EU Flower providers. Time to travel to meetings impacted on
networking activity. Networking with local community members and festivals and events was important for business referrals mainly.

**DISEMBEDDED NETWORKING TO DEVELOP THE BUSINESS AND ATTRACT TOURISTS**

Methods of disembedded networking included the access of funding from organisations as presented in Chapter 4. Funding was mainly sourced through locally embedded organisations but there were examples of disembedded links in this instance. Four providers located close to the international border illustrate this best, because of access to funding from the International Fund for Ireland and the Peace fund directly based on their location in an area with a history of conflict. Also disembedded was the promotion of businesses by taking part in trips to international trade and tourism shows, angling shows and caravan and camping events in the United Kingdom and Germany which were cited by three Greenbox members. These trips were facilitated by the national tourism authorities. These providers promoted their own businesses on the trips and businesses which relied on angling tourists cited benefitting from them. A small number of providers had benefitted from familiarisation visits by national and international journalists and travel writers which were organised by the national tourism authorities, or the Greenbox in some cases, with the costs borne by the Greenbox. The national and regional organisations were viewed positively by many but their lack of resources currently was recognised.

While word of mouth locally and among tourists who had visited was cited as the most important way to attract tourists, all providers also had their own websites. They felt that tourists mainly discovered their business through the national tourism authority websites but that most of their bookings came from commercial sites such as booking.com. All felt that membership of the national tourism authorities was necessary but the value attributed to the membership was minor. One provider mentioned that external booking engines were actually more important and attracted more tourists. These providers stated that they felt they had to join FI in order to be marketed and promoted effectively. In the case of a Greenbox member and EU Flower holder referred to earlier, a German tour operator was the primary method of attracting tourists. This link was cited as being vital by the business owner; however, she was aware of the risk of over-relying on this client base.
Twenty-five of those interviewed discussed how they used local imagery in promoting their businesses on their websites and leaflets and on social media profiles. This was mainly done as it illustrated what was available locally to tourists. Images used included local mountains, such as Benbulben in Co. Sligo, lakes such as Lough Allen in Leitrim and other images related to the tourism product such as loop walks, cycle ways, outdoor activities and images of the landscape in which the activities are conducted.

Thirty six businesses provided information on the tourists who visited their businesses by national or international source. The sources varied according to the types of business which the respondents operated. For example two B&Bs, who depended on angling tourists had a European market of around 70%. Another B&B which had links with a German eco tourist operator cited 75% of an international market from Germany. A B&B in Cavan cited 70% international business and this was attributed in particular to Americans visiting the area to conduct genealogy searches to trace their ancestors. Most activity centres stated having a higher domestic market, as did hotels and surf schools. The surf schools held a higher domestic market as clients came on day trips. The hotels felt they had a higher domestic market as their location was not frequented by high levels of international visitors. One hostel and a country house cited a 50-50 distribution. One caravan park in Northern Ireland cited a higher domestic market, whereas its counterpart in Ireland stated the reverse (because of a tradition of receiving visitors from Northern Ireland since the years of political unrest). One educational centre cited 70% international visitors, which was due to the fact that they offer organic courses which appeal to overseas tourists from Germany, France and Italy who come and stay for a number of days to complete the course. One hotel owner in a Leitrim fishing town felt most of his visitors were international because he mainly attracted anglers from the UK and received few national clients in his hotel. This was based on long term disembedded marketing to UK angling clubs which this hotel appeared to have before the current owner purchased it. Some domestic tourists may have originated inside the Greenbox border but were not ecotourists or had not come to visit on the basis of knowing or being aware of the Greenbox.
The distribution of tourists who visited the businesses reveals that extra local and international markets were being reached. Twenty-nine respondents stated that word of mouth, flyers and their own websites were their primary methods of promotion. Six stated the importance of disembedded methods such as national media, national tourism associations and other promotional organisations such as *Ireland’s Blue Book*. One mentioned the importance of trade shows and one was not actively marketing their product because of cost. Three mentioned the importance of social media in promoting their product, for example one provider could not afford to spend money on marketing due to the recession and was developing a free Facebook page to market her business.

**THE FUTURE OF NETWORKING**

Providers were also asked for their views on the future of networking in the area relating to the Greenbox and ecotourism but also in terms of tourism more generally. Some felt that there was scope to develop collaboration further and some mentioned the need for a new network, like the Greenbook, in order to increase ecotourism potential. Three mentioned that the Greenbox had led to the development of the Greenbook network and that this may lead to the continued development of formal and informal networking in the region. An activity centre owner felt the question had highlighted the fact that he was not doing enough networking and needed to develop this in order to increase the marketing potential of his business. Some providers reminisced on how networking was happening more frequently in the past. One respondent mentioned that she used to be a member of a network of B&Bs and guesthouses called Town and Country Homes (now part of the Irish Homes section of the Discover Ireland promotional website): “we had a fantastic system going at the time, we were always referring people... not so much now” (BI#1). Now the business was generated by large websites like booking.com, revealing increased vertical engagement with tour operators.

Some providers chose to discuss the elements which they believe may foster success in terms of networking tourism providers in the area. This provided an insight into how they viewed the future of ecotourism and tourism more generally and some of the elements they felt would aid its development. The success of networking was
considered questionable by some providers with some mentioning that there was not enough networking occurring and others citing the need for a local leader/hero who would assist in developing a larger more proactive group of interlinked networks which has been referred to in food literature (Sage 2003). In counties Fermanagh and Cavan region some respondents felt that the local television and celebrity chef referred to earlier was fulfilling this role by referring business to local B&Bs and guesthouses. More generally, a network on the lines of the Greenbox was considered to be required. The establishment of the Greenbook gives expression to this perceived need for collaborative promotion of ecotourism.

CONCLUSION
Many providers joined the Greenbox in the hope that this network would be active and assist them in developing their links with other ecotourism providers and help them develop their products more fully through the transfer of information. However, the findings indicate that the network may not have been fully active. The planned Greenbox provider network, although considered successful by the CEO was viewed by many providers as inactive and most contact was occurring informally outside the provider network. Some providers were not actively networking formally as they did not see the need, due to being from the locality and having established many informal contacts over the years. The emergence of a new provider led network (the Greenbook) is illustrative of the interest of a small group of providers in networking for ecotourism but also of the importance of a structure to assist with promotion more generally. Networking with organisations was happening in a locally embedded way for funding and advice and in an extra local disembedded direction to access marketing and promotion, tourists and funding. The future of ecotourism was viewed as important but it could only be secured through a new network like the Greenbook or through the assistance of a local leader or hero to promote ecotourism more widely.

Non-members of the Greenbox, in particular, highlighted the importance of local tourism groups to develop and promote ecotourism locally. Those in larger towns and villages had a critical mass of tourism providers to actively contact with and these networks did not really develop in areas without this critical mass. Networking
with local communities was reported by all but one for client referrals, benefitting from and contributing to community events and festivals. A local TV celebrity chef behaved as a local leader in one area.

Local embedded and extra local disembedded networking was exhibited by all providers. There were variations in the purpose and direction of the networking and this could be related, in part to the levels of involvement with the Greenbox, but also to the interest of the particular providers to develop networks to either promote the area, their products or develop new products with others. Also important was the provider location near towns and villages and a belief in the usefulness of networking.

Supporting local business development is synonymous with ecotourism development in developing countries (Ryan 2000) and it has been a focus in some developed world contexts (Che 2006). There appears to be a local awareness in the northwest region among Greenbox and non Greenbox businesses as to the importance of business referral. It is difficult to decide implicitly if this is due to the development of the Greenbox or is it a feature of the specific rural area. Some providers promote activities based in the locality using endogenous resources. Others mentioned being involved in festivals that related to the natural environment such as angling. These providers were involved in these festivals because of an interest in promoting activities that were based on the availability of local resources. The festivals may have been established to generate more income or increase tourism numbers to the area however, the eco awareness fostered by the Greenbox seemed to have highlighted the importance of local resources in these instances.
CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

CONTEXT
Ecotourism is a socially constructed concept which has been defined many times, with these definitions having unifying factors such as preservation of the natural environment and contributions to conservation and sustainability of an area and tourism that does not exceed the local carrying capacity (Bjork 2000; Fennell 2001; Donohoe and Needham 2003). It is established for some decades as an environmentally sustainable form of resource use that is introduced to contribute to local economies in developing areas of the world. Ecotourism has been introduced more recently, in peripheral areas in developed countries, as part of rural development initiatives, where the natural and cultural resource bases are appropriate. This thesis explored an example of the deliberate introduction of ecotourism with EU funding in a border area between Ireland and Northern Ireland, known as the Greenbox. The underlying purpose in establishing the Greenbox was to help compensate for the neglect of the local economy and society during thirty years of civil unrest in Northern Ireland, between the late 1960s and the late 1990s. A high concentration of rivers, lakes and canals and a relatively underused agricultural landscape, arising from a history of outmigration, further identified the area as suitable for ecotourism development. A management network was established to promote ecotourism through the support of a certification programme (the EU Flower label). A provider network was also established. The Greenbox network ceased to function actively in 2007 when the area did not qualify for a second round of EU Interreg funding. Tourism providers who had attained EU Flower certification continued to hold the label until it became subject to renewal. Many stated that they would not renew the label. Although the Greenbox is an example of a short lived network, a phenomenon that is recognised in international literature (Gibson et al. 2010), it assumes particular interest in that context, particularly since it was the first such experiment on the island of Ireland, and was considered worthy of study. Few studies have been conducted on ecotourism in developed countries and the research therefore contributes to an emerging body of knowledge (Anderson 2002; Hanrahan 2007).
Based on the close relationship between ecotourism and the local resource base, concepts relating to local embeddedness and appropriate disembeddedness (in order to source funding, other resources and attract tourists), were used to assess the extent of integration of ecotourism locally, drawing on the use of the concepts in tourism more generally in policy and destination development contexts (Chapter 2). The use of a network and networking to promote the development of ecotourism follows emerging international practice in tourism more generally. Concepts from network theory and experience of networking as reflected in the work of Saxena (2005), among others, were used to analyse the effectiveness of these strategies in attaining embeddedness and appropriate disembeddedness in the Greenbox. Two sets of actors who were central to the development of ecotourism in the Greenbox, organisations and tourism providers, were selected for interview in a purposive way (Chapter 3). The organisations included international and national entities but most operated at the local and regional level. The providers were SMEs, the majority of which were family owned accommodation and activity providers with few employees. They included both people of local origin and immigrants. Accommodation businesses dominated (only they were eligible for EU Flower certification) but outdoor recreational activities were deliberately included for study on the basis of the benign use of the resource base (Chapter 4). The research was designed to answer four questions:

1. What is the relationship between ecotourism as a particular form of rural tourism, and the local resource base broadly defined?
2. How do appropriately embedded and disembedded networks and networking among organisations operate to promote ecotourism?
3. How do appropriately embedded and disembedded networks and networking among providers operate to promote ecotourism?
4. How can ecotourism as an appropriately embedded and disembedded phenomenon, operating through networks and networking, contribute to balanced rural development?

In depth face-to-face interviews were held with both sets of actors and the resulting text was analysed thematically. The results of the analysis relating to the first research question were presented in Chapter 5, that relating to the second in Chapter
6 and that relating to the third in Chapter 7. This chapter extracts the broader implications of the findings with reference to international literature and discusses the fourth research question relating to the contribution of ecotourism to balanced rural development.

FINDINGS

Ecotourism

A working definition of ecotourism was adopted by the Greenbox based on environmental ‘green’ criteria and the accreditation method chosen related to technical ‘grey’ criteria. Only two organisational representatives and two providers adopted the Greenbox definition. Others referred to ecotourism as more of an ethos that related to benign use of environmental resources pointing to embeddedness in the natural environment.

Certification is considered essential for the promotion of ecotourism (Font 2002) but the label adopted prioritised only grey criteria, and applied to accommodation only, which meant effectively that resource based providers, without accommodation, were not eligible to apply although they may have been members of the Greenbox and attended information sessions and courses relating to ecotourism. This illustrates that a label needs to be adopted that related to ‘green’, or both types of criteria. Positive features of the label included reduced running costs of the business and environmental education of the provider and potential tourists. There were some difficulties cited which related to onerous criteria in complying with the conditions of certification, large amounts of paperwork and high costs associated with maintaining the label. The Greenbox was instrumental in funding the adaptation of buildings and extensions in order for providers to meet the criteria for qualification for the EU Flower. It also provided access to training for ecotourism principles and practices. All of those who had obtained the label said they would not have done so without financial assistance from the Greenbox. Questions were raised that highlight the need for multiple levels of certification, as Fennell (2002) suggested, so that providers can progress from one level to another with costs spread over a long period.
of time. Obtaining certification did not increase tourist numbers which raised questions about its value also.

The establishment of the Greenbox, and the availability of funding for EU Flower certification, resulted in providers becoming aware of ecotourism as a construct. Fourteen accommodation providers who obtained the EU Flower label were interviewed. All of the remaining interviewees, which included Greenbox and non-Greenbox members, provided experiences that could be defined as ecotourism because of being based on benign use of the natural environment. A small number appeared to seek to benefit from ecotourism in the Greenbox while not practising ecotourism as advertised on their websites. For those who had the EU Flower label, positive features included cost saving and environmental education. Ecotourism emerged as being embedded in the local environment in the Greenbox. Given the embeddedness of providers in the natural environment, it seems appropriate that the quality of these resources would be protected by a label that included environmental criteria as in the Life project as discussed by O’Cinnéide (1999).

Both the organisational representatives and the providers reported uncertainty relating to the future of ecotourism in the Greenbox. This arose from the cessation of the Greenbox organisation per se and the associated non-availability of funding to support certification and promotion. The need for an organisation to take a lead in promoting ecotourism, as the Greenbox had done, was viewed as a priority if the area was to function effectively as an ecotourism destination. The new Greenbook network provides concrete evidence of the providers’ appreciation of the benefits of joint promotion and the value of an organisational structure to arrange for certification. Hydraulic fractioning (fracking) was identified as a threat that would impinge on the quality of the local environment and its reputation as an ecotourism destination. This was an issue as the time of interview because speculative licences had been sought.

Where possible, providers sourced all supplies locally, highlighting an awareness of the importance to contribute to the local economy but also of the expectations of ecotourists. There was no evidence of the expansion of businesses within the pursuit of ecotourism but some were attracting a specialist ecotourist clientele. Therefore, they were helping to establish a reputation for the area as an ecotourism destination.
which might be built upon in future. More generally, there was not a strong awareness of this identity for the Greenbox.

Organisations

The Greenbox network consisted of a CEO, eight organisational representatives and three provider representatives who were responsible for developing the area as an ecotourism destination, supporting the acquisition of certification and promoting the products. The board members networked closely with one another both formally and informally, following Saxena (2005). Vertical networking to national and international levels took place formally to source funding, promote the area and the providers. Local horizontal networking created awareness of ecotourism through providing information, funding, training and promoting awareness of the products locally. The CEO of the Greenbox was particularly influential in creating awareness of ecotourism and supporting attainment of certification. As noted earlier a limited number of organisational representatives were more active than others in networking which resulted in a larger number of connections with organisations and providers. Their distinctive features were working for organisations that held regular meetings, longevity in post and established relationships with counterparts in other organisations, and being native to the area where they worked and aware of the natural resource base for ecotourism (Fennell 2001; Buckley 2009). Some organisations gave recognition to the principles of ecotourism in official documents. The designation of a UNESCO Geopark within the Greenbox emerged as having heightened local environmental awareness.

Thirteen other organisations were involved in supporting ecotourism providers through funding, advice and promotion as part of a broader role for tourism and many also networked with the Greenbox. Leader companies were particularly important as sources of funding. Some of these organisations were collaborating in the development of natural resource based activities that followed ecological principles broadly defined. For example, collaboration between a local authority and IFI to develop canoeing in a waterway so that it did not interfere with angling. Overall embedded local networking emerged as being important for awareness, training and product development associated with ecotourism. Extra local networking took place to access funding and external tourists in order to support this
activity. Ecotourism providers were not prioritised for funding or support by this broader set of organisations and had to compete with other tourism businesses.

Providers
The establishment of a network of providers was an objective of the Greenbox but the evidence suggests that this was less active than anticipated. Nevertheless, a network functioned among existing ecotourism (resource based) providers. Application and qualification for the EU Flower also promoted active membership of the network by accommodation providers. The main function of the Greenbox provider network was to create general awareness of ecotourism, provide training and also to advise on the specific requirements of certification. A new organisation, the Greenbook, emerged from this more active group of providers. The emergence of the Greenbook suggests awareness of a market for ecotourism among providers who were deeply committed to this form of tourism. Ecotourism type of activities (water based activities such as canoeing and angling) attracted ecotourists throughout the year, as they were willing to tolerate a certain amount of rainfall and bad weather and resulted in revenue coming in to the area on a year round basis.

As Chapters 3 and 4 illustrate, the Greenbox network was established as an externally funded project in order to stimulate the growth of an ecotourism product in a peripheral region of northwest Ireland and it offers an example of a government led funded project, as described by Morrison et al. (2004). As the Greenbox was only developed in 2003 it provides an example of a ‘young’ network in Gibson et al.’s (2005) terminology. The project ceased in 2007 and is therefore also a short term network which exhibited a short lifecycle, a phenomenon illustrated in Australian and British contexts by others (Morrison 1994; Dredge 2006b). This research furthers the understanding of the lifecycle of tourism networks in this instance, as it illustrates that even though a network may be short term, or ceases to exist, a new network can emerge on the basis of being promoted by committed actors who realise the benefit of a network approach in tourism.

Gibson et al. (2005) posit that in young networks, in the context of the Leith Initiative for Tourism in the United Kingdom, the effective development and longevity of the network depends on suitable participant behaviour. The personal
characteristics and interests of actors were discussed earlier as being important in an organisational context. Here also, the personal characteristics of a small group of invested providers led to the development of the Greenbook, illustrating a finding that is comparable to the organisational data (Conway and Cawley 2012).

The findings of this study illustrate that the start-up and growth of young networks can be unclear, that some benefit can emerge from the networks in the form of learning (Chapter 5), but fragmentation and loss of networks can occur when the network identity is weak (Gibson et al. 2005). There have been a number of benefits accrued from networks and networking, cited in the literature. These usually include learning, business activity and community connections (Morrison 1994). This research corroborates some of this literature as the Greenbox provider network led to learning and business referral and providers were actively connecting with the wider community (Lynch et al. 2000). Published research on ecotourism is further contributed to as the study offers an insight into how networks can promote learning with regard to ecotourism destination development and associated certification.

Rural development
The Greenbox was established as a project designed to contribute to the development of a rural border area between Ireland and Northern Ireland where the economy had declined during the thirty years of civil unrest in Northern Ireland, between the late 1960s and the late 1990s. Funding was available for this purpose from the EU Interreg and Peace funds, the International Fund for Ireland and, to a lesser extent, from local council sources. Ecotourism was considered to be an appropriate niche form of economic activity because of the extensive waterways and the survival of traditional landscapes and ways of life (Jenkins 2000). The evidence reveals that the establishment of the Greenbox made small contributions to balanced rural development in terms of the three pillars of sustainable development, environment, economy and society-culture. Many existing businesses were based on sustainable use of the natural environment and their owners were aware of the need to protect the environment as an asset for tourism even though all did not articulate this in terms of ecotourism.
The adoption of the EU Flower as a form of certification based on grey technical criteria heightened awareness of the importance of environmental protection through conservation of water and insulation of buildings. The funding that was available to adapt practices and buildings to comply with the EU Flower criteria enabled approved providers to adapt their premises. Savings resulted for them in terms of costs of heating and utilities and they were able to market their products to ecotourists. The Greenbox organisation promoted the approved products on their website bringing further benefits. There is no doubt that environmental awareness was increased in the area as a result of the establishment of the Greenbox and as a result of networking associated with training and information exchange associated with qualification for the EU Flower label. A small number of businesses provided integrated ecotourism experiences on site. Others collaborated with other ecotourism providers in order to provide such experiences. More generally, however, the organisations and providers felt that the Greenbox remained to establish a strong identity as an ecotourism destination in a meaningful sense. The emergence of a new organisation, the Greenbook, illustrates the interest of a group of dedicated providers in creating this identity.

Most of the businesses surveyed were established before the Greenbox came into being so that it was not a catalyst for the introduction of new enterprises. The exceptions stated that the Greenbox did not impact on their choice to establish the business. The providers who applied for the EU Flower, in the main, already complied with some of the requirements for certification which reduced the costs involved. Many businesses were supplementary sources of income rather than being a main source. The majority were, however, open throughout the year. Networking to refer clients to other businesses was practised widely, reflecting deliberate efforts to retain tourism expenditure locally.

The contributions to employment were relatively modest, but year-long, in an area where tourism per se provides mainly seasonal employment. All, except hotels and a thalassotherapy spa, employed less than five people and many employed two or less. They also provided opportunities for female entrepreneurship in areas where few alternatives exist. Most of the businesses were based on natural environmental resources rather than on cultural resources. The exceptions were tourism related to
genealogy and community activities based on the restoration of historic buildings and local festivals.

LESSONS TO BE LEARNED FROM THE GREENBOX EXPERIMENT
The Greenbox was established as a top-down, funding led project, designed for a defined area which was perceived as having an appropriate natural resource base for ecotourism development. Following international good practice, a definition of ecotourism was adopted as was a certification label. All three features were necessary in order to develop the destination but each had weaknesses that may not have been perceived at the outset. It was not realised that it would not prove possible to obtain a second tranche of funding from Interreg after the end of the initial five year period. As a result, it was not possible to continue to promote ecotourism and support the providers. There was some awareness of ecotourism and of the value of the natural environment among existing tourism organisations and providers in the Greenbox but limited consultation took place with local providers in developing the project. They may, therefore, not have been as informed about the objectives from the outset, as was desirable. The definition of ecotourism adopted by the Greenbox included environmental criteria but the EU Flower was based on technical criteria only and applied only to accommodation premises. The adoption of the label is understandable because it is based on clearly defined criteria which can be certified by existing quality standards evaluators. A label based on environmental criteria would have been much more difficult and expensive to implement and monitor. The project was organised through a network of primarily local stakeholders, professional staff and a provider network. The latter proved less effective than was initially planned. The Greenbox reveals many of the problems faced by short term networks including; lack of long term communication and short term support systems associated with top down, short lived projects which are dependent on external funding, as documented in the international literature (Gibson et al. 2005).

Although short term the Greenbox has illustrated that benefits can accrue. These benefits relate to the understanding gained of ecotourism by the organisations and providers, awareness of certification, and learning in terms of ecotourism development more generally. The interviews with the organisational representatives and providers illustrated that awareness of ecotourism as a particular form of tourism
that may be applicable to marginal areas in developed countries grew. Only a small number used the official definition adopted by the Greenbox but most referred to features that comply with accepted definitions of ecotourism. This aspect possibly raises questions as to the merits of having one definition of ecotourism, for these kinds of destinations, as opposed to using the principles of ecotourism within a broader rural tourism approach.

Local embeddedness was evident in the case of organisational representatives who had strong links with counterparts in other organisations. Disembedded networking was happening to access funding mainly. The providers were also embedded locally with other tourism providers and members of the local community in this way. However, they were also locally embedded in their use of available local resources to develop their products. Disembeddedness was mainly for marketing and promotion and, in instances, for funding.

This project is adding a new dimension to previous studies of networking in tourism by providing data and findings that illustrate how networks and associated levels of embeddedness and disembeddedness operate in the case of ecotourism. Some of the findings corroborate studies conducted in tourism in other developed world locations, such as Australia and the United Kingdom and contribute to the international literature in this instance. The research has highlighted the understandings of the constructs of networks, networking, embeddedness and disembeddedness on the part of ecotourism providers and supporting organisations. Some of the findings from this research have implications for tourism more generally. The development of the Greenbook highlights learning on behalf of the providers in terms of the benefit accrued from being a member of the Greenbox.

The development of the Greenbox, without what appeared to be, the consideration of existing informal networking capability raises questions as to the understanding, by those involved, of the success of joined up approaches including both ‘top down’ and ‘bottom up’ elements as proposed by academics like Murdoch (2000) and other rural development models such as the Leader programme. The Greenbook illustrates that some understanding of the value of these type of approaches existed among providers. This understanding, I would argue, is central to network longevity in future projects of this kind, either in ecotourism or in tourism more generally.
The value of the existing networking found in the Greenbox area, illustrates the communication that currently takes place in rural areas and highlights that, in tourism, there is still a strong culture of referrals (Mottiar 2007). Capitalising on these local strengths and communication between those in a certain business or industry, in my opinion, can foster the sustainable development of networked based projects, like the Greenbox, in the future. Further research to explore these issues could commence with examining the perspective of the ecotourists in a similar context (Dolnicar et al. 2008).

CLOSING STATEMENTS
As highlighted, the Greenbox network was an example of a short term, organisation led network. Although only in existence for a short period of time it was seen to accrue benefits. It can be appreciated that imposed, top down, networks developed in response to the availability of considerable external funding can have positive implications, for the area in which the network is developed, and also for those who are part of the network. Projects like the Greenbox can lead, in part, to a realisation of the need to develop, and utilise existing collaborative approaches such as networks and networking in order to foster growth and development and, in particular, in terms of niche tourism products like ecotourism. Learning from the responses of the organisational and provider representatives can allow researchers to consider questions, which this research raises, that require further investigation, including: the optimum way to develop ecotourism as a niche tourism product; the appropriate way to develop a network in these instances while also utilising existing methods of communication; and finally, the suitability of an accreditation method that only has one set of criteria (either green or grey) and one level of attainment to promote ecotourism. Ecotourists were not included in this research and their expectations and experiences are therefore absent from the discussion. It terms of planning an ecotourism destination (which was not the purpose of the study) it is important that they would be included.
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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: ORGANISATIONS INTERVIEWED

**Agency:** BMW Assembly

**Year Established** 1999

**Synopsis:** The Border Midland and Western Regional Assembly was one of two Regional Assemblies established in 1999 by the Irish Government to give effect to the division of the country into two regions for Structural Funds purposes. The BMW region retained full Objective 1 status for the period to 2006; for the 2007-13 funding period, the BMW region no longer qualifies for Objective 1 funding (having a GDP per capita above 75% of the EU average) and qualifies instead as a phasing-in region for Objective 2 funding (Regional Competitiveness and Employment Objective).

**Agency:** Fáilte Ireland

**Year Established** Established as Bord Fáilte in 1955; reconstituted as Fáilte Ireland 2003

**Synopsis:** Fáilte Ireland is the national tourism development board and it provides strategic and practical support to develop and sustain Ireland as a high-quality and competitive tourist destination. Fáilte Ireland works with the tourism industry in areas including business support, enterprise development, training and education, research, marketing and regional development.

**Agency:** Family Homes of Ireland

**Year Established** 1994

**Synopsis:** As the name implies, the Family Homes of Ireland are B and B providers but all establishments are family run. The Family Homes of Ireland was established in 1994 and relate to smaller B&Bs of Ireland, whose homes offer a friendly welcome and quality accommodation. The organisation has nearly 300 homes registered with them.
**Agency:** Greenbox  
**Year Established** 2003  
**Synopsis:** The Greenbox is Ireland's first integrated ecotourism destination. The area of the Greenbox includes Counties Fermanagh, Leitrim, West Cavan, North Sligo, South Donegal and North West Monaghan.

**Agency:** Irish Tourism Industry Confederation (ITIC)  
**Year Established** 1984  
**Synopsis**  
ITIC is the representative body for the tourism industry, dealing with Government on issues influencing tourism policy and performance, investment strategies and funding priorities, particularly for international marketing and product development.

**Agency:** LEADER Partnerships  
**Year Established from 1991 to 2007/08**  
**Synopsis:** The Rural Development Programme, also known as LEADER, is designed to target resources to support improvements to the quality of life in rural areas and the diversification and development of the rural economy.

**Agency:** Local Authorities  
**Ireland**  
**Year Established** 1989  
**Local government functions in Ireland** are mostly exercised by thirty-four local authorities, termed county or city councils, which cover the entire territory of the state. The principal decision-making body in each authority is composed of the members of the council, elected by universal franchise in local elections. Many of the authorities' statutory functions are, however, the responsibility of their chief executives, termed city or council managers, who are career officials appointed by an independent government body. The competencies of the city and county councils include planning, transport infrastructure, sanitary services, public safety (notably fire services) and the provision of public libraries. A further eighty town councils form a second tier of local government.
NI (1973)

Northern Ireland is divided into 26 districts for local government purposes. In Northern Ireland local councils do not carry out the same range of functions as those in the rest of the United Kingdom, for example they have no responsibility for education, for road building or for housing (though they do nominate members to the advisory Northern Ireland Housing Council). Their functions do include waste and recycling services, leisure and community services, building control and local economic and cultural development. They are not planning authorities, but are consulted on some planning applications. The collection of rates is handled by the Land and Property Services agency. The councils of the 26 districts are variously styled 'district councils', 'borough councils', 'city councils' and 'city and district councils'.

Agency: Northern Ireland Tourist Board
Year Established 1948 (reconstituted 1992)
Synopsis: The Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) is a non-departmental public body of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment Northern Ireland, which was constituted under the Tourism (Northern Ireland) Order 1992. It is the body responsible for the development, promotion and marketing of Northern Ireland as a tourist destination. It also advises the Department on the formulation and implementation of policy in relation to the development of tourism and interacts with other government departments, within the tourism industry in Northern Ireland and with its counterparts elsewhere in the UK and in Ireland.

Agency: The International Fund for Ireland
Year Established 1986
Synopsis: The International Fund for Ireland is an independent international organisation which was established by the British and Irish Governments in 1986. Financed by contributions from the United States of America, the European Union, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, the Fund promotes economic and social advance, and encourages contact, dialogue and reconciliation between nationalists and unionists throughout Ireland. At its core, the Fund’s mission is to tackle the underlying causes of sectarianism and violence and to build reconciliation between people and within and between communities throughout the island of Ireland.
**Agency** Tourism Ireland  
**Year Established** 2000  
**Synopsis:** Tourism Ireland is the agency responsible for marketing the island of Ireland overseas as a holiday destination. Tourism Ireland was established in 2000 under the framework of the Belfast Agreement of Good Friday, April 1998, to increase tourism to the island of Ireland as a whole.

**Agency:** Western Development Commission  
**Year Established** 1997 (non statutory) 1999 (statutory)  
**Synopsis:** The Western Development Commission (WDC) is a statutory body that was set up to promote both social and economic development in the Western Region (Donegal, Leitrim, Sligo, Mayo, Roscommon, Galway and Clare) by ensuring that government policy is directed at improving the social and economic situation in the region by developing projects in tourism, industry, marine, renewable energy, technology and organic agri-food. In using the €32 million Western Investment Fund (WIF) the WDC provides loans and equity to business and local communities in the west.

**Agency** IFI Inland fisheries Ireland  
**Year Established** 2010  
**Synopsis:** The Inland Fisheries Act 2010 (No. 10 of 2010) provided for the restructuring of the inland fisheries sector through the creation of a national inland fisheries organisation, Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI), which replaced the Central Fisheries Board and seven Regional Fisheries Boards. On July 1st 2010 Inland Fisheries Ireland was formally established as the agency responsible for the conservation, protection, management, marketing, development and improvement of our inland fisheries and sea angling resources.

**Agency:** Peace and Reconciliation (Peace II Fund)  
**Year Established** 2000  
**Synopsis:** The EU Programme for PEACE and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland (PEACE II) is the second of two Operational Programmes which implement the Community Support Framework.
The PEACE II Operational Programme addresses the economic and social issues identified in the context of Northern Ireland's current transition to a more peaceful and stable society. Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland received support for the period 2000-2006 and approximately €425 million.

**Agency**  ICBAN (Irish Cross Border Area Network)

**Year Established** 1995

**Synopsis:** The web site states that “ICBAN will continue to improve the quality of life and prosperity of the Central Border Region by creating a dynamic model of best practice and partnership in cross border development”. In 1995 ICBAN was established as a network of councillors from the central Ireland/Northern Ireland border area with one common aim: to respond to the unique economic and social needs of the Central Border Region.

**Agency** Teagasc

**Year Established** 1988

**Synopsis:** Teagasc, (The Agriculture and Food Development Authority) is the national body providing integrated research, advisory and training services to the agriculture and food industry and rural communities. The organisation is funded by state grant aid; the National Development Plan 2007 to 2013; fees for research, advisory and training services; income from national and EU competitive research programmes; and revenue from farming activities and commodity levies. Teagasc is a client-based organisation and operates in partnership with all sectors of the agriculture and food industry and with rural development agencies. It has developed close alliances with research, advisory and training agencies throughout the world and is continuously seeking to expand international contacts.

**Agency** Fermanagh Lakelands

**Year Established** 1999

**Synopsis** Fermanagh Lakelands is a public private partnership based in County Fermanagh responsible for marketing and promotion of tourism in Fermanagh.
APPENDIX B: HEALTH AND SAFETY PROTOCOL

Introduction
This research protocol has been developed in line with the guidelines set down by the NUI Galway Ethics Committee.

An email has been received from the NUI Galway Ethics Board stating that they do not deem it necessary for the research to receive approval from the ethics committee.

All respondents are adults and can opt out of the research whenever they may wish to do so.

Informing research participants
Participants were informed fully on the purpose of the research. This involved the sending of an initial letter and a follow-up phone call. Participants were also asked if the interview could be recorded and only when they were agreeable was the voice recorder engaged. Transcripts of the interviews can be forwarded to participants if such a request is made. Participants have also been assured that the data they provide will be treated in the strictest confidence and their name will not appear on any report or document arising from the research.

Documenting Results and Storing Primary Data
Throughout their work, researchers are required to keep clear and accurate records of the research procedures followed and of the results obtained. Data generated in the course of the research must be kept securely in paper or electronic form, as appropriate. The university expects such data to be securely held of a period of ten years. Data will be stored in line with the Data Protection Act and the University’s [Data Protection] policy (NUI Galway Code of Good Practice 2002).

Confidentiality
Special precautions will be taken in the case of audio recording to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. Transcriptions and recordings will be kept in a safe and secure location and will be coded to ensure anonymity.

Interview participants are not identified on the recordings by the researcher and recordings are saved under coded names, identifiably only by the researcher, until they are destroyed on completion of the transcription.
APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE ORGANISATIONS

Embeddedness and Disembeddedness in Rural Tourism

Relevant information:
This interview schedule forms part of a research PhD being carried out in the School of Geography and Archaeology at the National University of Ireland, Galway under the supervision of Dr Mary Cawley. The PhD is entitled “Networks and networking in ecotourism promotion: evidence from Ireland’s Greenbox ecotourism destination”. The research is being funded by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) through the Fourth Programme of Research in Third Level Institutions (PRTLI4) as part of the ISSP and CISC programme of research.

The following is divided into eight sections. The questions will be examined through a semi-structured, face to face interview of approximately 1.5 hours in duration.

The research is developed against the increasing consideration being afforded to the sustainability of environmental, sociocultural and economic aspects of rural development policy. Consequently the research is designed to contribute to the better understanding and promotion of innovation in rural tourism so as to contribute to a more balanced rural development. The project has a particular focus on the key concepts of embeddedness, disembeddedness, networks and networking.

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Telephone: 0876576141

Email: t.conway5@nuigalway.ie
1. Profiling

To be completed in advance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Unit and Contact details</th>
<th>Date of interview</th>
<th>Location of interview and description of location</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Name:</td>
<td>1.6 date:</td>
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<td>1.2 Address:</td>
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<td>1.5 Web:</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.9 Role of unit with regard to tourism:</td>
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</table>

**Interviewee**

1.10 Name of interviewee:

1.11 Occupational title:

1.12 Day to day responsibilities relating to tourism:

1.13 Male □ Female □

1.14 Age Group: 20-24 □ 25-34 □ 35-44 □ 45-54 □ 55+ □

1.15 Highest level of education attained:

Second Level □ Diploma □ Degree □ Masters □ PhD □

1.16 How long have you held your current position?
1.17 Record any background professional information that may be pertinent to the project

2. Structure and Role of the Organisation/Unit

2.1 Remit:

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<th>National</th>
<th>Regional</th>
<th>Local</th>
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<td>Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unit</td>
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</table>

2.2 Structure of unit:

Private Company ☐ Public Sector ☐

2.2.1 Organisational structure

Branch of State Agency ☐ Stand Alone Unit ☐ Other ☐

2.2.2 ________________________________

2.2.3 Legal status

PLC ☐ LC ☐ Partnership ☐ Co-op ☐ Sole trader ☐ Voluntary Organisation/Charity ☐

2.2.5 Other

2.3 What is the decision making structure of the unit?

Board ☐ Committee ☐ Other ☐

2.4 Number of Board members
2.5 Whom do they represent? (Stakeholder groups and numbers representing each)

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<th>Stakeholder Groups</th>
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2.6 How many staff does the unit employ who are involved in rural development related activities and tourism? (Including the informant)

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<th>Part Time</th>
<th>Seasonal/occasional</th>
<th>Total (to be calculated)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Rural development</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tourism</td>
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</table>

2.7 Does your unit have any role relating to ecotourism?

Yes ☐ No ☐

2.8 What is this role?

2.9 How does your unit define ecotourism?

2.10 How many staff are involved? (Record m/f; FT, PT, seasonal)

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<th>Part Time</th>
<th>Seasonal/occasional</th>
<th>Total (to be calculated)</th>
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<td>m</td>
<td>f</td>
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2.11 **Role of this unit in relation to rural development:**

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<th>ROLE</th>
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<th>Elaborate on what is involved</th>
<th>Number of staff/portion of staff time involved</th>
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<td>Establishment</td>
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<td>Marketing</td>
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<td>Regulation (of a label, quality, the environment)</td>
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<td>Representation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Any other aspects of business development/expansion</td>
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2.11.1 Role of this unit of the organisation in relation to tourism/ecotourism:

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<th>ROLE</th>
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<th>Elaborate on what is involved</th>
<th>Number of staff/portion of staff time involved</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Promotion</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Regulation (of a label, quality, the environment)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Representation</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any other aspects of business development/expansion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.12 Does the unit have any responsibility for the accreditation of an ecolabel?

If ‘yes’ what does this involve?

2.13 Types of businesses the unit supports (community groups, coops etc)

2.14 Can you provide information on the amount and size of businesses assisted in the last five years?
Approximate number of businesses – In the Greenbox- assisted in the last 5 years (obtain documentation)

How many of these businesses are involved in ecotourism specifically?

2.15 How much was your total budget in 2010? (Most recent year for which information is available) (€)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Allocation of budget</th>
<th>% budget</th>
<th>Purpose (business est., expansion, training, promotion/marketing …)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tourism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecotourism, if separate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% in the Greenbox</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.15.1 What are the source(s) of the budget?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Proportion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State Department</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Leader Company</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Sources</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.15.2 Is there a special allocation for ecotourism (how much and from where?)

2.16 Who makes decisions on the allocation of the budget?

*Get documents

2.16.1 Are there any difficulties in that regard?
2.17 If you outlined your support of businesses in 2.11 can you describe the application process and the criteria for receiving the support?
*Get documents

2.18 What is the impact of the current recession on budgetary operation?

2.19 Are there any specific impacts in relation to tourism and ecotourism?

3. Tourism

I will first ask a few general tourism questions and then I would like to discuss ecotourism in the context of the Greenbox.

3.1 How important is the natural environment for tourism in the Greenbox?
*Is the natural environment used appropriately?
*Query also misuse and threats

3.2 Does the unit feel that the natural environment in the Greenbox is adequately promoted?
*If not why not?

3.3 How important does the unit consider the built environment for tourism in the Greenbox?

3.4 Does the unit see the social environment as having an important role to play in attracting tourism activity (tourism businesses and tourist numbers) to the Greenbox?

3.4.1 Does the unit see the cultural environment as having an important role to play in attracting tourism activity (tourism businesses and tourist numbers) to the Greenbox?

3.5 Does the unit see the economic environment as having an important role to play in attracting tourism activity (tourism businesses and tourist numbers) to the Greenbox?

3.5.1 As a need to support someone’s income

3.5.2 In order to gain the special support that is provided for ecotourism

3.6 What is it that attracts tourists to the Greenbox?
*Green, authenticity etc

**The Greenbox**

3.7 Is this unit a member of the board of the Greenbox?

3.7.1 If ‘yes’, what are the obligations/duties as a member of the board?
*Planning (regulation), information about economic opportunities, and distribution of literature.

3.7.2 If answer is no; is the unit involved in any way with the Greenbox?

3.8 When did the unit become involved in the Greenbox?

3.9 Why did the unit become involved in the Greenbox?

3.10 Has this involvement changed over time? (Increased/decreased or changed in other ways)

3.10.1 Why did this change take place?

3.11 What is the main role of the Greenbox in the region in your unit’s view?

3.12 What are the benefits to the unit from being involved in the Greenbox?

3.13 Are there any disadvantages?

4. **Linking with other organisations**

**Networks**

4.1 Is the unit represented on the board of another organisation/s?

4.1.1 If ‘yes’, would like to obtain some information on the organisations and the roles played in this context.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Role</th>
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<tbody>
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</table>

*look for forms of contact etc...

**Relationships**

4.2 Did you have links with the previously mentioned organisations before the Greenbox was established (in the context of rural development or tourism)?

4.3 Who/what other organisations does the unit link with and why? *That are pertinent to rural development and/or tourism*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Formal/informal (Form)</th>
<th>Geographical unit (local, county, national etc.)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Insert information for each organisation

*Some of the linking information: are they geographical, weak or strong ties….

4.4 Has the establishment of the Greenbox had an impact on the unit’s links with other organisations in relation to rural development and or tourism?

4.4.1 Yes ☐ No ☐

4.4.2 If yes how:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Negative</th>
<th>Reason</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Networking

4.5 Which are the most important organisations the unit links with in terms of tourism development and promotion?

4.5.1 Why are these considered to be most important?

4.6 Which are the least important organisations the unit links with in terms of tourism development and promotion?

4.6.1 Why are these considered to be least important?

4.7 Which organisations are most influential with regard to ecotourism in the Greenbox?

4.7.1 Why are these organisations are most influential with regard to ecotourism in the Greenbox?

4.8 Are there any difficulties in collaborating with these other organisations?
*In relation to ecotourism in the Greenbox

4.8.1 Have there been conflicts over any issues?

4.9 Is decision making at meetings impacted on by poor attendance?
* Conduct in meetings

4.10 Are the links that exist likely to last?

4.10.1 Why are they likely to last?

4.10.2 If ‘No’ why not?

4.11 More generally, are there any weaknesses surrounding the links between organisations in this region in relation to the Greenbox?

4.12 Does the unit link with producers in the Greenbox?

Yes ☐ No ☐
4.12.1 If no, why not?

4.12.2 If yes, what are the purpose, frequency and importance of linking/meetings with producers? (Individuals and groups)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Producer type/group</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Frequency and type of link (formal/informal)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

4.12.3 If ‘yes’, which types of producer are the most beneficial to link with in terms of ecotourism?

*i.e. accommodation providers, activities etc

4.12.4 Why are they most beneficial?

*promotion, very eco aware etc

4.12.5 Can you provide specific examples of these producers?

4.13 Are there other producers who are active in ecotourism in any way with which you do not link? (types, examples)

4.13.1 In what way are they active?
5. Marketing and promotion

5.1 Does the unit use an image of this region in a report, brochure, a label?
*Obtain the document

5.1.1 Why is this image used?

5.1.2 Are there any advantages for ecotourism in using this image?

5.2 What role does the unit have in the promotion and marketing of the Greenbox? (If any)

5.3 What is the competitive advantage of the Greenbox versus similar regions?
*Authenticity

5.3.1 On the island of Ireland

5.3.2 Abroad

5.4. How important are the numbers of tourists that visit the Greenbox for your county?

5.5 What is the relative distribution between international and national tourists in the Greenbox?

5.6 Does the unit have a view on how effectively ecotourism in Ireland is promoted?
* seek evaluation within the question
* Information on national and international promotion

Labelling

5.7 Was the unit involved in developing the Greenbox label and in what way?

5.8 Does the unit have a role in regulating the Greenbox label?
5.9 What form does this take?

5.10 Is the organisation responsible for the regulation of any other label pertinent to ecotourism? *EXPLAIN what you mean

5.11 Are you aware of the EU flower label?

5.12 Does your unit support organisations and producers, or others etc in obtaining the EU Flower?

5.12.1 In what way?

5.12.2 If not involved: Would it be possible for the unit to become involved in this task?

5.13 Does the unit have a regulation role with regard to any other label?

6. Ecotourism’s contribution to rural development

6.1 Did the unit contribute to the development of any policy for rural development in the last five years? *prompt for way

6.1.1 Remit of the policy (obtain documentation)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National</th>
<th>Regional</th>
<th>Local</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6.1.2 Does this policy address tourism/ ecotourism/ rural tourism?

Embeddedness/disembeddedness

6.2 Does the unit link with/work with the local community?
*Prompt for type of involvement

6.3 Where does the unit source resources for the following?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Sourced from</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Labour</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate events</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibitions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food for canteens</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Printing and Stationary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6.4 Does the unit organise visits for visiting delegates to Greenbox locations?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Why</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7. **Future Plans**

7.1 The next five years: how do **you** see the role of ecotourism, in particular in the Greenbox, evolving?

7.1.1 The next five years: how does **the unit** see the role of ecotourism, in particular in the Greenbox, evolving?

* Does the unit see future opportunities in ecotourism for the Greenbox area?

7.1.2 What will the unit’s role be?

7.2 Does the unit envisage any threats to the future development of ecotourism in the Greenbox?

8. **Other**

8.1 Is there anything else that you would like to discuss/add that you feel I may have omitted relating to the role of ecotourism in rural development in the Greenbox?
8.2 Is there anything in your own professional or personal background that influences your views on ecotourism? (If not captured already)
## APPENDIX D: NON PARTICIPANTS

**Table 4.1: Businesses that did not participate in the research**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Number (n=10)</th>
<th>Reasons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Activity centre</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Tender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity website</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Business no longer functioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B&amp;B</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Business no longer functioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B&amp;B</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Terminal illness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boat charter</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Failed to attend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fishery</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Failed to attend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pet farm</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Business no longer functioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self catering</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Did not wish to participate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yoga centre</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Non contactable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX E: PROVIDER SCHEDULE

Embeddedness and Disembeddedness in Rural Tourism

Provider

Relevant information:

This interview schedule forms part of a research PhD being carried out in the School of Geography and Archaeology at the National University of Ireland, Galway under the supervision of Dr Mary Cawley. The PhD is entitled “Networks and networking in ecotourism promotion: evidence from Ireland’s Greenbox ecotourism destination”. The research is being funded by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) through the Fourth Programme of Research in Third Level Institutions (PRTLI4) as part of the ISSP and CISC programme of research.

The research is developed against the increasing consideration being placed on the sustainability of environmental, sociocultural and economic aspects of rural development policy. The research is designed to contribute to the better understanding and promotion of innovation in rural tourism so as to add to a more balanced rural development. The project has a particular focus on the concepts of networks and networking and how enmeshed they are in the localities in which the tourism activity occurs. The research focuses on a case study of the Greenbox (Ireland’s first ecotourism destination), and on the tourism that occurs in the corresponding geographical area.

Contact Details:

PhD candidate: Therese Conway

Address: Room 114, Department of Geography, NUI Galway

Telephone: 0876576141

Email: t.conway5@nuigalway.ie
1. Profiling

To be completed in advance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Producer and Contact details</th>
<th>Date of interview</th>
<th>Location of interview and description of location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Name:</td>
<td>1.6 date:</td>
<td>1.7 Location:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Address:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Phone:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Email:</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.8 Description:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5 Web:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Interviewee**

1.10 Name of interviewee:

1.11 Role in the business:

Owner [ ] Manager [ ]

1.12 Male [ ] Female [ ]

1.13 Age Group: 20-24 [ ] 25-34 [ ] 35-44 [ ] 45-54 [ ] 55+ [ ]

1.14 Highest level of education attained:

Second Level [ ] Diploma [ ] Degree [ ] Masters [ ] PhD [ ]
1.15 Other professional qualification/s and or experience pertinent to your business

The Business

2.0 What is/are the main product/s of the business?

2.1 When was the business established? (Year)

2.2 Why was the business established?

2.3 By whom (i.e. history of the business)

2.4 Who is/are the current owner/s?

2.5 Are you/the owner(s) from this locality?
   Yes ☐ No ☐

2.6 Have you/they always lived here? (Register if different answer for different people)

2.7 If not, when did you/they move to live here?

2.8 Why did you move to live here?

2.9 If you/the owner moved from elsewhere would you mind telling me where you resided before and for how long?

2.10 How long have you held your current position (in the case of the manager)?

2.11 Is the business:
2.12 How many staff does the business employ who are involved in tourism? (Including the informant)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Full Time</th>
<th>Part Time</th>
<th>Seasonal/occasional</th>
<th>Total (to be calculated)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>m</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>f</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

2.13 Legal status of the business

PLC ☐ LC ☐ Partnership ☐ Co-op ☐ Sole trader ☐ Voluntary Organisation/Charity ☐

Other ☐ _______________________

2.14 What is the decision making structure of the business? (In the case of co-ops etc)

Owner ☐ Manager ☐ Board ☐ Committee ☐ Other ☐

2.15 Number of Board members ____

2.16 Whom do they represent? (If a board in place) (Stakeholder groups and numbers representing each)

2.17 Does the business have any role relating to ecotourism?

Yes ☐ No ☐

2.18 What is this role?

2.19 How do you/does the business define ecotourism?
2. 20 How many staff are involved in ecotourism? (Record m/f; FT, PT, seasonal)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Full Time</th>
<th>Part Time</th>
<th>Seasonal/occasional</th>
<th>Total (to be calculated)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Establishment and development of the business

I would like to ask a number of questions relating to support that you may have received in establishing and or developing the business

2. 21 Did you obtain financial assistance in establishing the business? (grant or loan from family or financial institution)

2.22 From whom?

2.22.1 Approximately how much? (€/£)

2.22.2 For what purpose?

2.23 Did you obtain financial assistance in expanding the business?

*A loan or grant from a bank or development company

2.24 When? (Year)

2.24.1 From whom?

2.24.2 Approximately how much? (€/£)

2.24.3 For what purpose?

2. 25 Can you describe the process and the criteria for receiving support?

2.26 Were there any problems in obtaining finance in either establishing or expanding the business?
2.27 What was/were the most importance source/s of advice in establishing the business?
(Source, type of advice)

2.27.1 Why was this important?

2.28 What was/were the most important source/s of advice in expanding the business?

2.28.1 Why was this important?

2.29 Where there any problems in obtaining advice to establish or expand your business? (Ask what the problems were)

2.30 Have you received training relating to your business?

2.30.1 When?

2.30.2 From whom?

2.30.3 How important was this for the business (and why)?

2.31 Where there any problems in obtaining training relating to your business? (ask what the problems were)

2.32 Have you received support in promoting and or marketing your business?

2.32.1 From whom?

2.32.2 Type of support?

2.32.3 How important has this support been for your business?
2.32.4 Have there been any problems in obtaining advice to promote or market your business? (What have these problems been?)

2.32.5 If you have not obtained any external assistance, why not?

2.33 Who has the most influence in tourism in the region?

2.34 Why are they the most influential?

2.35 Do you/business owner/s have another (supporting) income occupation (i.e. agriculture, teaching, industry, each)?

2.35.1 Do you own any other tourism related business?

2.35.2 What is this business?

2.35.3 When was it established?

2.35.4 Why was it established?

2.35.5 By whom was it established?

2.35.6 Approximately what proportion of your/owner/s income comes from the tourism business(s)?

The Greenbox

I am interested in learning about the involvement of businesses in the Greenbox in this area. I would like to ask a number of questions relating to the Greenbox as it was in operation between 2003 and 2008 and more recently.

3.1 Were you (as a producer) a member of the Greenbox in the past? (between 2003 and 2008)?
3.1.1 If no, why did you not join?

3.2 If ‘yes’ When did you become involved in the Greenbox?

3.3 Why did you become involved in the Greenbox?

3.4 Are you still a member?

3.4.1 If ‘no’, when did your membership cease?

3.4.2 Why did your membership cease?

3.5 What did/does membership involve?

3.6 Did this involvement change over time? (Increased/decreased or changed in other ways)

3.6.1 Why did this change take place?

3.7 What are/were the benefits to you from being involved in the Greenbox?

(Expand)

3.8 Are/were there any disadvantages? (Expand)

3.9 What is it that attracts tourists to the Greenbox?
*Green, authenticity etc, natural, cultural, economic and social environment

3.9.1 Where do tourists stay when they visit your business (in the case of activity providers)?
3.9.2 What activities do the tourists engage in when they stay at your premises (in the case of accommodation providers)?

3.9.3 Does the Greenbox have an image, in your view?

3.9.4 More generally, what is/was the main role of the Greenbox in the region in your view?

I would like to ask about links between tourism businesses in the Greenbox /Greenbox area

3.10 If not answered above, do/did you link with other producers in the Greenbox?

Yes □ No □

3.10.1 If no, why not?

3.11 Which other businesses did/do you link with and why? (the producers, types and reasons for links)

3.12 Which of these links are of greatest important for your business and why?

3.12.2 Do any of these contacts relate to ecotourism?

3.12.3 Which?

3.12.4 Which types of other producers are the most beneficial to link with in terms of ecotourism? *i.e. accommodation providers, activities etc

*Who- names of businesses

3.12.5 Why are they most beneficial?

3.13 Are there other producers who are active in ecotourism in any way with which you do not link? (Types, examples)
3.13.1 Why do you not link with them?

3.13.2 In what way are they active?

3.13.3 Are you a member of the board of the Greenbox?

3.13.4 If ‘yes’, what are the obligations/duties as a member of the board?
   *Planning (regulation), information about economic opportunities, and distribution of literature.

3.14 Were you involved in developing the Greenbox label (brand) and in what way?

3.15 Do you have a role in regulating the Greenbox label?

   Yes ☐   No ☐

3.16 What form does this take?

3.17 Are you responsible for the regulation of any other label pertinent to ecotourism?
   * EXPLAIN what you mean Green Hospitality etc

3.18 Are you aware of the EU flower label?

3.19 Do you hold the EU Flower Label?

   Yes ☐   No ☐

3.19.1 If ‘yes’ what does it involve?

3.20 If not involved: Would it be possible for you to obtain it?

3.22 Does your business have any other ecolabel or quality label or any kind?
3.23 What is/are this/these labels?

3.23.1 When did you obtain the label/s?

3.23.2 Is it monitored in any way?

3.23.3 By whom?

3.23.4 What are the advantages of having this label?

3.23.5 Are there any disadvantages?

3.23.6 Does the business have any responsibility for the accreditation of an ecolabel?
If ‘yes’ what does this involve?

3.24 Are you represented on the board, or do you link with, other organisation/s or producer group (that are pertinent to tourism)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Role (member/officer)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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</tbody>
</table>

3.24.1 Do you link with individual businesses?

3.25 Who/what other organisations does the unit link with and why? (That are pertinent to tourism)

3.26 Has the establishment of the Greenbox had an impact on your links with other producers/organisations?

Yes ☐ No ☐

3.27 Which are the most important organisations you link with in terms of tourism development and promotion?

3.28 Why are these considered to be most important?
3.28.1 Are the links that exist likely to last?

3.29 Are there other organisations that you link with that are not particularly important in terms of tourism? (eg IFA)

3.30 Why are these not considered to be important (in tourism terms – why are they still important to link with)?

3.31 Which organisations are most influential with regard to ecotourism in the Greenbox?

3.31.1 Why are these organisations are most influential with regard to ecotourism in the Greenbox?

3.32 More generally, are there any weaknesses surrounding the links between producers in this region in relation to the Greenbox?

**Ecotourism’s contribution to rural development**

3.34 Did you contribute to any policy for rural development or tourism in the last five years?

*prompt for way *ask for name of policy

**Economic issues**

4.1 Do you mind telling me approximately how much your turnover was in 2010? (Most recent year for which information is available) (£)

**Categories**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt; €10,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>€10,000 - €30,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>€30,000-€60,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>€60,000-€100,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>€100,000-€500,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.2 What was your percentage profit for the same year?

4.3 What is the impact of the current recession on your business?

4.4 Are there any specific impacts in relation to ecotourism?

**Marketing and promotion**

5.1 How do you promote your business?

5.2 Do you use an [image](#) of this region in promoting your business in a report, brochure, a label?

*Obtain the document/s*

5.2.1 What is the image?

5.2.2 Who developed it?

5.2.3 Why is this image used?

5.2.4 Which are the main regions that compete with the Greenbox for tourists?

5.2.5 In Ireland

5.2.6 Abroad

5.2.7 How do they compete?

5.2.8 On the island of Ireland

5.2.9 Abroad

5.2.10 What effects are these competitors having for tourist numbers in the Greenbox?
5.2.11 Are the numbers of tourists that visit the Greenbox specifically important for your business?

Very important □ somewhat important □ neither important or unimportant □ of little importance □ of no importance □

5.12 What proportion of tourists come to you/heard of your business through the Greenbox? (Does being located in the Greenbox impact on your visitor numbers?)

5.13 What is the relative distribution between international and national tourists that come to your business?

5.13.1 Are there obstacles for tourists getting to the area?

5.14 Do you have a view on how effectively ecotourism in Ireland is promoted?

* seek evaluation within the question
* Information on national and international promotion

Extremely effectively □ effectively □ neither effectively or ineffectively □ somewhat ineffectively □ ineffectively □

Embeddedness/disembeddedness

6.1 Does your business link with /work with/ have contact with the local community?

*Prompt for type of involvement

6.1.1 Do you sponsor any local events? Which events and what types of sponsorship?

6.2 Where does the business source the following?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Sourced from</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Labour</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertising</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6.3 Have you received familiarisation visits for visiting delegates (tour operators, journalists) to Greenbox locations?

6.3.1 Who was primarily responsible for organising these visits?

*Name of organisation

6.3.2 Have you helped to organise any of these visits?

6.4 Has the Greenbox helped to obtain media coverage for you?

6.4.1 What type of coverage?

6.4.2 Have you had media coverage in any other way?

6.4.3 Are there any threats (currently) to ecotourism/tourism in the Greenbox?

*Water, pollution, fly tipping etc

**Future Plans**

7.1 The next five years: how do you see the role of ecotourism, in particular in the Greenbox, evolving?

7.2 What will your business’s role be in promoting ecotourism?
7.3 Do you envisage any threats to the future development of ecotourism in the Greenbox? What are these?

**Other**

8.1 Is there anything else that you would like to discuss/add that you feel I may have omitted relating to the role of ecotourism in the Greenbox?

8.2 Is there anything in your own professional or personal background that influences your views on ecotourism? (If not captured already)
APPENDIX F: LETTER OF PARTICIPATION

Date: 12th May 2011

RE: A study of ecotourism in the Greenbox area funded by the Irish Higher Education Authority

Dear xxx,

I write to request your involvement in a research project which I am conducting for my PhD thesis at NUI Galway. The project relates to ecotourism in the Greenbox area and its potential contribution to rural development. The research is funded by the Higher Education Authority and is supervised by Dr. Mary Cawley, School of Geography and Archaeology, NUI Galway.

The research is designed to contribute to the better understanding and promotion of innovation in rural tourism so as to contribute to more balanced rural development. As part of the research, I will be interviewing organisations and producers in the North West of Ireland who have involvement with the Greenbox. From background research, your organisation/business has been selected as one of these and your participation in the study will be most helpful in gaining a better understanding of ecotourism in the area.

The interview will take a little over one hour. It will discuss topics relating to rural tourism and ecotourism such as the following: the unit’s/business role in relation to tourism and ecotourism; role with regard to rural development and policy; the role of the physical, economic and socio-cultural environment for ecotourism; links with other organisations; marketing and promotion of the region; and the Greenbox per se. Not all questions may necessarily apply to your organisation/business. The information that you provide will be treated in confidence.

I would be most grateful if you would be willing to have me call to your office to discuss the above issues, as your expertise will greatly enhance the research. Alternatively, perhaps you could suggest a colleague whom I should contact. I plan to be in xxx during the week xxx and I hope that it will be possible to arrange to
meet with you at a mutually suitable time at your office. I will telephone within the coming week in order to discuss this with you.

If you have any queries in the meantime please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Therese Conway
PhD Candidate in Geography
t.conway5@nuigalway.ie; 087-6576141
APPENDIX G: THANK YOU EMAIL

Dear

I am just emailing to thank you for your recent involvement in the PhD research; “Networks and networking in ecotourism promotion: evidence from Ireland’s Greenbox ecotourism destination”.

Your time and willingness to participate is very much appreciated.

Thank you again.

Best regards,

Therese
## APPENDIX H: ESTABLISHMENT OF ORGANISATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Year Established</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Greenbox</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leitrim Co Co</td>
<td>1989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sligo Co Co</td>
<td>1898</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cavan Co Co</td>
<td>1989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monaghan Co Co</td>
<td>1898</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fermanagh DC</td>
<td>1970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BMW</td>
<td>1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WDC</td>
<td>1997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teagasc</td>
<td>1988</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West Tourism</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism Ireland</td>
<td>1998</td>
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<tr>
<td>NITB</td>
<td>1948</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failte Ireland</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ITIC</td>
<td>1984</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICBAN</td>
<td>1995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWARD</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cavan Monaghan Leader</td>
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<td>Donegal Leader</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leitrim Leader</td>
<td>1996</td>
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<td>FHI</td>
<td>1994</td>
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## APPENDIX I: BUSINESS TURNOVER

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<th>Provider Type</th>
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<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Caravan park</td>
<td>60-100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>280</td>
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<tr>
<td>Country homes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Guesthouse</td>
<td>60-100</td>
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<td>Hostel</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-catering</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small hotel</td>
<td>1-5m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1-5m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational centre</td>
<td>100-500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surf school</td>
<td>10-30</td>
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<td>Spa</td>
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<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boat charter</td>
<td>30-60</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fishery</td>
<td>-</td>
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</table>
APPENDIX J