Leaving No Trace in the Irish Countryside: Effecting Behavioural Change of Recreationists

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Currently in the process of completing PhD research, submission April (2019).

Active member of Leave No Trace Ireland, which aims to promote responsible recreation throughout the island of Ireland.
2018 was a great year for Irish tourism, with continuous growth on an already impressive 2017. There was over 10.6 million visitors to our shore.

The National Trails Office has noted a significant increase in the range of outdoor activity events being run around the country as well as a growth in participation in these activity's.

Diversification of the tourism market and programs like the Wild Atlantic Way has lead to the strong growth of revenue in tourism.
Littering

*It would definitely be rubbish, the indiscriminate dumping of rubbish. That would be the main one we would say.* (TRE02)
Conflict

The sheer volumes of people that visit the area can be a big issue. It can lead to erosion of trails and be a big problem for people. The is also the issue of car parking. (TRE01)
Wildlife Disturbance

I think people's engagement with wildlife seems to bother me the most, whether it's getting too close to it or whether they improperly store food. (BCE13)
WHAT IS LEAVE NO TRACE?

Mission: Promoting and inspiring responsible outdoor recreation through education, research and partnerships across the island of Ireland
How Do You Change Behaviour?

Legislation?

Education?

Infrastructure?

Other?
Objectives

Examine the attitudes and behaviours of outdoor recreationists regarding environmentally responsible behaviour.

Review and Critique the evolving theories relating to behavioural change.

Investigate and evaluate the efficacy of strategies used to achieve behavioural change in a range of context.

Develop and apply a theoretical framework illustrating the factors required to engender environmentally responsible behaviours in recreationists.

Principles

Plan Ahead and Prepare
Be Considerate of Others
Respect Farm Animals and Wildlife
Travel and Camp on Durable Ground
Leave What You Find
Dispose of Waste Properly
Minimise the Effects of Fire

Practising a Leave No Trace ethic is very simple: Make it hard for others to see or hear you and LEAVE NO TRACE of your visit.
Methodology: The Introduction of Pragmatism

Phase 1: Survey of Outdoor Recreationists

Phase 2: Interviews with Tourism Experts

Phase 3: Interviews with Experts in Behavioural Change

Phase 4: Framework Design and Intervention Testing

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Temporal Effect

- Attitude
- Knowledge & Skills
- Social Norms
- Past Behaviour
- Perceived Behavioural Control
- Demographics

Internal Factors

- Relationships
- Law and Enforcement
- Access and Facilities
- Culture

External Factors

Behaviour

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Findings: Attitude

“There is a general consensus that we don't do anything wrong in the environment, there's a real gap in the knowledge” (TRE02)

The attitude-behaviour gap is debated across numerous studies which, reinforces the opinion that although people in Ireland seem to be highly supportive of environmental initiatives, in theory, their behaviours are not solely based on their attitude towards the practising of ERB.

Previous studies indicate that the efficacy of positive reinforcement is of particular interest from an Irish perspective, as according to TRE02, “I think it is in the Irish DNA, we do not like rules or being told what to do”.

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Social Norms

I think I would look more at norms. I know norms are a component of the theory of planned behaviour but we keep finding that norms seem to matter. (BCE10)

“When in Rome, Do as the Romans Do”

By understanding group dynamics, a pro-environmental approach using social norms could have a more immediate uptake when compared to the promotion of environmental literature alone.

The power of a motivated community cannot be underestimated.
Findings: Perceived Behavioural Control

“The psychology in Ireland is if you’re not told to do something, or it’s not a condition, then it never happens”. (TRE02)

Skills and training are nothing without the will to act.

People need to feel like they can make a difference in order to induce long term behavioural change.

This can be affected by communication techniques used.
Importance of Communication

“There can be groups who do not feel that they are being listened to, and that is where you start to get negative publicity and push-back to your projects” (TRE07)

Communication, networks and communities were a common theme discussed by expert interviewees as a valuable resource for the sustainable development of tourism.

The use of “networks, through education and awareness” and the promotion of Leave No Trace Ireland methods as the “vehicle for the good practice message” has become standard practice for environmental agencies.
How Do You Change Behaviour?

Beating a drum and giving out to people about what they should do is not a great solution. People have lives, this is only a small element of their lives and you need to conscious of that or no one is ever going to listen to you. (BCE09)
How do you decide that a Behaviour has Changed?

To think that humans are all times are rational creatures is completely irrational. Even though we have a good theory like the theory of planned behaviour it doesn't explain all behaviour. (BCE10)

How can we define success in a behavioural intervention?

Is theory important in the design of behavioural interventions?

Now my opinion and I know there are some academics out there who disagree with me but this comes from working in this field for over 20 years.

In regards to human behaviour, we cannot neatly box everything into a prescriptive theory driven message. It's just impossible.....it's a great starting point though. (BCE13)
A Framework for Change

“It Is Not the Strongest of the Species that Survives But the Most Adaptable”

The same can be said for theories of behavioural change. The influencers of human behaviour cannot be quantified into a rigid theory. Behaviour change needs to be approached with adaptability and with a regard to the influence of time.

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Intervention Testing and Evaluation

It's okay not to know everything. I think when you start out you think that you're supposed to know everything but nobody is ever supposed to know everything. (BCE12)

Designed an intervention using a workshop scenario

Using Students at the institute I ran a 3 module intervention.

Using elements of the new framework, I focused the modules so they would link with each other. I got the participants to focus on place attachment, personnel responsibility and communication.

I wanted them to think about THEIR environment instead of THE environment.
Testing and Evaluation

It has to pull on their heartstrings a little bit not upset them or scare them. You have to make them believe that they are the champions that they can make a difference but do not scare them. (BCE12)

Three surveys were used to test the Efficacy of the Intervention;
• One was distributed beforehand the intervention.
• The second survey was given just after.
• The final survey was given a month after the intervention.

There was a significant change in attitude found in all participants. This change was retained in the later survey suggesting a change in the participants perception of their roll in the environment.

In the immortal words of all academia: More research is needed to further investigate the applicability of the framework.
A little ‘take away’ before you go

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has. (Margret Mead)

I have been studying for nearly four years

Coffee Consumed = 2352 cups (approx.)
Approximately 32KG of coffee cups and lids.

VS

One Cup
No Waste
€235 saved with discount
Little changes can really matter

VS

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Thank You
Go Raibh Maith Agaibh